

**“If the Present is a Struggle, the Future Will Be Ours”:  
The FUBA’s Student Movement and the Generation of  
Activism Through Political Aesthetic Practice in  
Buenos Aires, Argentina.**

PhD Thesis

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*Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*

## Declaration

Declaration of Authorship: I, Jose Ignacio Gonzalez-Acosta hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: *Jose Ignacio Gonzalez-Acosta* Date: July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2019.

## Abstract

This thesis considers the complex relationship of the organisational body of the *Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires* (the Student Federation of the University of Buenos Aires, FUBA) with the student movement it articulates. Taking the case of Buenos Aires, Argentina, it explores how a troubled local and regional political history - of recurring episodes of violent repression and socioeconomic crises - has generated alternative forms of politics, based on horizontal relationships and autonomy vis-à-vis institutionalised State politics. The thesis examines one particular instance of alternative, radical politics to explore the ways in which the emergence of these alternative approaches to the political may have promoted a political form that generates new ways of community making and learning. The thesis explores how members of the FUBA - together with other heterogeneous social movements and social organisations - have defined their emergence as political agents over time and propose to interpellate students through a range of political and aesthetic practices that entail the re-appropriation and production of space, developing connections between theory and practice, and engaging with militant practices relating to collective memory, thereby reflecting and altering the urban spaces in which the movement unfolds. The thesis argues for a connection between the dimension of the aesthetic, the sensorial, and the development of the political. And it contributes to the anthropological study of social movements, protest, union, and activist research.

Con lxs compañerxs de la FUBA

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my public admiration, thankfulness, and solidarity to the members of the FUBA, for allowing me to learn alongside them how new social imaginaries can be constructed when there is an honest commitment, mutual respect, and dedication grounded in the struggle for/through equality. I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my two supervisors, Professor Victoria Goddard and Dr Isaac Marrero-Guillamón, for their invaluable support and guidance throughout the process of this research project. This thesis reflects on the production of knowledge deriving from a social climate embedded in social relations, I thank them both for opening the doors to a process of reflective, thought-provoking and inspiring dialogue at all times. I also make my gratitude known to all the faculty members and peers at the Department of Anthropology of Goldsmiths, University of London for a constant process of conversation and reflection. I deeply appreciate the support of family and loved ones in raising questions that appear throughout this search. Finally, thank you to Jose Diaz Lara for his visual conception in helping me piece together this text and the images presented in it.

# Index

<b>Declaration</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>List of Characters</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Glossary of Local Terms</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>List of FUBA Student Centres</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Location of FUBA Student Centres According to the Campus Sites of the University of Buenos Aires</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>It Starts with Movement</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>A Personal Approach</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>The Wider Case of Buenos Aires</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>The Search for a Personal Focus and Contribution</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Re-emerging Areas of Inquiry</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Who are the students?</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Summary of Thesis</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>A Note on the Photographs Throughout this Thesis</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>II. METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Intentionality and Motivation</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Setting the Scene: Entering Buenos Aires and the FUBA</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Engaged Participant Observation</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Interviewing</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Photography</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Press collection and Online Monitoring</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>III. POLITICS, AESTHETICS, AND THE FUBA'S STUDENT MOVEMENT</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Staging Post 1. On Politics and Aesthetics.</b>	<b>74</b>

	7
<b>Staging Post 2. Breaks and Continuities: The Political as Intervention.</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Staging Post 3. In-between History and Memory: A Landscape of Re-emergences.</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Staging Post 4. Antagonism, Agonism, and the Politics of Difference.</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>Staging Post 5. Movements and Network Sociality.</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>IV. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND STRUCTURE OF THE FUBA</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>The FUBA: Organisation and Effects</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Tracing the FUBA and its wider communities: changing modalities of resistance through time</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Political Moment and Operation at the Time of Fieldwork</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Conclusion: A Repertoire of Intervention through Politics and Aesthetics</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>V. OCCUPATION</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>Understanding the Meaning of Occupation.</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Occupation and its Effects</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>Occupation in Academic Material</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Confrontation Negotiation and Ambiguity in Occupation</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Picturing Occupation by Contrast</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>Conclusion: The UBA as Produced by the Student Movement</b>	<b>198</b>
<b>VI. THEORY AS POLITICAL PRACTICE</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Scene 1, “<i>Prácticas</i>”</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>Scene B, “<i>¿Marx Antropólogo?</i>”</b>	<b>222</b>
<b>Scene C, “<i>Capitalismo Zombi</i>”</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>Meaning and Function of Theory as Political Practice</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>Organisation of Theory as Political Practice</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>In-between the Knowledge and Tensions of Theory as Political Practice</b>	<b>252</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>262</b>

<b>VII. THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT</b>	266
Setting the Context	266
The Role of Collective Memory in the Student Movement	271
Introduction	275
Construction and Transmission of Collective Memory	281
Functions of Collective Memory in the Student Movement	301
Overlapping Identities Expressed Trough Memorial Practice	311
Collective Memory and the Trans-nationalisation of Solidarity and Protest	325
Conclusion	331
<b>VIII. SPACES OF CIRCULATION AND DIFFUSION OUTSIDE OF UNIVERSITY</b>	335
Introduction	335
<i>Leon Leon</i> Scene:	337
<i>AGR-Clarín</i> Scene	345
The Importance of Other Sites of Circulation and Diffusion	353
Networks, reproduction, and sustainability:	355
The Material and the Relational: What do other spaces of circulation and diffusion enable?	359
Territories in Dispute: Other sites of circulation and diffusion as battlegrounds	367
Conclusion: Into the Horizon	375
<b>IX. CONCLUSION</b>	379
<b>REFERENCES</b>	390
<b>APPENDIX A. LIST OF IMAGES</b>	399



## List of Characters

The following is a list of recurring characters that appear throughout this thesis.

- Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*: Grandmothers of *Plaza de Mayo*. Mothers of victims of the Military Dictatorship of 1976-1983, whose grandchildren were stolen at birth by the military. They campaign largely to encounter their grandchildren and restore their identity.
- Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo*: One of two groups of the mothers of *Plaza de Mayo*. Mothers of victims of the Military Dictatorship of 1976-1983. This branch of the mothers developed close ties with *Kirchnerismo* during the federal administrations of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003-2015).
- Darío Santillán: A young activist who was shot dead by police aged 21 in 2002, in a repressive act by police forces at *Puente Pueyrredon*. The social organisation *Frente Popular Darío Santillán* is named after him.
- El Colectivo*: (The Collective) An electoral coalition particular to the CEFyL. Where a union was formed between *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations and the student organisation *La Mella* to contend the 2016 and 2017 student elections.
- Facultad de Arquitectura Diseño y Urbanismo (FADU)*: The Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism.
- Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (FFyL)*: The Faculty of Philosophy. Where a variety of degrees in arts, humanities and social sciences are taught, including Anthropology.
- Franja Morada*: The student organisation belonging to the *Union Cívica Radical* (Radical Civic Union Party). It presided over the *conducción* of the FUBA from 1983 to 2001. Today it has become an organisation aligned with *Macrismo*.

•*Federacion Universitaria de Buenos Aires (FUBA)*: (Student Federation of the University of Buenos Aires) The student union representing all the students of the University of Buenos Aires. Organisationally it is composed of 13 different student centres from each of the different faculties.

•*Juntos por FADU*: (Together for FADU) An electoral coalition particular to the CEADIG. Where a union was formed between certain *Macrismo* and *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations to contend the 2016 and 2017 student elections.

•*Kirchnerismo* or *Kirchneristas*: Students who are members or sympathisers of organisations who support the governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003-2015) and campaign for an electoral return to their policies.

•*La Izquierda al Frente*: (The Left at the Front) The electoral coalition of Independent Left student organisations assembled to contend student elections throughout the student centres of the UBA in the 2016 campaign.

•*La Mella*: A student organisation belonging to the larger *Patria Grande* organisation. Co-presides over the *conducción* of the FUBA together with the UJS-PO. Usually not self-aligned with either the Independent Left nor the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations, but situated in a space between them. Since the start of the Macri Federal Administration it has moved towards the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sector.

•*Las Manos de Filippi*: An Argentine rock fusion band with close ties to the *Partido Obrero*, that has been active since 1995. It is very popular among members of the student movement, particularly among the Independent Left. A popular anti-capitalist music reference in Argentina.

•*Macrismo* or *Macristas*: Students who are members or sympathisers of organisations who support the neoliberal federal administration of President Mauricio Macri (2015-ongoing).

- *Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora*: Mothers of *Plaza de Mayo* Founding Line. One of two groups of mothers of Plaza de Mayo, which has remained independent from associations to any government and federal administration.
- *Mariano Ferreyra*: A student of the UBA and a militant of the UJS-PO who was shot dead in October of 2010 by members of the *Union Ferroviaria* (Argentina's largest union of railroad workers) when campaigning for the working rights of outsourced railroad workers. He has since become an icon of the Independent Left and of victims of political violence in times of elected governments (1983-).
- *Maximiliano Kosteki*: A young activist who was shot dead by police aged 22 in 2002, in a repressive act by police forces at *Puente Pueyrredon*.
- *Movimiento Piquetero*: The *Piquetero* movement which became prominent in the events leading up to the *Argentinazo* of 2001. The *Piquetero* organisations were largely comprised of people who were left unemployed in rural areas and used roadblocks on the highways to Buenos Aires as their main tactic of protest. The adjective *Piquetero(a)* has since been adopted to refer to a particular combative form of protest, and the *Piquetero* methods have been adopted in urban protests.
- *Partido Obrero (PO)*: (Workers' Party) The largest Trotskyist political party of Argentina.
- *Polo Obrero*: The worker's branch of the *Partido Obrero*, comprised of employed and unemployed workers. Born out of the events which unfolded in the economic crisis of the 1990's that led to the *Argentinazo* of 2001.
- *Trotskistas* or *Troskos*: Students who are members or sympathisers of the Independent Left/Trotskyist parties and organisations.
- *UBA*: *Universidad de Buenos Aires*. The University of Buenos Aires.

- *Unión de Juventudes por el Socialismo* (UJS-PO): (Youth Union for Socialism) The youth branch of the *Partido Obrero* (PO). Together with *La Mella*, it presides over the general *conducción* of the FUBA.
- **UNA:** Universidad Nacional de las Artes (National University of the Arts). The largest public arts university of Argentina, located in Buenos Aires.
- **UNLP:** *Universidad Nacional de La Plata* (National University of La Plata). A national public university located in the city of La Plata, south of Buenos Aires.

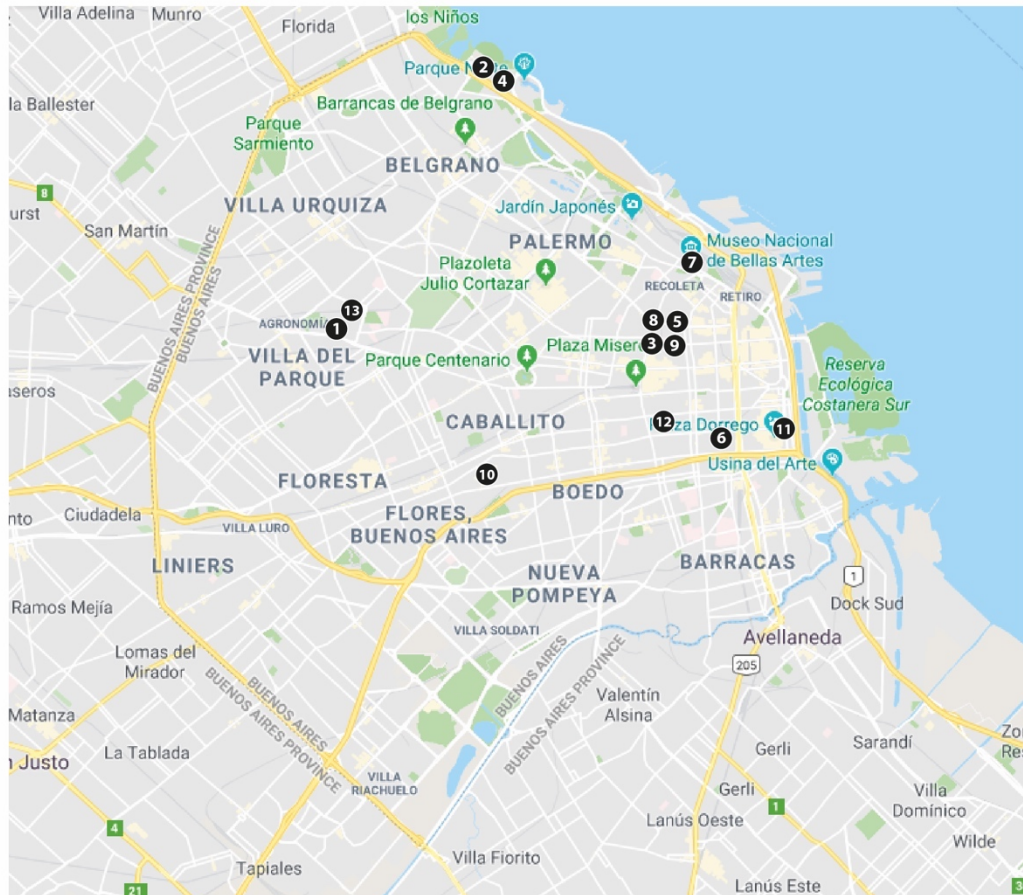
### **Glossary of Local Terms**

- *Agrupación* or *agrupaciones*: The local term used by members of the FUBA to refer to the various student political organisations of the student movement.
- *Círculo* or *círculos*: (circle or circles) Small weekly meetings of about 3-5 students that members of particular *agrupaciones* use to debate political issues and plan short-term actions on a weekly basis.
- *Conducción*: The elected group of students of a particular *agrupación* (or coalition of *agrupaciones*) that carry out the administrative roles and activities of the 13 individual student centres of the FUBA as well as the general administrative roles of the FUBA.
- *Mesa* or *mesas*: (table or tables) Table stands used by the many *agrupaciones* throughout the university spaces. These serve as local operation or meeting points for student militants across the university.
- *Prensa*: (press) Newspapers and news bulletins published by the different student *agrupaciones* or the social organisations/political parties that these are associated to. They constitute key vehicles for information and discussion throughout the student movement.

## List of FUBA Student Centres

- CEABA: Student Centre of the Faculty of Agronomy.
- CEADiG: Student Centre of the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism.
- CECE: Student Centre of the Faculty of Economic Sciences.
- CECEN: Student Centre of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences.
- CECiM: Student Centre of the Faculty of Medicine.
- CECSO: Student Centre of the Faculty of Social Sciences.
- CED: Student Centre of the Faculty of Law.
- CEFO: Student Centre of the Faculty of Odontology.
- CEFyB: Student Centre of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry.
- CEFyL: Student Centre of the Faculty of Philosophy.
- CEI: Student Centre of the Faculty of Engineering.
- CEP: Student Centre of the Faculty of Psychology.
- CEV: Student Centre of the Faculty of Veterinary.

## Location of FUBA Student Centres According to the Campus Sites of the University of Buenos Aires



- |   |  |    |  |
|---|--|----|--|
| 1 | CEABA: Student Centre of the Faculty of Agronomy.                          | 8  | CEFO: Student Centre of the Faculty of Odontology.                 |
| 2 | CEADIG: Student Centre of the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism. | 9  | CEfYB: Student Centre of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry. |
| 3 | CECE: Student Centre of the Faculty of Economic Sciences.                  | 10 | CEfYL: Student Centre of the Faculty of Philosophy.                |
| 4 | CECEN: Student Centre of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences.        | 11 | CEI: Student Centre of the Faculty of Engineering.                 |
| 5 | CECIM: Student Centre of the Faculty of Medicine.                          | 12 | CEP: Student Centre of the Faculty of Psychology.                  |
| 6 | CECSO: Student Centre of the Faculty of Social Sciences.                   | 13 | CEV: Student Centre of the Faculty of Veterinary.                  |
| 7 | CED: Student Centre of the Faculty of Law.                                 |    |  |

Image 1

# I. Introduction

## It Starts with Movement

This thesis considers the complex relationship between the organisational body of the *Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires* (the Student Federation of the University of Buenos Aires, FUBA) and the student movement that it articulates. In particular, I focus on this student movement's forms of action, its porous and fluid boundaries and its spaces of action and interaction. Complex organisation, responsiveness, growth, reproduction, and evolution are all considered to be fundamental traits of living organisms, and the major factor implied by all these traits is that of movement. So, this thesis is born out of a concern for movement; which as a personal and professional concern is reflected through a search informed by these elements which characterise the student movement.

I explore the political and aesthetic practices of the FUBA, to argue that there is an inherent connection between the aesthetic and sensorial dimensions, and the development of political identities. I analyse how political-aesthetic practices shared across the FUBA are partly inherited from earlier generations of activists, and partly generated by contemporary members of the student movement. Through such an analysis, I demonstrate that the political is an inhabited and sensorial category, which generates a series of habitus in everyday language and experience. By focusing on the connection between aesthetics and politics, I explore how the FUBA, as a community tied together by sense experience, intervenes in the political field, reconfigures its social space, and facilitates political subjectivization.

This thesis contributes to anthropological knowledge by introducing a discussion of the sensorial and the aesthetic to an analysis of the political. It also contributes to understanding the blurring of the lines between the political and the academic. I attempt to help bridge a gap in the anthropology of politics, which has so far incorporated discussions of the economic, the rational, the affective, the embodied, and the subjective, but has paid less attention to the sensorial and

the aesthetic; which I argue are fundamental categories to understand involvement in political processes. Therefore, this thesis adds new knowledge to the social scientific literature on social movements and protest; adding to the anthropology, sociology, and human geography of University activism, social movements, trade unions, the boundaries of the state and its institutions, and the fragmentation and fluidity of politics.

The idea of movement in the broad sense of the word has informed the approach to my experience with the student movement of the FUBA through 15 months of fieldwork and participation with the FUBA, as well as an ongoing process of conversation with my research participants in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Therefore, the idea of movement developed in the thesis refers not only to the meaning of the word assigned to social movement or student movement, as is the subject of my thesis; but is an invitation to see things in the course of transforming and becoming something else; taking into account the general dynamic that movement implies; the movement of molecules, of the body, of the researcher and of the object of study (fusion and amalgamation), movement as physical and imaginative displacement that allows a search to unfold and an undefined horizon to be imagined, with its concerns, fascinations, and curiosities, as well as its challenges, obstacles and contradictions.

As is perhaps always the case when one becomes seduced by an idea or an object of study, the starting point may be hard to trace; one might not notice the moment that an interest started to develop, but rather one may find him or herself in the midst of that interest and that search *already*; *already in motion*, as the choice to allow one's self to be affected or interpellated by something else is a choice that we do not appear to make in a purely logical and rational way, but rather appear to have somehow already taken the decision to become involved by the time we notice. So did this search for movement begin to unfold.

The reason for approaching the introduction of this thesis through the notion of a concern with movement is two-fold: on one hand it is to present my own personal motivations for having undertaken this research as a personal and professional project. And on the other, it is also to allow us to reflect on how members of the FUBA's student movement themselves may also become



involved in that search for movement and transformation through activism; that journey which they may start at a similar age as my own, during their own youth.

### **A Personal Approach**

My approach to the research I carried out in Buenos Aires was broadly in line with Pink's suggestion that research should be a reflexive and experiential process through which a profound understanding can be facilitated, and knowledge produced (Pink 2009). I was born in Mexico and over the past three decades lived across Mexico, the USA, and the UK, which led me to experience a sort of transiting across the thresholds of what in a world-systems analysis are considered to be the geographical cores of financial capitalism and the peripheries or semi-peripheries of such a system of extraction and domination (Wallerstein 2004). This movement and the observations it made possible, through way of a contrast of what was considered possible in different locations, was a dynamic that led me to consider the periphery and the edges (spaces in which exist in both, the cores and the periphery) as places of economic marginalisation and oppression, but also as spaces for radical possibility, learning and productive resistance (Goddard 2019; Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Sousa Santos 2014; Mignolo and Escobar 2010; Connell 2007; Mignolo 2012; Moraña et al. 2008). As Massey suggests, it is helpful to approach space as the sphere for multiplicity and possibility, across a space/place divide, where each space may be endowed with the political possibility for alterity in a simultaneous time (Massey 2005). And what I intend to highlight is that precisely, the violent application of narratives of "free-market" and capitalist "development", presented for a long time as the only way forward throughout the Latin American region, came to produce specific counter-hegemonic practices of what it means to do politics or to engage with the political throughout the region (Gledhill 2007). And it was here that my interest emerged in what I began to see as forms of politics that were not necessarily concerned with the State or with institutionalised forms of politics, but rather were concerned with the articulation of a different "distribution of the sensible" (Rancière 2004); a different sensible conception of roles and spaces associated with the possibility of political action. For what became a defining characteristic of the implementation of the neoliberal agenda

throughout Latin America were sustained episodes of crisis in the economic and political sense; the widening of a gap of inequality whereby trans-national actors aided by local elites led a project of looting and extractivism (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011), that ultimately, with local variations in time and speed, seemed to lead State forms of power to abandon their social responsibilities and notions of accountability, through more or less veiled forms of operation and/or clientelism. Yet very importantly, what also seemed to be abandoned in the course was, as López Levy points out of the Argentine case, the hope that State power could constitute a solution to the everyday problems being faced by the public (López Levy 2004).

An obstacle in the road forces a turn or a circumvention, it requires an exercise in the imagination and creation of an alternative route. And in the same way, not out of a romantic idea concerned with appearing theoretically attractive but rather out of necessity, the sustained moments of crisis across Latin America forced new pathways to be developed, new forms of community-making to be established, and new form of learning to be articulated (Zibechi 2012). Admittedly, throughout the first two decades of this century there have been Latin American governments who attempted to capitalise on these sectors of society that operated outside of the confines of the State, and with the posterior return of neoliberal governments to the region (2015-) the situation of many of these communities is today complex and divided (Zibechi 2019; Kapferer & Theodossopoulos 2019), with groups of members of these communities choosing to aim for a reform of the State and a return to re-distributive centre-left governments, others opting for withdrawal strategies that may be autonomous from all forms of State power, and yet others in-between. Yet this posterior discussion should not keep us from the point at hand, which is the emergence of these spaces and the irruption of their actors as political subjects as a response to episodes of crisis in the first place.

As an international student in a UK university at the time that I began to envision this project, it was what I perceived as those moments of creative irruption as a result of crises that drew me evermore into the possibility of studying these groups concerned with enacting horizontal forms of organisation; informed by the notion that has been put forth of considering Latin American (and other)

social movements as carriers of new worlds. There came to be, in my personal imagination, a fascination for the moment of the forced interruption and detour, which at the time I associated with notions of the *détournement* and the *dérive*; dynamics that implied the subversion of an established order together with the liminal space and the possibility that inherently accompanies these forms of movement. From an outside position, it seemed to me that these were irruptions which resonated with Rancière's description of the political occurring precisely as those mistakes, which by the logic of "the police"<sup>1</sup>, were never supposed to happen in the first place (Rancière 2010). Yet there they were, as we will see, born out of the lived necessities of the communities articulating them.

As a student I had been involved in student activism in the UK in 2011, and in student centred social movements in Mexico in 2012. However, a dynamic that I noticed from participating in these initiatives, and a concern that lingered in my mind from these experiences, which has also been theorised, was the issue of social movements tending to decline in a short timespan. It seemed that many of these initiatives tended to disband within a short time-frame or were channelled into the institutional and bureaucratic apparatus of the State, or both. Whereas I would not argue that these movements should be measured under a productivist logic - for (both in the UK and Mexico) they clearly articulated meaningful networks that, as we have seen in posterior years, have once again become visible in later struggles (they weaved and changed a social fabric) - my concern was with the social movement in the form of a vehicle for transformation, with the liminal spaces that it allowed through the process of its enactment, so the question of how the vehicle could be extended was pressing. Where could the experience of social movements in an extended temporality be studied and experienced for its effects? It was through these concerns and reflections that research in Buenos Aires seemed to offer opportunities for exploring the enactment of radical politics.

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<sup>1</sup> By using the concept of "the police" throughout this I refer to Rancière's definition of the term, as the set of practices and actors that guard the division between those who have a part/voice in a community and those who do not (Rancière 2010). This includes a range of material and symbolic actors, such as the actual police force or military, but also local and transnational agents such as governments, corporations, educational institutions, patriarchy, among others which members of the student movement referred to and condemned.

The multiplicity of movements and organisations based on principles of autonomy and horizontality there represented a space where sustained episodes of political contention, together with a long history of processes of emancipation - of political emergence through mobilisation and protest - had resulted in a wide registry of practices, which through a range of aesthetic forms concerned with the sensible, addressed the issue of the political<sup>2</sup>. It offered a case where the visible (sensible) dimension of the political informed a vast amount of registers across public space, education, leisure, cultural and even sporting activities; where the political could be sensibly felt, read and experienced in almost every aspect of daily life. And it appeared to offer a case where, instead of there being one single movement as an emergence to be studied, there was clearly a variety of social movements and organisations articulated in a wide and complex ecology; with groups such as student organisations, neighbourhood assemblies, worker-run companies, artistic and cultural collectives, and Human Rights organisations, coexisting and informing each other.

This complex multiplicity of political actors and networks offered a challenge and also an opportunity when it came to consider the student movement of the FUBA, itself a group consisting of a different political organisations and orientations. The decision to focus on the FUBA and its student movement was due to the fact that as a heterogeneous group consisting of multiple actors, it articulates these positions and projects in ephemeral forms of visibility, which also involve a day-to-day cycle of reproduction through the life of its members in the space of the *Universidad de Buenos Aires* (University of Buenos Aires, UBA) and beyond. Through the study of the FUBA's student movement, I hoped to show how this movement reproduced and sustained itself through a variety of aesthetic and political practices that its members had acquired through a long history of collective and individual struggle, and speak to the challenges faced by activists and social movements in a variety of contexts.

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<sup>2</sup> I refer to the categories of the "sensible" and "the political" as conceptualised by Rancière; where the political - as a form of intervention or "dissensus" - depends on what can be sensibly perceived/seen/heard in a society and what can be said/done about it (Rancière 2004).

## The Wider Case of Buenos Aires

While research with the FUBA's student movement allowed me to focus on key questions about political emergence, trajectories, temporalities, theorising, and space production by a social movement, the city of Buenos Aires also represented a particular opportunity for learning from social movements, given that the city continues to provide a space for various forms of contentious action (Goddard 2007). Here, I will focus on four points which at the time of conducting my fieldwork made this a viable research project, which were: 1) the larger genealogy of protest in which the FUBA was inscribed, 2) the social and political circumstances that existed in Argentina from 2001-2015 that allowed for the possibility of a space of expression for these social movements, together with the change of conditions that the onset of the Macri Federal Administration and its return to neoliberal policy brought in terms of increased mobilisation, 3) the possibility of considering trans-national forms of activism in which the FUBA together with other social organisations participated in, and 4) the urban character in terms of the field site itself which allowed for the exploration of a mixed participation in terms of socio-economic class backgrounds in the FUBA's initiatives.

Regarding the first point, the larger history of struggle of social movements and social organisations in Argentina through times of dictatorship and democracy, allowed me to consider the FUBA's student movement as one of the categories of political actors emerging from long processes of emancipation. The FUBA's student movement was in this sense embedded, as Goddard suggests, within a deeper genealogy of protest, as descendants and potential generators of events in a particular framework of identity and history (Zibechi 2003; Schuster et al. 2002; Goddard 2015). This case allowed the exploration of a space in which independent organisations, composed largely of groups of young people had become, as Jelin and Sempol acknowledge, self-identified and self-recognised social actors, who through the contexts of dictatorship and economic and political crises had articulated spaces for the growth and expansion of movements; where the demands of these groups had been deeply inscribed in the private and public arenas of society (Jelin and Sempol 2006).

In this sense the FUBA was part of a history of social movements in

Argentina that had articulated demands for autonomy, horizontality, forms of collective memory and the recognition of Human Rights, and specially since 2001, the strong inclusion of multiple demands denouncing neoliberalism in a wide array of forms, having inherited demands of recognition through previous generations (Jelin and Sempol 2006). As Goddard suggests of the events around the *Argentinazo* of 2001 and its effects: despite the ephemeral quality of many of the forms of protest and solidarity that emerged during that moment, and despite concerns that sectors of social movements were later co-opted by the emerging model formulated by the Kirchner governments, there was in Argentina, an enduring value recognised in what took place, and in the alliances forged in that conjunction (Goddard 2015). As Gaudin recognises, social movements throughout this process seemed to have generated significant social change, and succeeded in creating a different cultural-political programmatic environment; a different sensibility (Gaudin 2006), in which the FUBA was inscribed.

On the second point, regarding the response from the Federal Governments headed by Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003-2015) in the post-2001 period, it should be said that the case of Argentina and Buenos Aires allowed a certain space for social movements and organisations to exist, insofar as they were not confronted with an immediate repressive response by the State, but instead were expected to dismantle in their own time (Gaudin 2006) or to serve to garner support for the government (Quirós 2011). As Goddard notes, this was part of the Kirchner Administrations' strategy for a new model of development, which implemented policies that established dialogue with Human Rights groups and re-approached social movements (Goddard 2015).

So for the focus of this thesis, not regarding State politics (as Rancière notes: there is no such thing as a democratic State), but instead looking for the political as a processes of emancipation in the interactions among people, it should be said that to a certain extent the environment facilitated in Argentina from 2003-2015 did allow social movements a physical and logistical space to experiment, and articulate a new sensibility beyond the State that would have hardly been possible to imagine elsewhere, in other so-called liberal "democracies" or Western capitals – where the consolidation of the State and its repressive power in the form of the literal police would have swiftly befallen, as it

has, on contemporary social movements, or where economic pressures would quickly choke out the possibility of a non-commercial politically motivated space or initiative to be sustained.

With this point comes an important reflection for the case of Buenos Aires, for as Graeber suggests, there appears to be a link between the experience of first being able to imagine social alternatives and then bringing them into being, especially if the alternative is the possibility of a society premised on less alienated forms of creativity (Graeber 2009). The imagination then appears as key prerequisite for an alternative to be able to present itself to sense experience; to figure in the collective set of coordinates of people; to appear in the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004) informing a community. And such an imagination seemed possible in the case of Buenos Aires; an environment in which there has been, as Jelin and Sempol recognise, a strong participation of organisations which do not take official party or State politics as a reference for identity, but that look for other elements as articulators for their actions - groups that take horizontality as a way to do politics, as a methodology and also a political principle, manifested in their practices (Jelin and Sempol 2006).

This logistically and symbolically significant space for social movements and organisations to exist in Argentina (whether it was allowed with the intention for them to disband or to be co-opted by government) changed radically at the end of 2015 with the onset of the Macri Federal Administration, which quickly reinforced the visibility of the repressive apparatus of the State. Nevertheless, this visibility and the austerity measures taken by the government (Goddard 2018) triggered further action in the form of protest on behalf of social movements in Buenos Aires, as we will see throughout the ethnographic examples of this thesis. This included important public sector workers' mobilisations (Lazar 2017) and included the university sector, for example the strike by university lecturers and the "*Gran Marcha Universitaria*" in August 2018.

Regarding the third point, Buenos Aires also offered the possibility of exploring how the FUBA's student movement (as well as other social movements based in Buenos Aires) extended its network of action to collaborate with social movements and campaigns beyond the local context, including a trans-national level. It offered the possibility of questioning which causes the FUBA articulated

solidarity with, developing from instances of cultural proximity. This possibility of considering trans-national campaigns by social movements was relevant since, as Marcus (1995) argues, if there has been a collapse in the division between local and trans-national system narratives, which groups such as the FUBA recognise as part of their self-acknowledged “internationalist” stance, the dynamic of events in other sites, across national borders, generating solidarity on behalf of the FUBA, as well as those in Argentina spilling over to other countries, would be informative of the FUBA’s student movement as a group of self-conscious actors involved in interdisciplinary arenas, who themselves move across various sites of activity (Marcus 1995).

Therefore, through the consideration of trans-national processes of activism in the form of scale shift transmissions, from one country to another (Tarrow and McAdam 2005), an exploration could be made of the increasingly common practice by heterogeneous communities present in social movements of addressing trans-national concerns, generating identifications of equivalence with causes that share a proximity with their own. And of a particular importance when considering trans-national action in the form of scale shift by the FUBA’s student movement, came to be issues of political and State violence, given the local understanding of a collective memory regarding Human Rights that has been articulated by Human Rights organisations and social movements in Argentina, which would also be illustrative of how members of the FUBA consider themselves in relation to the struggles of those in the past, as well as to present struggles of groups in other sites.

Furthermore, in recognising the category of trans-national action, I should acknowledge the production of this research project itself as part of a system of interactions that have their roots in trans-national processes; as an outcome of the relations proposed by Marcus (Marcus 1995). This is a category that has been highly relevant for this research, since it helped challenge the anthropologist-other binary; allowing me instead to find a process in which I intended for participants to become counterparts of the research, as Coleman and von Hellerman suggest, in a move towards working with subjects in various situations with mutually interested concerns, projects and ideas, contributing to give the research itself an open-ended perspective (Coleman and von Hellermann 2011); also a sort of trans-national or “internationalist” collaboration (as participants



often humorously referred to my perspective).

On the fourth point, regarding the urban character of the field site of Buenos Aires - in which the FUBA's student movement lives, circulates, and is reproduced, informing the city as a whole – I would point out that the case of studying the FUBA's student movement within the university spaces of the UBA, as well as throughout the city in its other sites of circulation, offered me the opportunity of thinking past the question and divide of whether urban movements can be considered truly revolutionary. For as Harvey suggests, in urban contexts we see a heterogeneous participation where the working class (together with its spaces) and those interwoven with workers in close solidarity can be multiple and mixed (Harvey 2012). This is particularly true of the case of Argentina, where in the urban area of Buenos Aires close links of collaboration and solidarity exist between workers, neighbourhoods, and student movements and organisations; where many times their joint effort has been decisive in the outcome of workers' struggles (Zibechi 2006).

Conducting research in Buenos Aires as a city, because of its urban character and population density, offered the possibility of an observational platform, as Harvey suggests of urban contexts, since they constitute a place and site of appearance where the deeper social currents of political struggle are expressed. Yet it also offered a provocation, for also, the urban environment, with its characteristics may be more conducive to rebellious protest than other sites (Harvey 2012).

Considering the arguments presented above, the case of Buenos Aires represented an opportunity to study a space where the troubled social, political, and economic history of Argentina has allowed groups of struggle and social movements to emerge, unfold and to recognise themselves as historical agents. It is a case of a history of contention that has been closely interwoven across personal and public narratives, where politics (and political action) appears as a constant interlocutor revealing itself in regular irruptions in the lives of men and women (Goddard 2006). It is an environment in which, admittedly, many attempts have been made by government policies to co-opt sectors of social movements. But it is also a space where, through these turbulent processes, which continue to unfold today, certain social movements have become capable of altering the

dominant distribution of roles of political participation and action through self-recognised principles and methods of horizontality, equality and independence. Thus they have generated a wide variety of practices through which alternatives for social organisation, community making, and learning have been developed, and their demands have transcended State borders. For this research project, the case of Buenos Aires was a space where imagination had been able to spring forth amid the overlapping and tensions of different regimes, permitting a politics of emancipation to become articulated in the initiatives of social movements. These social movements and organisations, through their exercise of resistance and subjectivization<sup>3</sup>, seemed to have created new modes of sense perception and forms of political subjectivity, while in the process, polemically reconfiguring the physical and symbolic social order that Rancière proposes as the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004).

### **The Search for a Personal Focus and Contribution**

Having outlined the search that led me to the encounter with the FUBA's movement as well as some of the key elements that made research in Buenos Aires a viable possibility, in theoretical and logistical terms, as well as in cultural and biographical terms - coming from Mexico and being a young student involved in activism myself – I would like make note before proceeding, of why I began to undertake the theoretical analysis of the FUBA's student movement that I present in this thesis in the way I did, informed by notions of activist anthropology and engaged research<sup>4</sup>.

It was very clear to me from when I began research and participation with the FUBA, that as a student organisation that articulates a student movement around it – in which a multiplicity of political organisations (locally called *agrupaciones*) debate and participate in a day-to-day life – would require a range

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis I understand “subjectivization” as proposed by Ranciere; as the process through which people extricate themselves from the dominant categories of classification by implementing equality, thus taking on the role of active political agents (Rancière 2004).

<sup>4</sup> I discuss in greater detail how the process of conducting engaged research with the FUBA's student movement developed in Chapter 2, Methodology.

of approaches. Attempting to apply a single perspective or theoretical account of this movement would be misleading and inadequate, and defeat the purpose of exploring this student movement as a space of multiplicity itself. Furthermore, as these were university students who I was working and participating with, it was a vital part of the movement that they themselves were already heavily involved in theorising their own political experiences and approaches to activism. Furthermore, the theoretical approaches that members of the FUBA develop as part of their political practice were aligned with the political perspective that they were proposing and campaigning for, inside and outside of the student movement. Therefore, the task of providing a coherent and comprehensive account of the full range of political perspectives that are debated and confronted in the FUBA is immense and to do so might endanger the tasks of capturing the fluidity and mobility of priorities and responses that were evident during fieldwork. To a large extent, the complexities and the challenges faced when attempting to capture the political landscape of the FUBA relate to the very core of the agonistic and antagonistic dimensions that characterise and energise the student movement<sup>5</sup> (Mouffe 2013; Laclau and Mouffe 2014).

Faced with this scenario came the need to acknowledge that I could not possibly attempt to theorise any particular political perspective (anarchism, Trotskyism, Guevarism, Peronism, Kirchnerism etc.), debated in the FUBA better than the students themselves - for they know better than anyone the role that these political perspectives should have in the student movement. And that I could not possibly presume to encompass all of these theories myself to describe a complete picture of the political perspectives debated in the FUBA. Furthermore, I recognised that this should not even be my endeavour as an anthropologist, for the students would always know their situation and their necessities better than I ever would, as is always the case in anthropological research. Instead, while collaborating with these students, I should attempt to tease out and recognise the underlying shared practices that were informing these students' livelihoods while they engaged with activism; in the process of them doing so.

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<sup>5</sup> The methodological need to think of the FUBA's student movement through the dimension of political antagonism is further discussed in Chapter 3: Politics, Aesthetics and the FUBA's Student Movement.

So it was that I chose to focus on aesthetic (sensible) practices concerned with the political. This means that I was concerned to identify, describe and analyse the material and discursive practices of the student movement which addressed and allowed the political to be enacted, and that were shared across the FUBA's student movement. I chose to focus on exploring the ways through which the aesthetic dimension (for example, the materiality surrounding interactions among students) shared across the FUBA's student movement enabled the political and vice-versa; how aesthetic and political practice allowed the student movement to be sustained, to reproduce, and to generate processes of subjectivization for its members and new participants. To think of how its aesthetic ways of "doing and making" (Rancière 2004), allowed the student movement to generate activism. And it is through that pathway that I looked to make a contribution to the analysis of the FUBA's student movement through this thesis. For it is from this perspective, that as a half-outsider (studying in the UK, enrolled in the UBA and researching in the UBA and Buenos Aires), I believed I could shed a new light on the dynamics of the FUBA, since from the onset of my research the aspect of aesthetic and political practice of the FUBA was the most striking and the most intriguing for me, and this dimension is perhaps not so easily noticeable or so evidently visible from the inside of the FUBA - if one's experience of being a student and an activist has always already happened in the midst of such a sensible sphere. For example, upon my first visit to the UBA, the overwhelming material production of the student movement and the interpellation of its student militants immediately and affectively signalled a degree of occupation I had never seen before; it was a fundamentally radical experience, different to any other university space I had seen; which already implied a specific type of political relation between students, university, and the outside. And this is something that to local members of the FUBA may not seem so striking. Therefore, it is from this perspective that the main questions of my research unfolded, and that they are elaborated upon throughout this thesis, focusing on how practices of occupation of space, of theorising as political practice, of the use of collective memory, and of a circulation of movement around the city, are informed by a particular distribution of the sensible while also reconfiguring it.

## **Re-emerging Areas of Inquiry**

From the analytical focus that I have described previously, the following questions will be of key importance to keep in mind when going through this thesis, given that they are concerned with how the FUBA's student movement makes use of political and aesthetic practices - sensible forms of action that intervene in the political field - to sustain itself and to generate processes of political subjectivization. In order to understand the relationship between the aesthetic and the political and ways in which they may interact with specific individuals and groups to interpellate them, connect with them, engage them with particular situations, projects, and discourses, it is necessary to understand the ways in which the history of social movements and organisations in Argentina, like the FUBA's student movement, enabled the category of the political to become a constant sensible presence in the life of members of the FUBA.

### The question of knowledge and knowledge production:

The above leads to the question of how a history or histories may be interpreted by students, and where do they situate themselves in relation to wider narratives of struggle. A related issue, which is to do with how members of the FUBA's student movement conceptualise their place in the political landscape of the city and the country as a whole, relates to the use academic theory as a political practice. This in turn relates to how they produce knowledge and what types of knowledge are produced by the FUBA's theoretical-political activities and how the knowledge produced might become a complement to the academic knowledge formulated within the university.

### (collective) History and collective memory:

Related to the above, is the question of how members of the FUBA's student movement interpret the category - and propose the contents - of collective memory, politically and symbolically. Given the pervasive presence of references to historical events and shared collective experiences, the thesis asks whether, and if so how, the notion of collective memory may help further the work of mobilisation and struggle articulated by the student movement. Taking as a

starting point the recognition that the collective memories are highly contested and express overlapping political identities and allegiances, in the thesis specific narratives as well as events such as memorialisations, provide the focus to explore what forms and which channels has collective memory been transmitted to current generations of students, and how might these forms be seen to address political concerns of the present and the future? How is the category of collective memory contended by different sectors of the FUBA?

#### The production of space:

How does the FUBA's student movement produce its own space? And how does the production of space facilitate the student movement's sustainability and reproduction over an extended temporality? How does the space produced by the FUBA affect the construction of political identities for its members and for those who become participants of the FUBA's student movement? How does this production of space impact the UBA itself as an educational institution?

Given that the movement inhabits and acts within and upon a range of spaces beyond the university premises, the question arises as to what other spaces help sustain the life and reproduction of the FUBA's student movement and how the aesthetics of these spaces might enable the political to be formulated. A key concern is the ways in which other activities in the daily life of members may inform their political identities and what alliances and allegiances they may have with other struggles articulated through participation in other spaces. In what ways does life as a student allow participation in other spaces, and how does participation in such spaces inform life as a student? How can we consider the FUBA's student movement to affect the city of Buenos Aires as a whole, and how can we think of the porous boundaries of the student movement throughout the city?

#### **Who are the students?**

Having outlined my concern with exploring the FUBA's student movement through the dynamics of political and aesthetic practices, as well as some of the

key questions that will be addressed throughout this thesis, it is important to consider the demographics of the UBA's student population, given that the FUBA draws its membership from the ranks of the UBA student body. However, many FUBA initiatives also convene people from other social movements and organisations. So it is important to acknowledge the porous boundaries between the FUBA's student movement, and the wider network of movements it intersects with, and, therefore, the heterogeneous characteristics of the populations encountered in these events.

The Federal Government's systematic underfunding of public education, together with increased unemployment, significant devaluation of the national currency, and rocketing inflation, are more than likely to have affected the makeup of the student population of the UBA (and of public universities throughout the country) as well as the socioeconomic situation of university students. Therefore, although tuition in public education is free, the rising costs associated with studying (time, transport, materials, etc.) have led to greater student drop-out rates.

At the time of my fieldwork, the student population of the UBA (the largest university of Argentina) accounted for nearly 20% of all the university population of Argentina (UBA 2015)<sup>6</sup>. As part of Argentina's public education system, studying at the UBA is free for undergraduate level students, whether they are Argentine nationals (96%) or foreigners (4%). According to the last census available at the time of my fieldwork (carried out in 2011), student enrolment consisted of 262,932 undergraduate students, and 14,441 postgraduate students. Regarding the undergraduate population, 61% was female, and 39% male. In terms of nationality, 96% were identified as Argentine, with most of the foreign students coming from Argentina's neighbouring countries. The majority of undergraduate students was recorded as being under 25 years of age (52%); 62% of undergraduates worked and received a salary, while 20% did not work but were seeking employment, and only 18% neither worked nor sought

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<sup>6</sup> These were the latest demographics that I was able to consult at the time of my fieldwork (2016). Yet we should be aware that Argentina's economic situation has suffered a major downturn since the onset of the Macri Administration. So, although the last available census of the UBA was carried-out in 2011 (UBA 2011), we should consider that changes in the make-up of the student body are likely to have occurred.

employment. As for their income situation, 57% of them declared their work salary as their main source of income, while 3% received some type of funding or scholarship from an institution<sup>7</sup> (UBA 2011).

According to the 2014 report from the Ministry of Education, there was a total of 126 university institutions in Argentina, 62 of them public, and 64 private. The total university student population in 2013 consisted of 1,484,234 students, of which 57% of them were female and 43% male. In a similar fashion to the case of the University of Buenos Aires, the majority of the students were registered as 24 or younger ( 51%), followed by the 25-30 years-old with 24%, and by those aged 30-34 (11%), and 35-39 years-old (7%). It is also important to note that at a national case, during the decade from 2003 to 2013, the population of university students increased by 23%, the number of new students increased 16%, and the number of graduates increased by 50% (Ministerio de Educación de la Nación 2014).

The youthful student population of the UBA, the high percentage of women in the student body, their concentration in the city, and other characteristics outlined above, have implications for the levels and forms of militancy of the FUBA. As Jelin suggests, women have emerged as a self-recognised category of political subjects, with a critical identity as central actors, not only in the student organisations, but in the larger context of social movements in Argentina. This emergence of women is associated with the development of alternative projects and centres of resistance, through a wide array of collective activities, and through the subversion of everyday activities that have led to transformations in

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<sup>7</sup> Regarding undergraduates' residence, 82% of the students appeared to live with family members, 10% by themselves, and 7% with groups of friends, fellow students, or other conditions. Their declared place of residence was the City of Buenos Aires for 53%, and Greater Buenos Aires for 42%.

In terms of the postgraduate student population, 62% was female and 38% male. Their nationalities were recorded as 85% Argentine and 15% foreigners, the majority of foreign students coming from South American countries. The major age group appeared to be 30-34 years with 33% of the postgraduate population belonging to this bracket, the second largest was 25-29 years with 26%, and the third was 35-39 years with 15%. In terms of residence, 72% of postgraduate students resided in the City of Buenos Aires. Regarding their work and source of income 72% declared their work salary as their main source of income, and 35% had obtained some type of funding or scholarship from an institution. Also, 37% of postgraduates declared they were conducting some form of research (UBA 2011).



public life (Jelin 1985). This is key to understanding many aspects of FUBA militancy but is also relevant to the FUBA's close connections with the contemporary feminist movement and campaigns such as the *#NiUnaMenos*.

It is also important to consider what it means to be young in Argentina, what it means to be a university student, and to do politics as a university student. As Jelin reflects, in Argentina, historically young people have taken an important place in politics by becoming socially recognised, differentiated and self-identified actors, through collective practices in which youth as a category has constituted a fundamental identifying element for people, even beyond their involvement in activism. And as such, youth groups and youth political organisations have played an important role in the political life of Argentina. More so, as Jelin and Sempol recognise, the category of young people has had a heavily loaded social and political meaning in Argentina's recent history. The various dictatorships that governed the country during the last century, saw young people as suspicious if not directly oppositional and subversive, while they argue, in the post-dictatorship period, this connotation has not been completely erased and to a certain extent it persists today in tension, and sometimes in contradiction, with the vision of the youth representing the hope for the future (Jelin and Sempol 2006).

Hence, we can acknowledge that the majority of members of the FUBA's student movement are individuals living in the city of Buenos Aires, who have grown up through episodes of economic and political crisis, and who know adult life, university life, politics and social movements in a post-2001 context, for a long time accompanied by the backdrop of the Kirchner Administrations - with all the implications of disenchantment towards neoliberalism and/or official State-based politics that such a biographical timeline may carry with it. These are all elements that bear an influence on the desire of members of the FUBA's student movement to participate and on the ways they may do so. Certainly, the student movement is inscribed within larger histories of mobilisation, protest and resistance throughout various political regimes. How these aspects of their daily lives, together with their histories, imaginaries, language and symbols, may shape their engagement with the political, is likely to be informed by the makeup of the FUBA's student movement that we can begin to contemplate here.

## Summary of Thesis

In the first section of the thesis, chapters 2 to 4, I introduce the research, including the conduct of my fieldwork, how it developed and the way information was obtained, with the theoretical framework to be followed through the rest of the thesis, and the wider histories and structure of the FUBA to understand how the student movement operated at the time of my fieldwork. This is followed by a second section, chapters 5 to 8, which are mainly concerned with political and aesthetic practices that are performed by members of the FUBA's student movement, in the form of occupation, theory, collective memory, and movement through other sites of circulation. Finally, the conclusion allows for a reflection of what we might take on board learning from the FUBA's student movement. A more detailed summary is as follows:

In Chapter 2 I give an account of the methodological approach of my research in Argentina, which included 15 months of fieldwork with the FUBA's student movement. To do this I reflect on my own position as an anthropologist conducting engaged research with an activist group. I stress recognising the production of this thesis from my personal situated account, and I describe the process that unfolded in the course of my participation with the FUBA. I outline questions of intentionality with which I attempted to conduct my research; the overarching idea inspiring the process of work with the FUBA, in accordance with the political concerns presented in this thesis, and with the political practices enacted throughout the student movement. After this reflection, I delve into the practical and logistical accounts of how information was gathered during my fieldwork. I describe the field site of Buenos Aires, and the UBA, reflecting on the transitory nature of the university's and the FUBA's memberships. I give an account of how my involvement with the FUBA developed, and how I enrolled in the UBA as an exchange student. I describe how participant observation was carried out in the daily life of the UBA and in the activities of the FUBA's student movement. The process of interviewing and finding past and present interlocutors from the FUBA is also described. Furthermore, I acknowledge how other research methods such as photography, online discourse analysis, and press monitoring allowed channels for the study of the FUBA and collaboration with its members. Throughout the chapter, I reflect on how my position as a foreign

researcher, through the application of the methodologies described, shaped the construction of my research and the description of the political and aesthetic practices proposed in the thesis.

In Chapter 3, *Politics, Aesthetics, and the FUBA's Student Movement*, I outline the theoretical framework and provide an overarching guide of the ideas with which I develop the analysis of the FUBA and its student movement. To do this, Chapter 3 runs through five “staging posts” that consist of propositions on areas of concerns that recur across the thesis. First, I outline the reasons for exploring the FUBA and its student movement through the relation between politics and aesthetics as suggested by Rancière, taking on board concepts such as the distribution of the sensible and aesthetic communities (Rancière 2004; 2009) to apply them to the analysis of the FUBA. Secondly, I consider how “the political” is used throughout the thesis, taking into account politics as intervention vis-à-vis forms of State organization. Here, the local political context of Argentina is framed in a series of ruptures and continuities with the past to express the need for us to take the political as a non-fixed category when attempting to understand the FUBA and its student movement. Third, I consider how notions of history and memory are constantly re-emerging categories in the landscape of the FUBA, and I suggest the concept of historicity to allow an exploration of the flexible figure of “collective memory” articulated in Argentina, which lends itself to the enactment of political agonisms and antagonisms, through the student movement and beyond. Fourth, I discuss the importance of recognising the politics of antagonism, agonism, and difference as theorised by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau and Mouffe 2014; Mouffe 2013), as a mode of operation through which the FUBA's student movement is sustained, which has allowed it to develop a series of aesthetic and political practices while contesting a struggle for hegemony inside and outside of the student movement. Fifth, I reflect on the forms of network sociality through which the FUBA's student movement appears to operate and be sustained over an extended temporality, facilitating the development and expression of political identities for its participants, while locating the FUBA within a deeper genealogy of protest (Goddard 2015; Zibechi 2003) and political action.

Moving on from the theoretical framework, in Chapter 4, Historical Background and Structure of the FUBA, I discuss historical aspects and structural characteristics of the FUBA and its student movement. Since members of the FUBA emphasise the importance of recognising an inheritance and certain transmissions from past generations of the student movement, I consider these trajectories and the way they have informed the distribution of the sensible (as discussed in chapter 3) in the FUBA's activities and interventions during the course of my fieldwork. Here, I set out the distinction between the organisational body of the FUBA as a student organisation, and the wider student movement that the FUBA articulates around it, focusing on the wider student movement to analyse its repertoire of aesthetic and political practices that are elaborated upon in the next chapters of the thesis. I outline the trajectory of the FUBA and the communities around it, since the years of its foundation. In this account, meaningful episodes through times of dictatorship and democracy are explored, taking into account events in the recent history of the student movement such as the *Argentinazo* of 2001 and its effects. I consider how all of these events left marks that became embedded in the imaginary of the student movement throughout the years until the time of my fieldwork. I also comment on the institutional political situation at the time of my fieldwork, in terms of the shift that occurred at the level of the Federal Government of Argentina, from the centre-left agenda of the Kirchner Administrations (within the larger Latin American Pink Tide) to the neoliberal model of Mauricio Macri's incoming administration, which had profound implications within the FUBA. Then the chapter considers how this trajectory (and others) is mapped on to the distribution of political positions within the FUBA, resulting in what we can identify as the three main sectors of organisations in the FUBA: The Independent Left/Trotskyist, the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, and *Macrismo*, plus independent students and organisations. After this, I explain how the FUBA operated at the time of my research, with its organisational body composed of 13 student centres, and I describe the representative mechanisms of student elections in the FUBA. In this chapter I also acknowledge how political organisations of students, locally called *agrupaciones*, operate in the daily activities of the student movement, and how students who are not members of these can also participate in the many initiatives promoted by different organizations and/or the FUBA itself.

Having explored the FUBA's trajectory and its implications for today's members of the student movement, in Chapter 5 I go on to discuss the practice of occupation by the FUBA's student movement. I describe what I take occupation to mean, as a constant inhabitation of the university space of the UBA by the student movement. And through ethnographic examples and interviews, I discuss how members of the FUBA interpret the practice of occupation, starting with the meaning that they attribute to this practice, how they consider it to have been constructed through the years, as well as the effects that this practice appears to have on students, whether they are actively involved in the student movement or not. I also consider the degree to which occupation extends into the official academic materials and programmes of the UBA, exploring the various mechanisms through which it does so. This raises questions as to whether university authorities may exert an influence on the occupation of university spaces for their own political agenda, as well as the possible disagreement of certain students regarding the constant state of occupation, taking into account differences within the 13 faculties of the UBA. Following on, I question whether students could imagine their university experience without the practice of occupation by the FUBA, to highlight the fundamental aspect of this practice in university life. Finally, I explore what other sites, apart from the university, students may also consider to be occupied and inhabited by the student movement. Resulting from this, I suggest that the UBA is itself a product of the student movement; as the result of the tensions that occur in the midst of a state of occupation. Throughout the chapter I draw on a notion of space that includes physical, mental and social space, as theorised by Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1991), and consider space as always under construction (Massey 2005).

In Chapter 6, Theory as Political Practice, I move on to consider another practice of the FUBA's student movement, the use of theory as part of its political practice. I frame the FUBA's notion of theory as political practice through concerns raised by Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire 2000); where theoretical reflection and political practice are necessarily intertwined processes. Then, through ethnographic examples and interviews, I explore the political action carried out by the student movement through theoretical activities that double as forms of political practice which are organised by the many *agrupaciones* within the FUBA, in and outside of the university space. To do this

I first present three examples of theoretical-political activities that I documented during my fieldwork. Then, through interviews, I explore the function that these activities play in the student movement as tools for the visibilization of its agenda, for the attraction and activation of students into the student movement, and for the recruitment of independent students into particular *agrupaciones* within the FUBA; while looking to facilitate a critical consciousness on behalf of students. Afterwards, I give a description of how these activities are organised, taking into account who participates in them and why. I also explore the type of knowledge that is produced and transmitted through such activities. Throughout the chapter, I attempt to give testimony of the frequency with which these activities take place and the larger context in which they happen, to illustrate the vital practice that this constitutes for the FUBA and its student movement in the tense political climate it inhabits. Resulting from this, I propose to consider these theoretical-political activities as fundamental pillars for the reproduction and sustainability of the student movement, for the formation of militants within the diverse array of *agrupaciones* in the FUBA, and also to be a mechanism for the experimentation and visualization of new social imaginaries.

Following the analysis of occupation and theory as political practice, in Chapter 7, *The Role of Collective Memory in the Student Movement*, I explore the central role that the local category of “collective memory”, relating to State political violence, plays in the student movement today, informing a vast amount of the FUBA’s political and aesthetic practice. First, this chapter introduces the key events related to collective memory in the form of a timeline. Then comes an invitation to consider the category of collective memory in Argentina, and the memorial practices relating to it, as the outcome of a heterogeneous and contentious process of construction. This is in order to reflect on how the category of collective memory has undergone a long process of vindication, contention and also institutionalisation throughout generations, and to highlight how it is still under constant debate and construction today; situating its importance as an argument that seems to situate political organisations within the FUBA along two agonistic positions, and serves to mobilise activity throughout the student movement. From there, drawing on ethnographic examples and interviews, I pose questions regarding the functions that collective memory seems to play for members of the FUBA and its organisations. I focus on ideas of identification and

legitimation through the category of collective memory, recognising how certain demands inscribed through the form of collective memory are still active today. The function of collective memory regarding internal disputes of legitimation and distinction among organisations within the FUBA is also considered, as well its function for outward legitimation, towards government and the general public. Subsequently, the chapter explores how different, overlapping identities of members of the FUBA can be expressed through their participation in memorial rituals. Nevertheless, it is important to note that memorialisation of past events within the FUBA cannot be taken as a homogeneous practice, but should be looked at as an active process of difference and differentiation whereby members of adversarial political groups may subscribe to different versions of collective memory, participating in different forms of memorialisation. Thus, it is important to situate collective memory as a relevant point of action that can illustrate how members of the FUBA negotiate layers of memberships and political identities. Ethnographic examples are given to compare and contrast the dynamics of participation in distinct memorial rituals, while locating collective memory within the agitated political climate in which it is encountered and expressed. Towards the end of the chapter, I point out the particular role that collective memory seems to play in the trans-nationalisation of efforts of solidarity and protest in which the FUBA takes part. Specifically, cases of political violence in Latin America, and the trans-nationalisation of the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign are discussed to illustrate how collective memory seems to inform participation of FUBA members in both cases. Throughout the chapter I argue that, although the events which collective memory encompasses may be situated in the past, the practices and rituals of its commemoration seem to address very present concerns in the everyday life of the FUBA, through the flexible sensible use of this category.

Having considered political and aesthetic practices of the FUBA which relate to the activity of the student movement mainly in relation to the the inner mobilisation of the FUBA and the space of the UBA, in Chapter 8, *Spaces of Circulation and Diffusion outside of University*, I attempt to broaden our understanding of the social life of the student movement beyond the limits of the UBA, considering the porous boundaries between the student movement and the rest of the city. Therefore, throughout the chapter I consider other sites, outside of university, that inform the student movement's distribution of the sensible,

helping it to generate processes of subjectivization in the lives of its members. To picture the political possibilities that other sites of circulation enable, I offer two ethnographic examples that I documented during my fieldwork: the scene of a concert in the *centro cultural* (cultural centre) of a political organisation that is active in the FUBA, and the setting of an interview in the encampment of an occupied factory, where members of the FUBA participated for several months. These examples suggest the importance that these other sites hold for the articulation of networks that aid the reproduction and sustainability of the student movement. I reflect on the categories of the material and the relational in regards to these spaces, reflecting of the types of relations that the material aesthetics of these places may facilitate for members of the FUBA who participate in them. Arguably, the existence of these sites is also part of a struggle for hegemony manifested across the city of Buenos Aires, and reflects how these sites may constitute fields on which agonisms and antagonisms within the FUBA and beyond are enacted. As I argue throughout the thesis, if the political is co-constitutive of the aesthetic, and if political identities are also shaped by spaces, I propose to think of these other sites of circulation and diffusion outside of University, and the practice of participating in them, as vital to understanding the FUBA's student movement. Furthermore, throughout this chapter I sensorially locate the student movement and its effects within the larger context of the City of Buenos Aires, thinking of how the student movement informs the city, and is in turn, is informed by it. The chapter therefore invites reflection on notions of boundaries and blurring regarding the limits of the student movement, questioning how and where the student movement and its effects extend into the city, and into other aspects of daily lifestyle.

Finally, in Chapter 9 I summarise some of the main issues arising from the research into the aesthetic and political practices enacted by the FUBA's student movement. I frame these contributions as questions, reflecting on the merits of engaged research in anthropology and a focus on movement(s) and resistance. I outline some of the forms the FUBA's student movement (together with other movements) has generated as alternatives to conventional (institutional/representative) politics for the articulation of communities out of necessity, out experiencing sustained episodes of crisis – and how, now that the same social, political, economic and environmental crises are closing in on



capitalist cores, we may learn from others who have undergone similar experiences over a long time, and created radical alternatives in the face of such violence and crisis.

It has become evident, particularly so from the financial crash of 2008, and in the last few years through myriad political crises throughout Europe and the United States, that the processes of crisis endemic to neoliberal capitalism, which have long eaten away and devastated the peripheral zones of capitalist extraction, such as Latin America, are now closing in and knocking at the door of the cores of the capitalist system; the mobilisations of the Occupy movement throughout the United States and Europe, the *Indignados* movement in Spain, and more recently the Extinction Rebellion in the UK are but a few examples of the pressing demand for radical action. Evermore, the devastation of the environment, the flexibilisation of labour, the stripping away of rights, the censorship of academic circles, and the neoliberalization of academia, seem to threaten the spaces for the articulation of radical alternatives. And faced with the need to confront such a reality, lessons learned from those who have long dealt with, and created in the face of, this adversity may well prove useful to think of.

### **A Note on the Photographs Throughout this Thesis**

The photographs in this thesis were originally uncaptioned. Captions have been added to provide context and translation. By presenting captions, I do not intend to make photographs contingent on written text, subordinating them to a reading that closes down and fixes their explanation. As Pink suggests, any experience, object or image holds different meanings and can be redefined differently in situations by different individuals in different discourses (Pink 2007). Thus, I encourage an open-ended reading that allows the images to convey their own meaning, and enables an experience of the sensorial feelings arising from the encounters with these aesthetics and material productions in the living spaces of the FUBA's student movement. The immediate encounter with this imagery and symbolism was a vital part of my fieldwork; they were most striking in the early stages of the research, as I became acquainted with the various spaces of the UBA and beyond, and became more familiar as I spent weeks and months

living and conducting research in this landscape. All images, unless otherwise stated, are my own; for the purposes of clarity, a list of images is provided in the appendix.



Image 2. The delegation of the FUBA marches with the *Encuentro Memoria Verdad y Justicia* (EMVyJ) column for the yearly demonstration of the *Día de la Memoria*, March 24th, 2016. On the 40th anniversary of the military coup of 1976.

## II. Methodology

### Introduction

This chapter covers the methodology with which I approached my research during fieldwork with the *Federacion Universitaria de Buenos Aires* (FUBA) and its student movement in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Given the importance that anthropology stresses in recognising knowledge not as derived from neutral observation, but rather constructed from a particularly situated account, throughout this chapter I discuss my position in the field and the process that unfolded over the course of the 15 months of my participation with the FUBA; whilst also reflecting upon my own position as an anthropologist conducting engaged research with activist groups.

As Pink suggests, ethnographers should not claim to deliver an objective or truthful account of reality, but should try to convey accounts of their lived experiences of reality that resemble in the closest way possible the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which ethnographic knowledge was produced (Pink 2007). So in order to engage with the particularities of this research in the personal and social dimension, the chapter is structured in two relevant categories that may be identified as, first, a reflection on the rationale and intentionality with which I attempted to conduct my work with the FUBA's student movement; that is, the overarching idea inspiring and informing the process of data collection and collaboration with the FUBA, in accordance with the ideas and political principles that are presented in this thesis. Ideas that also touch upon the ethical aspects of the research. And second, the practical and logistical accounts of how information was gathered during my fieldwork through a series of activities, events, and methodological practices.

In terms of the first category of the principles inspiring my fieldwork, I start by reflecting upon on the precept of equality as a departure point for my research and collaboration with members of the FUBA. Given the nature of this research project, with student members of activist organisations, I outline my concerns in

attempting to apply the same political and theoretical precepts enacted throughout the student movement, to the development of my own fieldwork and theorisation through different modes of enacting engaged anthropology (Low and Merry 2010).

In terms of the second category of how information was gathered, I describe the urban field site of Buenos Aires, with the campus of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) spread around the city, and the transitory nature of this university's population. From there I make an account of how contact was first established with members of the FUBA, and how I became enrolled in the UBA as an exchange student. I go on to describe how this contact allowed for the development of engaged participant observation in the daily life of the UBA, and in the activities of the FUBA and its student movement. I describe how interviews were carried out with past and present members of the FUBA as well as academic staff members of the UBA. I also describe how other research methods such as photography, online discourse analysis, and press monitoring allowed channels for the study of the FUBA and collaboration with its members.

Throughout the chapter I reflect on how my own position as a foreign researcher, through the application of the aforementioned methodologies, shaped the construction of my research and the description of the political and aesthetic practices proposed in this thesis.

### **Intentionality and Motivation**

To begin the discussion on the ideas and concerns which inspired my methodology and work throughout the research process, I describe here my personal situation carrying out engaged research with activist groups; groups that defined themselves in a struggle for equality. For this purpose, I turn to the ideas of Rancière on defining equality, to begin from the guiding precept that, throughout the research process that I undertook, equality had to be thought of as a method instead of simply a demand. For as Rancière suggests, equality cannot simply be understood as a demand made by groups, but needs to be assumed as a starting point for truly democratic politics to exist; for a movement to be characterized as democratic. In my case, this would mean looking for the

implementation of equality in the relationship between researcher and the student movement being studied. For as Todd May points out in keeping with Rancière's ideas, equality is the touchstone of a democratic politics, meaning that through equality there is no avant-garde, no necessary divisions between those who think or theorize and those who act. Consequently, the precept of equality informing fieldwork meant that the process of performing politics was as essential as its results, since "we cannot resist now and create equality later", for how we struggle and resist, or create alternatives, reflects our vision of what society should look like (May 2009, 16). In line with these thoughts, resistance, as well as this research, focusing on and collaborating with, groups of resistance, could not be conducted simply with democracy as an end in view, but needed to attempt to be democratic in its very unfolding.

In formulating such an approach, I took inspiration from Osterweil and Chesters's reflection of the anthropologist and activist working as an artisan to convey the position that as a researcher I could possibly take within the FUBA's student movement. An artisan as someone "who works on the cusp of the imaginary and the material, whose imagination is directed by the self-organizing tendencies of social and material systems". An artisan who "is the under-laborer of utopian spaces; an individual or collective who responds to cajoles, who traces, shapes, and sharpens, but who cannot direct or determine". In contrast with the vision of the ethnographer as an architect, as the designer of utopian worlds, the master of the material who through his practice attempts to impose a grand, other-worldly design, as an imposition of the will (Osterweil and Chesters 2007: 259). I intended therefore, to consider the ethnographic process in my fieldwork in line with Graeber's suggestion of ethnography as a method for teasing out the hidden, symbolic, moral, or pragmatic logics that may underline social action, but which can also provide a potential role for the radical, non-vanguardist intellectual, through which research may not only be helpful in offering the analysis carried out back to the movements one has worked with, but also in using it to formulate new visions; visions which can be offered as potential gifts and collaborations, instead of definitive analyses or impositions (Graeber 2009). In this sense, participation with the FUBA's student movement through collaboration, along with my theoretical research, implied finding forms in which I could work in a practical way to help the student movement further its actions

without supposing the necessity or the capacity to take on a protagonist role, as Low and Merry suggest (Low and Merry 2010). Therefore, there was a key dimension to my research of being led by the relational capacity of the student movement, to situate myself in the midst of its current, and to be moved and carried by it. Precisely because, as I argue throughout this thesis, I propose to see the FUBA's student movement and the groups participating in/with it, not as a fixed and homogeneous grand narrative, but as a transforming multiplicity of actors that conforms an environment which allows for evolving discussion, collaborative engagements, and conflict negotiation, in which configurations may be constantly changing, but in which certain political and aesthetic practices are shared and performed.

Furthermore, given that this research project focused on a student movement whose members themselves are heavily involved in producing theoretical models and using theoretical practice as one of their methods for generating alternatives and defining themselves in the political field, I intended for the study to be enriched through this proliferous yet challenging affinity. Indeed, as Zibechi notes, many social movements throughout Latin America themselves produce theories that are embodied in non-capitalist social relations, representing an epistemic turn and a challenge for those studying these movements (Zibechi 2012). Therefore, there had to be a commitment to my research in approaching and considering the FUBA's student movement not simply as an object to be studied, but as a network that is an active producer of knowledge; a dynamic that calls for a redistribution of roles for the researcher *in* and *of* social movements (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein 2018). This approach led me to sit in and participate in various theoretical-political activities which I will describe<sup>8</sup>, and also to understand the theory and analysis produced by the FUBA's student movement, as Osterweil proposes, to be part of an extended or theoretical experiment in which the object itself may be to test out or make visible the possibilities of new arrangements or imaginaries of the social; to think within and against current formations (Osterweil 2013). Under this conception, I looked to take on board lessons learnt from the theorisation happening throughout the FUBA (as well as from its sources of information) to

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<sup>8</sup> The analysis of theoretical-political activities in the FUBA's student movement is elaborated at greater length in Chapter 6, Theory as Political Practice.

apply to my own analysis of it, and to collaborate with the student movement through my participation in theoretical-political activities carried out by members of the FUBA - looking to develop a form of political engagement through forms of social critique, education, and theorisation (Low and Merry 2010) with the groups that I was studying and with the larger political context at hand.

Through this approach to working with the FUBA's student movement, I looked for the research to involve an understanding of politics as open, non-formulaic, non-linear, and not necessarily concerned with ends, as Osterweil and Chesters suggest. I intended for my research to be part of a theoretical practice and politics that values the occurring communication and exchange of ideas between the researcher and the group of study, not in order to come to a definite agreement, plan or solution, "but for the unpredictable, often subtle, affective effects of the process of critical engagement and encounters" (Osterweil and Chesters 2007: 257); in the same way that I felt political intervention across the student movement to operate: not so much for achieving a distant goal on the horizon, but for the sensibility, livelihoods, and political identities that are developed in the process of aiming towards a diverse horizon – for its transformative effects. With this process, I looked for the research to develop in an understanding of politics that through thought, practice and critique, as Osterweil and Chesters suggest, may come to be truly radical in the sense of addressing the roots of the problems faced by equality as Rancière describes it. I looked to be guided by an understanding of politics that could represent a process of subjectivization that re-informed both, researcher and informants, as political subjects. With this co-constitutive process in mind, I looked to address what Zibechi considers to be modernity's perverse heritage from colonialism: the subject-object relation (Zibechi 2012), instead opting for a process that was engaged both ways. Therefore, throughout the process of my fieldwork and writing-up, there has been a sense of responsibility to both: the members of the FUBA's student movement as well as the research being academically undertaken, as Lowe and Merry reflect on the shared commitments of activist anthropology (Low and Merry 2010).

Such a way of looking at the FUBA's student movement allowed for a recognition of the constant reformulation of difference and equivalence, of agreement and disagreement, necessary to promote knowledge and alternatives

through social movements (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). As Goddard suggests of conducting research “on the edges”, I looked for a methodological application with room for connections and divergences, which reflected different trajectories with a shared affinity in their concerns; to understand, to capture and reflect a reality, and ultimately to transform social reality (Goddard 2019). This angle of study and involvement with participants allowed me to consider the many coexisting and possibly conflicting sides to social movements, keeping them in mind as a series of loosely bounded groups, as I argue throughout the thesis, instead of fixed entities with a common will. In doing so, this methodological understanding helped me as a researcher to notice that the anthropologist, although sincerely committed, cannot always be at the service of social movements or groups in struggle, since these may not embody a unified intention, as was the case within the FUBA, where different horizons were proposed and confronted with each other, among which differences and antagonisms constituted a vital element for the student movement’s sustainability. Nevertheless, through critical intellectual and theoretical work, and other practices developed in conjunction, there was a common ground to be found between activism and academia, from which an open-ended and transforming form of knowledge could ideally be produced. As Osterweil notes, such a recognition of commitment and of difference helps the anthropologist to avoid falling into the trap of thinking that anthropology in groups of struggle must require politically induced analytical closure, which erases complexities in a call for uncompromising action regarded as “realist”, therefore limiting the exploration of alternatives to already existing and established reductionist forms of politics. Or that on the contrary, research with activist groups must be purely detached and analytical. (Osterweil 2013). Here, the dimension of valuing sincerity and accepting shared commitments - although these may take the shape of different personal convictions and political horizons - to visions of social justice and social change (Low and Merry 2010), proved key to this research.

These reflections emerged in the hope that my research could be informed by the theoretical practice generated by the groups in Buenos Aires, and also contribute to them from its academic position. There was an acknowledgement that this interplay could happen resembling a sort of wandering, of “*caminar preguntando*” (Osterweil and Chesters 2007: 257), that accepts the complications



of not having eternally correct answers, but that looks to produce knowledge that may be more insightful into the nature of these movements by walking in or alongside them. As Zibechi notes of Argentina's *Colectivo Situaciones*' notion of the militant researcher: not just integrating into organizations, but participating in the disengagement and place shifting that movements pursue; moving one's self to capture and reconfigure (Zibechi 2012).

Surely, social movements may embody shifting forms and allow different kinds of interactions within them for a researcher. However, the practice and acknowledgement of such possibilities for conducting research through engaged anthropology in contexts of activism and social movements, was at all times of key importance in order to more truly resemble and enact a radical redistribution of politics and equality. We could speak of a methodological search in which I looked to partake during my research. Just as students who chose to become active members of the FUBA's student movement frequently described transiting a personal journey looking for answers to their concerns through their political involvement, so too did I conduct my research not by following a fixed course, but rather re-tracing the orientation of questions and methodologies in a rhythm that shifted according to the life, changes, and emergences of the student movement itself; a dance that implied movements of displacement and return, repetition and difference (Zibechi 2012).

### **Setting the Scene: Entering Buenos Aires and the FUBA**

I first had contact with the FUBA and its student movement in June of 2014. Back then, I was spending a couple of months in Buenos Aires as part of a pilot for my doctoral research. At the time, I was just beginning to identify the FUBA as a relevant actor within the greater social movement scene happening throughout the city. On that occasion, a particular event caught my attention: a free music festival, headlined by *Las Manos de Filippi* was to be held at the iconic *Plaza de Mayo*. It had been organised by the FUBA in order to demand the absolution of a group of political prisoners, *Los Trabajadores de Las Heras*; and was the kind of event that, as an aspiring researcher, one could not miss. There, I was struck by the energy that the gathering seemed to exude; the loud music

blaring into the city night, the lyrics, the dancing and chanting, the banners waving in the air, even the food and drink being sold by street vendors to the crowd that had assembled there. This was protest, but of a particular kind, and I was left wondering how all of those present seemed to know the lyrics to every song that was played that evening, almost as if reciting a fervent form of prayer. As an outside observer I was impressed. In the course of an evening a space had been transformed; a community had turned up and a social space emerged, political intervention occurred and at some point late that night, the space would return to its (agitated) normality. The event left me wondering how the whole gathering had been staged; who were the several hundreds of attendees and how had they come together on that evening? What significance did this event have within a larger scale of protest? I eventually left Buenos Aires on that occasion with this glimpse and these questions lingering in my mind.

As one approaches or leaves Buenos Aires by air, one of the things that proves the most impressive is the huge expanse of its metropolitan area. And it was this sight that greeted me again when I returned to begin my main period of fieldwork with the FUBA over a year later, in December of 2015. The tall buildings in the City of Buenos Aires and the lower lying structures on the outskirts composing the *Gran Buenos Aires* (Greater Buenos Aires) strike a contrast with the green fields of plains surrounding the metropolitan area; the third largest in Latin America with over twelve million inhabitants (INDEC 2010). This was to be my research site for 15 months, and spread across that expanse of urbanity, the student movement of the FUBA was to be found.

I make note of these two aspects of my field site - the ephemeral emergences that social movements appear to have at first sight, and the large urban expanse in which my object of study was located - because they were to be central in the way in which my research would need to develop. In terms of the urban character of my field site, it was important due to the nature of the campus of the University of Buenos Aires, given that it is not centralised in a single site, but instead has its 13 different faculties spread across the City of Buenos Aires; thus, the different faculties conform points of influence in terms of student activity and movement embedded across the city. And it was also

important because other sites of circulation for the reproduction of the student movement would be scattered throughout that complex urban fabric.

In terms of the ephemeral character of the emergences that social movements appear to have, I was faced with a two-fold challenge: First, the ephemeral, although frequent, nature of the visible manifestations of the FUBA across Buenos Aires as a series of events. And second, by definition, the transitory nature of the membership and population of a student movement. So the challenge lay in finding a more stable platform through which to enter the student movement in order to explore it, as well as finding a coherent category to account for its transitory and shifting population.

Therefore, the methodology applied during my fieldwork would have to cope with these requirements. Bearing in mind these concerns, I set out to find an approach that could allow me to account for a shifting object of study and to address its past and present across different generations. For this reason, I had decided to focus on the category of the FUBA as a student organisation together with its student movement, since it would allow me to find a more coherent, although permeable, community that I could work with. It would have physical sites of operation that would allow me to observe the everyday workings of the student movement rather than seeing only the more visible manifestations and events that took place out on the streets. And with the FUBA as a category, I could concentrate on the shared aesthetic and political practices that its members had developed, its ways of doing and making, rather than focusing on the particular political perspective or moment of a single group of actors within it. How then could one enter the FUBA?

### **Engaged Participant Observation**

Upon arriving to Buenos Aires towards the end of December 2015, I encountered a couple of situations: Mauricio Macri had just assumed the Presidency of Argentina, and the UBA was having its summer break. This meant that while social organisations in Argentina were bracing for a shock in terms of the neoliberal turn, the FUBA itself was not yet very active owing to the summer vacation period. This was to be expected perhaps in a place where the searing

heat over the long summer months means that activity throughout the city as a whole slows down, with many *porteños* (local term for Buenos Aires dwellers) heading away from the city towards the coast (where some of the FUBA's *agrupaciones* even conduct political formation camps for militant students).

It was this first instance that made me think of the activity of the FUBA's student movement and its temporality in the form of tides, with seasons of low tide and high tide; and, although the summer break implied a low tide in the city, there were still a handful of events in which the FUBA participated during the first two months of 2016. In a similar manner to the form of tides, I would later realise through the constant attendance to events of different kinds, that events as such punctuate time in the rhythm of life of the FUBA's student movement, as Lazar recognises of activist groups and their temporalities in Argentina, with certain events gathering momentum in the lead up to larger occasions of historical time, and others inscribed within attritional time as everyday constant episodes of struggle (Lazar 2014). Of the earlier events I recall one was a protest to demand the restitution of the workers of *Grupo 23*<sup>9</sup>, and another was a general assembly of the FUBA to strategize its action plan in the face of the onset of the Macri Administration. It was as if the first winds arrived announcing the imminent storm. At that point however, my participation with the FUBA was that of an outside observer, limited to the visible manifestations occurring out on the public space. A way had to be found into the daily life of its student movement.

It was for this reason that I anticipated establishing contact with the student movement through the students of the Faculty of Philosophy (FFyL), given that anthropology programs are taught in this faculty. There, initial contact could be made with anthropology students who participated in the FUBA's campaigns, allowing our mutual interests and affinity for political activism to let my research unfold. This opportunity came towards the end of March 2016, with the high tide elicited by the start of the academic term in the UBA and the activities around the *Día de la Memoria* on March 24<sup>th</sup>; when a series of preparatory actions leading

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<sup>9</sup> *Grupo 23* was a media conglomerate which had contractual ties to the Kirchner administrations, and whose owners oversaw a wave of employment cuts in the form of lockouts in early 2016.

**ASAMBLEA DE ESTUDIANTES DESPEDIDOS**

**Organicémonos para defender nuestros puestos de trabajo**

**Jueves 18/2, 18hs en la Facultad de Sociales**

La Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires convoca para el próximo jueves 18/2 a una Asamblea de Estudiantes Despedidos en la facultad de Sociales. El objetivo es relevar la situación de centenares de compañeros de la UBA que están en conflicto por la defensa de sus puestos de trabajo y resolver medidas de acción colectiva para impulsar estas luchas.

A menos de dos meses de la asunción de Mauricio Macri, ya suman más de 25 mil los trabajadores estatales -nacionales, provinciales o municipales- despedidos. La excusa de la "modernización" ha servido para dejar en la calle a miles y miles de personas. La ola de despidos se extiende también al sector privado, como se ve en el caso del Grupo 23 de Szpolski y Garfunkel.

La estigmatización de los despidos como "ñoquis" oculta que no se ha realizado ningún tipo de evaluación de las tareas que cumplían los trabajadores, silenciando la función concreta que desempeñaban y la formación profesional al con la que cuentan. El gobierno de Macri se aprovecha de la situación de precarización laboral precedente, que le permite presentar los despidos como "no renovación de contratos".

La FUBA denuncia que los despidos masivos apuntan a disciplinar a los trabajadores y la juventud frente a un ajuste mucho más vasto. Mientras el gobierno otorga toda clase de beneficios para los exportadores, los grupos económicos y las privatizadas de los servicios, el ministro Prat Gay afirmó que los trabajadores deberán optar entre el "salario o los puestos de trabajo". El 23% en cuotas ofertado por Vidal a los docentes de la provincia de Buenos Aires anticipa que el paso siguiente a los despidos es una fuerte desvalorización del salario del conjunto de los trabajadores.

De Moyano a Caló, las burocracias sindicales han dejado pasar estas medidas y sólo apuntan a proteger sus propias prebendas y privilegios. A pesar de ellos, los trabajadores organizados desde sus dependencias han logrado colocar sus reclamos en la agenda pública y conquistar la reincorporación de cientos de compañeros.

Los jóvenes, que estudiamos y trabajamos, somos los más expuestos a la precarización laboral y los despidos. Por eso la FUBA se propone organizar a los estudiantes despedidos y a todos aquellos que ven peligrar sus puestos de trabajo. Convocamos una Asamblea de Estudiantes Despedidos y lanzamos un empujón para evaluar el impacto de los despidos en la universidad. Desde este lugar apoyaremos la jornada de paro y movilización convocada por ATE para el próximo 24 de febrero. Sumate a la asamblea y a organizar la lucha para frenar esta ofensiva!

**ASAMBLEA** de estudiantes despedidos

**Jueves 18/2, 18hs en la Facultad de Sociales**

**fuba**

Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires

FUBA Federación Universitaria Buenos Aires



Image 3. "Assembly for sacked students. Let's organise to defend our jobs.". Flyer for a general assembly of the FUBA on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016. The assembly was called upon as a response to the initial months of the Macri Administration.

up to the historical event of the *Día de la Memoria* - inscribed in the ritualistic calendar of the FUBA as perhaps the largest event of the year - appear to kick-start mobilisation throughout the student movement. It was then that I decided to enrol as an exchange student in the Faculty of Philosophy of the UBA. Enrolling was possible due to the fact that the UBA is a public university in which any foreign university student, past or present, may enrol as an exchange student for undergraduate courses with the payment of a small fee; the public character of the university hailed as a long-time conquest by the student movement itself.

Enrolling as a student immediately had a few effects: the first was that, as a student of the UBA, I was now, at least in “official” terms, a member of the FUBA. But more importantly, it meant that I could attend classes as a student of the UBA myself, and see first-hand what life as a student and a member of the student movement looked like; inside the classrooms, in and around the faculties, and also out on the streets. Although the buildings of the faculties of the UBA are open to the general public, personally I felt that enrolling as a student allowed me a sense of orientation and belonging navigating that space. So while I was attending a few courses on anthropology and philosophy during the 2016 academic year – which also helped me continue with theoretical debates as an academic practice for myself – I now felt free to hang around the faculty and observe the constant state of habitation, which throughout this thesis I call occupation, of the university space by the FUBA’s student movement. Technically I was in as a student, but I wanted to see life as an active member of the student movement.

For this reason, I approached the students in the *conducción*<sup>10</sup> of the CEFyL (the Student Centre of the Faculty of Philosophy), led by the UJS-PO and the PTS and let them know my position as a foreign anthropology PhD student looking to study the FUBA’s student movement. As students of humanities and

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term *conducción* to refer to the elected group of students that carry out the administrative roles and activities of the 13 individual student centres of the FUBA as well as the general administrative roles of the FUBA. *Conducción* literally translates to “conduction”, and in the political sphere has been likened to “leadership”. However, I have chosen not to use the term leadership as the local use of *conducción* does not imply a hierarchical leadership. *Conducción* implies a more horizontal organization, less focused on individual actors and organisations, yet at times it can imply a non-hierarchical and occasional sense of leadership or increased visibility.

social sciences themselves, these members of the FUBA quickly understood my position and from our first encounter invited me to participate in the activities that they were holding the following days as an independent student, which allowed me a degree of self-recognised closeness and affinity with these students and their *agrupaciones*, without necessarily becoming politically aligned with their positions.

From this initial conversation in the café of the CEFyL, my network of contacts within the student movement and research participants quickly started grow, and with it my own confidence in growing attuned with the field. The development of a network of contacts and familiar faces which I started to identify more and more (although some characters were visible from the very start as an outsider due to their positions), was telling of a couple of things: the dynamism with which the FUBA's student movement organises and welcomes new participants, and also the familiarity and even personal friendships that exist among both militants of the same *agrupación* across the faculties of the UBA, and also among militants of the different *agrupaciones* within the FUBA, who - although they may hold different adversarial political perspectives as militants - still recognised an amicable relation with other fellow members of the student movement most of the time.

This brings me to a statement that I should make about my own position in regards to the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA. While I acted as an active independent student in the FUBA's student movement during my fieldwork (meaning: not formally inscribed in any of the *agrupaciones*), because of the departure point of my research through the CEFyL (whose *conducción* was led by the Independent-Left organisations UJS-PO and PTS) as well as out of my own political orientation - which did not coincide exactly with theirs, yet allowed me to feel more familiar with this sector - the majority of the closer contacts with whom I participated in the FUBA's activities self-identified as either independent or belonging to the Independent-Left. And because of this departure point of my network of contacts, most of the smaller activities of the individual *agrupaciones* within the FUBA to which I was personally invited were those of the Independent-Left; something that is noticeable throughout this thesis. However, though I was experiencing this sense of gravitation towards the groups of the Independent-Left - a gravitational pull that any entering member of the FUBA may feel towards any

sector with which he or she may coincide the most – I did also consciously participate in a wide variety of activities of *agrupaciones* which belonged to the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sector as well as the independent sector of the student movement; the *Macrismo* sector of the FUBA being the only one in which I did not participate, due to its predominantly inactive character regarding the demands of the larger student movement. I should also say that, although I was enrolled as a student of the Faculty of Philosophy, my routine fieldwork activities did include regular visits to the other faculties of the UBA in order to carry out participant observation, interviewing, photography, and other forms of documentation throughout the UBA, looking to get a feel of the university as a whole; connections which were facilitated by my network of contacts that grew throughout the student movement.

So returning to this insertion into an expanding network of contacts, it was through a series of events, conversations, and encounters that I came to implement my intended principal research method of engaged participant observation. As I was exiting the Faculty of Philosophy one day, towards the beginning of my time at the UBA, a participant in my research, Manu, encouraged me: “¡Che, venite a militar un dia!” (Hey, come and militate one day!). I first wondered what exactly he meant by that and what activities this entailed. Through later explanations by way of example and together with the participants in my research, I would come to understand and embody the term more fluidly. I would eventually be taught what the meaning of “*militar*” (militating) in and out of the university meant, and what to be a “*militante*” (militant) student felt like, in a sensory bodily capacity (Pink 2009).

Conducting research into the FUBA’s student movement in such an engaged manner meant participating in a wide variety of practices that are shared by students across the various *agrupaciones* within the FUBA. And due to my assumed position as an official student and an active member of the student movement, I was then suitably situated to explore both of these aspects which many consider to be complimentary in student and militant life at the UBA. Through overlapping interests and commitments there was ground for reciprocity in research and collaboration to develop in an engaged form (Low and Merry 2010).



For example, in my capacity as a student I would sit in, participate, and learn from the courses in which I was enrolled at the FFyL in the middle-class neighbourhood of Caballito, enjoying classes relevant to my research that would be hard to come across in other universities. This meant that, as any other student, I would sit in *teóricos* (lectures) 4 hours long and *prácticos* (seminars) 2 hours long at a time, about three times a week; which in itself allowed me to see the value of the physical presence of students and their bodies in the university space, and the role which this long time of “*cursar*” (attending classes) already implies in terms of students inhabiting and creating the social space of the UBA. Yet sitting in the classrooms, I would also be attentive to observe issues that were related to the activity of the student movement which emerged inside the classrooms, and I would usually write down these observations in a set of notes separate from those for my lecture notes. It was observations like these which allowed me to perceive the degree in which the student movement can come to occupy the academic material in the official classrooms and academic programmes themselves, as argued in the chapter on occupation - be it through the affective capacity of militant students entering the classrooms or through the designs of the academic course programmes.

In addition to attending classes as a student, upon exiting the classroom I would become immersed in the circulation of bodies around the faculty, surrounded by the aesthetic production of the student movement in the corridors and hallways of the faculty; and often lingered in conversation with participants and fellow students in the faculty café or around the *mesas* (tables) of their *agrupaciones*. Our meetings were often scheduled with little notice or held spontaneously. There, in the form of conversation, invitations would usually come to participate in foreseeable activities that were being organised. Some of these were to be written down in an agenda in the form of a weekly schedule, and some were more impromptu, taking place that same day. To highlight how common this practice of organising time on-the-go is among *militantes*, I was once shown an *agenda militante*, a printed and published weekly planner for militant students that had special compartments such as: a daily schedule, a section for meeting notes from *círculos*<sup>11</sup>, a separate space for meeting conclusions, etc., which was

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<sup>11</sup> *Círculos* literally translates to “circles”. These are small weekly meetings of about 3-5 students used to debate political issues and plan short-term actions on a weekly basis.

meant to help militant students organise according to their specific needs. And in a more impromptu manner for example, I was many times invited to help sell the “*prensa*” (newspaper) of a particular *agrupación* at their table, or to “*pasar cursos*” (to pass by classes) with members of a single *agrupación* or a group of these.

*Pasar cursos* was a particularly interesting activity in which to partake since it is seen as a fundamental tool for the diffusion of the initiatives of the student movement. It literally meant passing by from classroom to classroom, knocking on the doors to ask if the teacher delivering the class would allow the passing group of students to enter the classroom. If allowed, the militant students will enter and make an announcement or invitation about a relevant subject (usually about their *agrupación* or about the particular student centre) and also hand out flyers, “*volantes*”, to the students sitting in the classroom as a physical reminder or invitation. These interventions usually take around 5 minutes. All of these interactions allowed for telling observations about the students on the giving and the receiving ends of the interventions (I was on both ends many times). In addition, the walking around classrooms in itself operated as a method for conversation to develop in a more informal style with militant students of the FUBA. On one such occasion, for example, a participant expressed having carried out this practice so many times in his years as a student that he knew perfectly well in advance which teachers would allow announcements from militants and which wouldn't, according to their own political orientation; he had developed a special touch in the form of a sixth sense for navigating the university space this way.

Beyond my activities at the Faculty of Philosophy, I also decided to take up the practice of conducting targeted visits to the other faculties of the UBA around Buenos Aires. These visits helped me to better understand what it was to circulate as a student across the city and around the university, as something which militant students may often do owing to their participation in activities of the student movement across the UBA. The physical circulation around the faculties helped me to develop the idea of the City of Buenos Aires as a whole being affected by the FUBA's student movement. This is due to the spread-out nature of the UBA's campus sites around the city, since faculty sites represent points of influence in which the student movement may be particularly active, and which in turn affect the surrounding areas of the city. These areas are affected visually

and aesthetically in terms of graffiti, posters, fashion styles, etc.. And they are also affected economically, socially, and politically, in terms of the businesses that cater to students around the faculties (book stores, cafes, stationery shops), and the political intervention that the neighbouring areas may be exposed to by the presence of the student movement, which often spills onto the streets. Conversely, the life within the UBA's different faculties may also be shaped by the character of areas surrounding them. These visits served the purpose of picturing the FUBA's student movement through the particular political configurations existing in the different faculties, and I conducted them during periods of regular tide and high tide in the student movement; that is to say, in regular weeks of the academic term (at times to conduct interviews), and also in electoral time in the weeks before and during elections for the student centres, when political activity is at its highest point.

Furthermore, I would regularly attend assemblies of the student centre whenever these occurred in the Faculty of Philosophy (where I was entitled to vote as a student), and whenever I could attend these (due to time) when they happened in the other student centres of the UBA. Some assemblies were organised well in advance (a week or two) and some would be organised as strategic emergency measures in response to particular crises being faced by the FUBA's student movement. In this sense, a coexistence of both temporalities, of historical time and attritional time, as described by Lazar (Lazar 2014), became evident throughout the operation of the FUBA's student movement. Assemblies would regularly last around two or three hours, and in them a vast array of proposals was usually treated, from contingent measures such as when to take a faculty to reside and sleep inside it as a strike measure (*tomar la facultad*), to larger symbolic debates such as whom the FUBA should march with in the *Día de la Memoria*, and beyond. The importance of voting on decisions such as whom the FUBA should march with in public demonstrations, in themselves, revealed the symbolic weight of where members of the FUBA situated themselves in relation greater narratives of historical struggle. Here, particularly adversarial positions would emerge between the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sector and the Independent Left.

During assemblies I would regularly take notes of the motions proposed by the different *agrupaciones*, which helped me carry out discursive analyses in

terms of which political orientations the different sectors of the FUBA and independent members took, and how antagonisms between these would serve to lighten-up debate among the student movement. During the assemblies of the FUBA's student centres, agonistic and antagonistic debates (Mouffe 2013) would play out, particularly between the Independent Left and *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sectors of the FUBA, with the Independent Left arguing for a student movement independent from any form of government, and the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations proposing a unified anti-Macri front. Assemblies provided an opportunity to see such discussions happen in the midst of loud cheering and chanting from the members of the respective *agrupaciones*, and to witness first-hand how the difference in orientations facing the issues debated provided a strong encouragement for militant students to campaign throughout the UBA's faculties in the days prior and posterior to an assembly.

Another practice which allowed for a greater engagement with the FUBA's student movement was that of attending *círculos* (circles); weekly meetings of around five people regularly held by militant students of the diverse *agrupaciones* as a tool for strategy and debate. In the circles, this smaller number of students (usually militants from an *agrupación* plus invited independent students) take the opportunity to revise the characterisation and political perspective that their *agrupación* holds in regards to current affairs occurring within the student movement and beyond; for example, from debating issues around gender violence and their stance in the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign, to debating the "institutional coup" that ousted Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (2016), and where to stand in regards to condemning it. These meetings also serve as an opportunity to plan and coordinate a political agenda for the upcoming days or weeks. The smaller number of students who participate in *círculos* means that militant members of a single *agrupación* within a faculty may form several of these circles, with each of these smaller groups usually deciding who they invite to participate and the time and place of their meetings. In my personal experience, *círculos* usually took place in available spaces around the Faculty of Philosophy; for example, in empty classrooms in the evenings. And because of the departure point of my research through the CEFyL, I participated most regularly in the circles of the UJS-PO. In terms of scale, the opportunity to participate in *círculos* offered an insight into the smallest scales of organisation in the student

movement. In terms of temporality, they allowed me to see how the student movement operated through a series of short-term events which punctuated time through the drawing-up of smaller episodes of everyday struggle (Guyer 2007). And in terms of engagement, *círculos* also opened spaces through which I could collaborate, both in debating as well as offering my support in certain tasks and initiatives of the student movement.

The adaptive method of engaged participant observation also led me to participate in a variety of activities organised by the FUBA, which students considered to be both theoretical and political, which throughout this thesis I refer to under the name of theory as political practice. During my fieldwork I was invited to participate in these theoretical-political activities in varying degrees: from conversations on the organisation of “*prácticas*” (practices) in marginalised areas bordering the City of Buenos Aires (*villas*), to the implementation and documentation of these initiatives together with students of the FUBA. Other forms of theory as political practice I was invited to in a more informal way, through the verbal or online invitation of student peers and participants in my research, sometimes a few days in advance and sometimes an hour or less. Yet others, I encountered myself simply by way of student diffusion and campaigning, by looking at a *cartel* (poster) hanging from the faculty walls, or even just by sitting in a classroom and being exposed to this practice without having anticipated it. In such a manner I would attend and participate in a variety of lectures, debates, etc. (elaborated on in the chapter on theory as political practice), throughout the faculties of the UBA, in the cultural centres of particular *agrupaciones*, in public spaces, and beyond. Both the particularly situated theoretical debates grounded in the local context of the student movement, and the political action these carried with them, were of great value to my research in experimenting a scenario where many times the theoretical-political exercises and interventions themselves became the objectives of the student movement. Through the forms of education, social critique, and collaboration (Low and Merry 2010), these activities opened pathways for engagement with the FUBA.

Embodied fieldwork also carries with it the notion of situating oneself to be open to encounters, to be led and oriented by the scent of the research subject; to engage with it and to recognise its affective dimension, to affect it and at the

same to open up oneself to be affected (Massumi 2015). As Max Gluckman's advice suggested: follow your nose wherever it leads you. And this perspective implied the disposition to follow the FUBA's student movement and its traces not only inside the university space, but also out on the streets and in the public and private spaces around the City of Buenos Aires where it became evidently or latently manifested. Therefore, a significant part of my research also developed in a variety of spaces outside of the UBA itself.

Instances of fieldwork through what in this thesis I label other spaces of circulation and diffusion of the student movement, came in what we can consider to be two categories: 1) Events openly organised and convened by the FUBA or by the particular *agrupaciones* within it, and 2) instances or events that although not directly organised by the FUBA or its *agrupaciones*, were still related to its networks of members and to its system of information, in which students and individual members of the FUBA would take part, and where the student movement's discourse would circulate, blending into the rest of the city.

Regarding the first category of events organised or adhered-to by the FUBA or its *agrupaciones* outside of the university, I attended a wide variety of multitudinous demonstrations, political-theoretical debates, commemorations, public classes, *cacerolazos*, music festivals, etc., many of which are used in this thesis and detailed at greater length as examples to illustrate the issues at hand throughout the next chapters. Larger public events played an important role in punctuating time (Guyer 2007) for the FUBA; on certain occasions in the form of a cyclical calendar, gathering momentum up to larger and more meaningful events, and in other occasions, as episodes of attritional time (Lazar 2014) given specific contingencies. In all events students stressed an importance in participating to open oneself to the expected and also the unexpected of what could happen. Invitations to participate in these activities, as with previous methodological practices, would come mostly by word of mouth through fellow members of the FUBA, or through physical and online campaigning and promotion. I should note that many of these activities were publicly open, and not only active members of the student movement participated in them, but also members of the general public who would sympathise with what was being promoted by the student movement for a variety of reasons. A degree of personal

organisation was required to attend these events due to how proliferous the FUBA and its *agrupaciones* are in organising them. On average, I would attend a couple of such activities every week to carry out participant observation and photography, though events like these could be held daily, and militant students would even attend a variety of these in a single day, on top of their day-to-day academic activities at the UBA. Needless to say, it was practically impossible to attend all of these, and it is fair to say that a week without any such activity occurring was a rare sight during my fieldwork.

In terms of the second aforementioned category of instances not directly organised by the FUBA's student movement, but related to it, I would usually participate in such occasions and be on the lookout for these as members of the FUBA would normally do themselves: on my own time outside of university. This is so because many times such events had to do with cultural, leisure, and lifestyle activities that took place outside of the university in a wide network of cultural centres, cafes, bars, independent music venues, and theatres, etc., which in turn informed the position of students within the university. And although these may not have been organised directly by the organisations of the FUBA, students of the UBA and active members of the FUBA clearly participated in them, and the visual and symbolic language of the student movement and its political discourse was clearly manifested in them through the aesthetics of these places: posters on the walls citing popular demands, familiar icons and slogans of social organisations - from a print on the wall of a cultural centre depicting the mobilisation of a student centre of the FUBA, to the green scarf carried by female performers and audience members inside many of these venues that could also be seen worn by students across the FUBA as part of the wider women's movement, its demand for the legalisation of abortion and its denouncement of gender violence. While not directly organised by the FUBA, participation in these spaces and events was many times informally allowed or even defined by the position of members of the public as students, allowing an insight into a key aspect of how life outside of the university shaped political ideas and subjectivities inside the university and the student movement. So in order to be open to such encounters, as a student of the UBA myself, I took up the practice of visiting these places and attending these activities on my own leisure and recreation time on evenings, nights, and during weekends; where many times I

ended up facing a deeply interesting question for my research without even having anticipated it upon deciding on the outing. As Pink points out, there is the question of whether the anthropologist is ever “off-duty”, for situations and events that might be unexpected during leisure-time can be profoundly informative about the research being undertaken, in terms of images, sounds, etc. (Pink 2007). It was encounters and situations such as these that made me both question the boundaries and the reach of the FUBA’s student movement, and consider how it diffuses into daily aspects of leisure and lifestyle across Buenos Aires.

Participation in both of these categories outside of university – of public events organized directly by the FUBA’s organisations, and those indirectly related to the student movement in terms of the participation of students – as well as in the day-to-day activities previously detailed of student and militant life within the university, came to open up an opportunity to experience and consider how bodily automatisms and emulations, identifications, bodily sensations, vibro-tactile sensations, rhythms, and vibrations, all served to produce ethnographic data (Knudsten and Stage, 2015). These affective stimuli allowed me to sense experiences on the personal level of a student of the UBA and a member of the FUBA; to make them part of my habits and lifestyle, and to situate myself in a position to better comprehend this community.

Through all of these exchanges over the course of my fieldwork I would gradually learn to position myself in the midst of the FUBA, to travel back and forth, in and out of the student movement and its spaces, to transit its points of high activity and its peripheries, to move through its thresholds and liminal spheres, to decode its visual language and become acquainted with the discourse emanating from the student movement and the social space (Lefebvre 1991) being continuously secreted by it. Through such encounters I would come to see and experience the habitus - the “durable, transposable dispositions”, produced by a particular type of environment that allow the generation and structuring of practices and representations, “without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends” (Bourdieu 1977: 72) - that being a member of the FUBA’s student movement entailed. And as Bourdieu insists through his theory of practice, over the course of constant repetition I would be



allowed to witness how knowledge is constructed through an embodied notion of habitus, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented toward practical functions (Bourdieu 1990). I would come to affect my surroundings and my object of study, and in the same capacity I would come to be bodily affected (Massumi 2015) by it in the process of my fieldwork. I would become familiar with, and make my own, the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004) in which the FUBA operated.

## **Interviewing**

If we can consider engaged participant observation as I previously described, to have been the principal research method applied during my fieldwork, interviewing played the most significant complementary role to it. And it was from the method of engaged participant observation that interviewing first started to develop into what would be different degrees of informal, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews (Bernard 2011).

After having made first contact with the FUBA's student movement through the CEFyL, a series of conversations quickly started to develop within two months which expanded the network of participants with whom I was constantly having interactions across the FUBA. So informal interviewing started in the first instance through a variety of conversations that I was invited to and which I became part of (expectedly or unexpectedly) with current members of the FUBA. This method of informal conversation proved to be of key importance and a proliferous source of data for orienting questions in my research. As Bernard suggests, informal interviewing was a method of choice at the beginning of participant observation, to settle in, gain rapport, develop guides for semi-structured interviews, and to learn about the lived experience of life in the student movement (Bernard 2011).

My experience with informal interviewing particularly benefitted from the fact that these informal debates and conversations happen as a regular practice all the time within the student movement; they are an elemental part of that which *militar* ("to militate") consists; to catch up and to invite fellow friends and students to have a *mate* or a coffee in order to debate on political characterisations and have a "shared political experience". This in itself was telling of the discursive

nature of the student movement, and what I felt to be part of the larger conversational culture in Buenos Aires. So in this fashion, with brief anticipation, many times chatting over the mobile phone or hanging around in the faculties, I would coordinate with my participants to meet in conversations where I could openly enquire about personal and group political orientations and approaches to the FUBA's student movement, and be asked about my own perspectives - be it on a Saturday morning with about five militant and independent students in the café of the CEFyL, or *pasando cursos* with groups of militants while becoming familiar with which of them belonged to which *agrupación* and why - conversations that required a considerable amount of memory work. Having openly disclosed my position as a researcher, I would also regularly take notes on these meetings which were hugely illustrative for me to catch my bearings and to situate myself in the midst of such a multiplicity of actors, *agrupaciones*, and political orientations; to draw a mental map of who was who, or who agreed/disagreed with whom in the student movement generally, and also to become known (at least informally) to the community of the student movement.

From this ongoing series of informal conversations and interviews, recurring themes started to develop across the accounts of members of the FUBA (militants of different *agrupaciones* and independents) that slowly shaped a guide that I would apply for unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. The guide would come to encompass a variety of shared practices across the student movement which emerged to visibility along with my participant observation in the field. It would include themes such as: Participants' personal involvement with the student movement, how members of the FUBA considered the current (at the time) political moment to impact on the student movement, the occupation by the FUBA of the university space and beyond, the forms of theory as political practice which students developed and participated in, the role that "collective memory" appeared to play in the student movement, and other spaces or spheres where members of the FUBA perceived the student movement to act or exist in, apart from university itself. All of these traversed by how they perceived antagonisms, within the student movement and beyond, to shape and to energise the student movement through a struggle for hegemony.

Depending on the position of participants - as militants of a particular *agrupación*, as independents, as non-active members, and as past or present members of the FUBA - the personal motives for involvement or non-involvement, and the themes relating to the larger student movement could be differently probed and explored. Furthermore, the modality of interviews as either unstructured or semi-structured (Bernard 2011), as well as the guide applied to them, had to be flexible depending on the time available for interviewing. I should say that I conducted most of the in-depth interviewing towards the final months of my fieldwork, by the time that I was well acquainted with the participants who I interviewed in this manner. Yet as I have illustrated before, the proliferous activity of the FUBA's organisations meant that militants particularly had a limited amount of free time per week to sit in interviewing sessions two or three hours long. So while participants were comfortably willing to be interviewed, other activities in the student movement always meant that time was a dimension of which one had to be aware.

As I mentioned previously, one of the concerns in my fieldwork was getting a variety of voices from different sectors of the student movement, as well as from different generations of the FUBA, in order to account for the shifts in terms of time and membership that the FUBA inherently has as a student organisation. So an effort was made with the help of my participants to develop a network that included not just present members of the student movement, but also past members who could speak about the key element of transmissions through generations within the FUBA. In this manner, I also conducted interviews with past members of the FUBA who continued to be political militants in their later biographical stages at the time of my fieldwork, now working as teachers in the UBA or generally in the public sector. These contacts were approached through introductions by present students, through past students among themselves, through personal communication in events in which the FUBA participated with other organisations such as teachers' unions, and in other sites of circulation of the student movement by way of personal conversation. All of which helped to connect past personal and political motives to today's generation of the FUBA's student movement.

Through such a logic together with my participants, interviews would vary with each person in time and location. Some would be conducted informally as a series of constant conversations or intermittent updates, others would be covered more formally in single sessions, and still others would expand over the course of a few two-or-three-hour-long sittings. They would take place in locations ranging from the FUBA's headquarters office to university faculties, private homes, street side cafes, and occupied factories; all of these locations themselves revealing of where the FUBA's student movement lives and circulates. In all occasions, given the character of the student movement, participants were readily willing to share their names and stories, even in relation to issues which I considered personally sensitive and which I was cautious in approaching, telling me instead that the voicing of these stories constituted a central element in the aims of the student movement. Through later dialogue and reflection with my thesis supervisors I decided that the names of interviewees would be changed, as they appear in this thesis, to keep the anonymity of participants; a point that participants in my research agreed to.

### **Photography**

Together with engaged participant observation and interviewing, a series of accompanying methodologies were applied throughout my fieldwork, mainly: photography, press collection and analysis, and online monitoring. First, I describe the process of photographic documentation.

From the outset of my research I anticipated using photography as a research tool, out of a personal affinity for this activity and given the nature of this project in its concern with sensible aesthetics, space production, symbolic language, and the overall visual material and sensorial production of the FUBA's student movement. As Pink suggests, ethnography should account for objects, images, the immaterial and the sensory nature of human experience, for the perception of visual forms around us is a key constituent to the construction of knowledge (Pink 2007). As a note on how the images were taken, and how they served as a means of gathering information and collaborating with the student movement, I offer the following observations.

As with the previous methodologies, opportunities in terms of times and spaces for photography were adaptive according to the circumstances at hand. Certain contexts were more suitable for carrying a large camera than others. For example, while I made an effort to document the inside of the UBA's faculties and classrooms visually, the process was more intrusive at times of day when classes were in session or when the faculties were heavily transited. So, owing to issues of anonymity, I decided to portray classrooms almost always empty, and photographs around the faculties were generally taken with a greater distance from students or focused on material details around the buildings. In other contexts however, my presence with the camera seemed to fit in perfectly with the surroundings. This was almost always the case in public events happening outside of the faculties, such as public classes, marches, festivals, etc. when opportunities to take photographs were plenty as students themselves may take pictures or journalists may frequently appear to document such instances. In terms of activities of leisure and lifestyle in other sites of circulation of the student movement, sometimes I carried my camera and sometimes I did not, owing to the fact that many times such encounters were unanticipated. As I argue throughout the thesis, the division between "in" and "out" of the student movement is fluid and diffuse, and as Pink recognises, there is nothing that makes images or locations essentially ethnographic other than the relations we associate with them (Pink 2007). So when I could, I attempted to capture the visual surroundings of study or work as well as of leisure, since many activities and sites of leisure also contribute to the political identities of students. Yet in the more private spaces of the life and reproduction of the student movement (such as *círculos* or café conversations) photography did not seem an adequate method for me.

Significantly, one pathway in which photography proved to be a valuable resource was in allowing a channel for interaction and collaboration with my research participants. Carrying my camera around served to "break the ice" with participants on a number of occasions, to present myself as a researcher, and also to offer something in return to the participating members of the FUBA. Regularly, I would offer to give back the pictures I took to the students I knew, and though other photographers usually covered the more public events of the

FUBA, other times a photographer was needed by the students. On these occasions I regularly agreed to help document the activities of the student movement, and humorously recall being asked to be the “official photographer” of the CEFyL in an instance. These occasions allowed for a mutually understood sense of reciprocity to be fruitfully engaging (Low and Merry 2010). The only challenge I faced with this was the fact that my camera was a 35mm. film camera, which meant a delay in getting back the pictures to the participants in my research, who were visibly more used to digital cameras. On occasions when I could not carry the large camera, or when I simply ran out of film, I had to use a smaller digital camera, or even my mobile phone camera as a last resort.

Photography also proved to be a useful method in post-fieldwork analysis, as a form of note-taking and an evocative reminder of the atmosphere affectively felt in my field site. On this comment of evocative note-taking, it is my hope that the images presented throughout this thesis may convey a sense of the experience of being bodily present in the surroundings of the FUBA’s student movement. As I argue through the repeated allusions to the sensorial surroundings secreted by the student movement in the passages throughout this text, there is an importance in situating one’s self amidst the textures, the colour, the vibrations, and the noise of the student movement; something which I hope to express in a closer way with the images that are intercalated along the text throughout this thesis as a whole. As Pink acknowledges the meaning of images is ultimately shaped by the relations which the viewer establishes (Pink 2007). Following this reflection, the captions presented are mainly contextual to allow an open-ended interpretation.

### **Press collection and Online Monitoring**

As I previously mentioned, press collection and online monitoring also served an accompanying role for collecting data and for navigating the field during my research.

By press collection and analysis, I mean collection of the *prensas* edited, published, and sold by the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA. These vehicles of information proved to be a valuable source of information since, as a mechanism,

they are considered to be a fundamental pillar of political militancy by active members of the FUBA. Members of all the larger *agrupaciones* emphatically campaign to sell their *prensa* to divulge their reading of political current affairs. *Prensas* can easily be found at the *mesas* of the *agrupaciones* throughout the UBA and they are relatively inexpensive to buy (around 10-15 Argentine Pesos at the time of my fieldwork). So during my fieldwork, and particularly during the first months, I made a practice of trying to read the *prensas* of different *agrupaciones* of the FUBA to identify the particular political directions that each of these proposed. In this manner, press collection and analysis was illustrative to clarify the differences between the political lines of *agrupaciones* in different sectors of the FUBA, and also between *agrupaciones* belonging to or identifying with the same political sector. Such a method helped me to remain aware of different narratives that were often created around a same event that was relevant to the student movement; always depending on the political agenda of who was telling the story. Furthermore, buying and collecting the *prensas* of the various *agrupaciones* offered me a good opportunity to become familiar in a physical and sensory way with the material that the student movement regularly produces - to corporeally learn from handling these objects (Pink 2009) - which active members of the student movement always seem to carry with them as an elemental accessory; a well-worn *prensa* that has clearly been the centre-piece of many debates and rounds of *mate*-fuelled conversation.

Another side of press collection that proved helpful as a source of information during and after my fieldwork, was online monitoring of the *prensas*. This is so because several of these outlets can be consulted in their own websites, with past and present issues available. So in this form, *prensas* were also there as an archive of information that was easily accessible, containing information about past moments of political organisations as well as the student movement in its general context. The value of these sources of information was highlighted by some of my research participants who themselves saw this form of archived stories as something to be promoted and disseminated.

In addition to the websites of the different *prensas*, visiting other online news outlets created by students and members of the FUBA proved to be a useful practice for my research. As brief examples of such outlets I can mention one

portal which compiled student election results across the UBA, and which was regularly consulted by militants, as well as another site which compiled a *cancionero*: an online archive of the songs chanted by the FUBA in marches and rallies - useful since these are always being created and adapted according to the present political agenda. Many of the melodies adapted for protest chanting have their origin in football, highlighting how politics often travels across registers in Argentina.

Online monitoring and collection of information leads me to the issue of social media in which members of the FUBA actively participate. As a methodological practice, I made an effort to follow the online profiles of most of the visible *agrupaciones* of the FUBA (those that actively participate in student elections) on websites such as Facebook and Instagram. Also, out of a more personal connection, I followed the profiles of participants in my research who were active in the student movement. This form of online monitoring did not have a strict form of implementation, but was done in the fashion whereby any member of the FUBA may surf online media, partly with an intention and partly stumbling upon groups, profiles, and publications.

The most important comment that I would like to make about the use of social media in the student movement of the FUBA, is that social media seemed to act always as an extension of interactions and discussions that happened in the physical and bodily space of the student movement; very rarely, if at all, was social media the departure point of any initiative or activity of the student movement. In this manner, the *agrupaciones* as well as militant students would usually post the same posters, invitations or news articles which they physically shared around the university space and beyond in their online form through social media. Debates would also occur in the online form through long threads of comments on particular posts; debates similar to those that would happen when militants of two different *agrupaciones* were discussing their positions at the café in a faculty of the UBA. Following such online publications allowed me to keep up to date with affairs happening throughout the student movement, particularly from a distance (i.e.: before and after fieldwork), as well as to find smaller events and activities which could then be looked at through physical participant observation.



### III. Politics, Aesthetics, and the FUBA's Student Movement

#### Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework that has informed the argument presented in the thesis and underpins my analysis of the *Federacion Universitaria de Buenos Aires* (FUBA) and the student movement it articulates. The chapter presents a series of “staging posts” that consist of reflections and propositions on relevant areas of theoretical concerns and recurring themes of the thesis. These staging posts include, first, the reason for approaching the exploration of the FUBA and its student movement through the relation between politics and aesthetics as suggested by Jacques Rancière, taking on board his notion of a distribution of the sensible, aesthetic communities, and aesthetic and political practices that can alter such a distribution through acts of political intervention and subjectivization. Second, a consideration of how “the political” will be identified and approached throughout this thesis, taking into account the category of politics as intervention vis-à-vis institutionalised political forms of State organisation (Rancière 2010). Here, the local political context of Argentina is explored in relation to breaks and continuities with the political past in order to express why it will be necessary for us to consider an understanding of the political as a fuzzy, non-coherent (non-fixed) category. Third, due to the ruptures and continuities with the past, it is important to consider how forms of history or memory are constantly re-emerging categories that allow for a flexible form of “collective memory” that lends itself to the enactment of political antagonisms, through the student movement and beyond. Fourth, stemming from the previous concerns, I discuss the importance of recognising the politics of antagonism, agonism, and difference as theorised by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, (Mouffe 2013; Laclau and Mouffe 2014) as a necessary mode of political operation through which the FUBA's student movement navigates and is sustained; which has allowed it to develop a series of aesthetic and political practices while contesting a struggle for hegemony inside and outside of the student movement. This leads to a reflection on the networks of sociality through which the FUBA's student movement appears to operate and reproduce, and that

contributes to its sustainability over an extended temporality and allows for the development and expression of political identities for its participants.

It is with these reflections and proposals in mind that the rest of the thesis will develop, delving into particular aesthetic and political practices that are performed by the FUBA's student movement, taking into account how these are inscribed within a larger distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004), how they have been shaped through a particular historical and political context traversed by antagonist struggles, and how today they allow for processes of political subjectivization that may allow for radical democratic spaces to exist and be enacted. All the while I consider the FUBA itself to be embedded within a larger genealogy of protest and political action (Goddard 2015; Zibechi 2003).

### **Staging Post 1. On Politics and Aesthetics.**

Reflecting on the possibility for radical politics to exist - informed by the experiences of May 1968 and the movements of the late 1960s, also manifested throughout Latin America against authoritarian regimes (Bonavena and Millán 2018) - one of Rancière's preoccupations has been to find spaces where the political proper can serve as a vehicle for open transformation rather than institutionalisation (Rancière 2010). His theorisation of the political seems to be inspired by hopeful moments and betrayed promises. Many students in the FUBA themselves quote momentous irruptions of the late 1960s such as the *Cordobazo*<sup>12</sup> as exemplary cases of "what can happen" when enough people decide to abandon the role of spectators and take action into their own hands. In the broad genealogy of protest that includes episodes such as the *Cordobazo* of 1969 and the *Argentinazo* of 2001 (Goddard 2006; Goddard 2015; Zibechi 2003), these episodes served as detonators to demonstrate that another form of politics was possible. The ill-fated fortune of many of these movements demonstrated that rather than focusing on the achievement or destitution of State power, politics ought to consist of interventions that changed the political social fabric of a

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<sup>12</sup> The *Cordobazo* rebellion of 1969 and its symbolic significance throughout the FUBA's student movement is discussed at greater length in Chapter 4, Historical Background and Structure of the FUBA.

society. This change levelled at the social fabric has remained in the case of Argentina, and indeed other territories of Latin America (Zibechi 2012); where Rancière has commented that perhaps more evidently than anywhere else, the struggle between the logic of the “first-class” and the logic of emancipation is present.

Rancière argues that there is an aesthetics at the core of politics that deals with the distribution of the sensible in a community or society. This distribution of the sensible is defined as the “system of self-evident facts of sense perception that disclose the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it”. It establishes something that is shared, as well as its exclusive parts. This allocation of parts and positions is based on a “distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity” that determines how “something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution”. The distribution of the sensible according to Rancière, therefore “reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed”. In this sense, having a particular position would determine “the ability or inability to take charge of what is common to the community; it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language”, and so forth. Rancière suggests to understand the distribution of the sensible as the system of a priori forms that determines what can present itself to sense experience; its conditions of possibility. “It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise” that “determines the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience”, since of key importance according to Rancière: “Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it”, around who has the ability to see and to speak, “around the properties of spaces and possibilities of time” (Rancière 2004: 12-13).

So it will be on the basis of this aesthetics concerned with a sensible allocation of political roles, capacities and allowances - of who has the ability to be a political agent, be it in an *asamblea* (assembly) or in a street protest - that the question of aesthetic communities and political and aesthetic practices will be raised; as forms of visibility that disclose political and artistic practices, the place they occupy, and what they “do or make from the standpoint of what is common to the

community". As Rancière suggests, we will consider these to be ways of "doing and making that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (Rancière 2004: 13).

Regarding today's generalised climate of depoliticization and manufactured hopelessness, Graeber proposes that in the last three decades we have seen the construction of a vast apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness. A kind of machine that is designed first and foremost, to destroy any sense of possible alternative futures, where social movements cannot be seen to grow, flourish or propose alternatives; cannot be perceived to win. The situation arises from the creation of a vast apparatus of violence (through militarization, police, surveillance, etc.) that creates a pervasive climate of fear and despair and renders thoughts of changing the world a pure fantasy (Graeber 2011). This characterisation is shared by Petras and Veltmeyer in their analysis of contemporary Latin America. They argue that the neoliberal economic and political regime instituted in Latin America from the 1980s was constructed through the repression of social movements, the use of armed force, debt peonage, and the ideology of globalisation, among others, to render its devastating effects as the only way forward for development (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011). Even earlier, since the 1970's, the transformations of global policy towards militarisation and indebtedness encountered very specific local projects across the Latin American region, particularly in Argentina, where the way for neoliberalism was paved, as Goddard describes, by the implementation of a military dictatorship that conducted the literal elimination of any groups that may have stood in the way of the project (Goddard 2015; Jelin 2002; Calveiro 2013). Economically, according to Graeber, such an apparatus of violence is pure dead weight, but it exists only "to shred and pulverize the human imagination, to destroy any possibility of envisioning alternative futures" (Graeber 2011: 32).

If we take this as an accurate commentary on the conditions of possibility – or in Graeber's view, impossibility - for "the political" to exist, we are faced with the construction, by a complex array of material and symbolic actors (that we can assimilate to Rancière's "police"), of a network of relations that has attempted to place people, first and foremost, as spectators of political life - if not as co-constructors of that spectacle of politics themselves. Rancière recognizes, that

the question of spectatorship lies at the heart of the discussion on the relation between arts or aesthetic practices and politics, given that to be a spectator is to be separated from the capacity to know and the power to act (Rancière 2009). For Debord, the function of the spectacle lies in producing alienation, where the more a spectator contemplates, the less he or she lives (Debord 1994). This separation between the roles of viewing and knowing, passivity and action implies a certain distribution of the sensible according to Rancière; an a priori distribution of the political positions and capacities and incapacities attached to these positions (Rancière 2009). Ultimately, such a distribution describes relations of inequality; which makes us confront the question of emancipation from spectatorship. And as Rancière suggests, emancipation can begin when the opposition between viewing and acting is challenged; when the relations that structure the opposition between these roles are understood themselves to belong to a structure of domination and subjection (Rancière 2009). Seemingly, we are left with the need for the articulation of a different structure of relationships, one that may alter and reconfigure such a distribution of the sensible.

Following this need for a re-articulation between the roles of viewing and acting we can turn back to Graeber's comment on the manufacturing of hopelessness, in which he goes on to suggest that: however pervasive such an unequal distribution of relationships may be in contemporary society, the moment there appears to be an opening, the imagination immediately springs forth with the emergence of radical social movements dedicated to principles of direct action and participatory democracy, aiming to revolutionize the very meaning of political life (Graeber 2011). Following this line of thought, we can think of how the aforementioned process for the manufacturing of hopelessness has been mapped onto different geographies of power, and how the breaks along its implementation have allowed for sensible conditions where different possibilities for the political to exist have emerged according to particularly grounded characteristics.

As a result of these tensions, according to Zibechi, we can depict the existence of the Latin American region at boiling point, in a state of flux, where decades of crisis, hardship and repression have also caused decades of resistance, of popular organisation and overflows, that have delegitimised the unequal model of spectatorship dictated from above, and have contributed to

profound long-lasting changes in the Latin American imaginary, in pendulum-like processes of ebbs and flows (Zibechi 2012). Indeed, as Petras and Veltmeyer comment on the Latin American case: if the depredations of globalization from above created the objective conditions of deprivation and poverty on the one hand, the community and organizations in the popular sector created and acted on the subjective conditions of widespread resistance on the other (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011), precisely generating openings to revolutionize the meaning of political life – and the meaning of life through politics.

According to Rancière, emancipation means the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body (Rancière 2009). Thus understood, emancipation should not be regarded as an objective, but a way of life (Zibechi 2012). So it is through its embeddedness in the sensible fabric of contestation resulting from these processes, that I approach the student movement of the FUBA as an “aesthetic community” as proposed by Rancière (2009). And it is through my concern with this form of blurring - these practices of intervention - as part of a larger “genealogy of protest” (Goddard 2015) woven together by a wide array of social actors in Argentina, that I will propose to consider the aesthetic and political practices that have been developed by the student movement articulated by the FUBA.

The present sensibility of a variety of activist formations and social organisations grounded in radical politics in Argentina is key to this research, for as Rancière suggests, what is common to human beings is sensation; they are “tied together by a certain sensory fabric, a certain distribution of the sensible which defines their way of being together; and politics is about the transformation of the sensory fabric of being together” (Rancière 2009: 56). So it is here that we can raise the question of aesthetic communities, which Rancière proposes not as a community of aesthetes, but rather as a community of sense, characterised by: (1) being tied together by sensorial information, (2) staging a conflict between two regimes (being dissensual figures), and (3) intending to produce a new sense of community out of itself (Rancière 2009); characteristics which we can apply to the analysis of the student movement of the FUBA.

if we are proposing the question of emancipation and a break with a regime

of representation and spectatorship, as Rancière suggests for the emergence of aesthetic communities to be possible, we will understand this break to be a disconnection with a regime that supposed concordance in the form of a twofold harmony between sense and sense - between active performers (governments) and passive spectators (citizens). For as Rancière proposes of this break, equating it to the field of art and theatre, what is broken is the continuity between thoughts and their signs on bodies, between the performance of living bodies and its effect on other bodies. And that is the meaning of aesthetics: the rupture of the harmony that enabled correspondence between the texture of an artwork or a theatre piece and its efficacy (Rancière 2009). Now, to equate this model to our purpose at hand, disconnection with the representational regime here will be understood to be a disconnection with the representational (classical) political regime<sup>13</sup> as well – where there is no longer harmony (if there ever was) between sense and sense, between what is said (by a representational political regime) and what is done, between the statements of governing political institutions and the lived reality of the public (the local particularities of this disconnection are further explored in the second staging post). The affective capacity of such a break - together with, and beyond the cognitive dimension - on bodies in the material and immaterial sense (Blackman 2012) is to be taken into account. And this disconnection will be understood as a broken and collapsed form of representational social contract that has forced the public out of the passive position of the spectator and into the active field of political intervention.

Therefore, we will understand the student movement of the FUBA through this form of aesthetic community, or community of sense, with two dimensions: as a new set of vibrations of the human community in the present, and also as a mediator for a people to come; resulting from a particular past, yet existing between the present and the future. For, according to Rancière, such a dissensual community has a dual body: “it is a combination of means for producing an effect out of itself”, and it is the reality of that effect; creating a new community for human beings - a new political people - and being the “anticipated

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<sup>13</sup> Here I refer to a representational regime in the sense of “representative” politics, which suppose a representational harmony between government and citizens. I do not mean to say that this regime is purely representative or discursive for, as Graeber notes above (Graeber 2011), this representational regime is built on the back of a huge apparatus of material and symbolic violence.

reality of that people”. We will understand this community to echo with Zibechi’s claim of emancipation being a prefigurative precept, not so much an objective but a way of life, which as Rancière suggests, always happens “*en vue de*” or “in the course of” - with a view to and in the hope of - becoming something else (Rancière 2009: 59).

According to Rancière, the central point emancipation<sup>14</sup> is that of stories of boundaries to be crossed, and of a distribution of roles to be blurred. And in the aesthetic regime he proposes, a free circulation may exist for social and artistic practices to exist outside of systems of legitimation, as their specificity may disappear with no longer clearly identifiable characteristics that distinguish between modes or genres of discourse. And in this interface between mediums newness can be formed and articulated, communities can be established, and spaces for the playing out of fantasy as well as reality may exist (Rancière 2004).

Following these concerns, throughout this thesis I suggest to contemplate the student movement articulated by the FUBA as one of such mediums that open up and reconfigure their distribution of the sensible. The political and aesthetic practices developed by its members can be understood as aesthetic acts defined by Rancière: as “configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity” (Rancière 2004: 9). As triggers and responses that may generate new forms of community participation and social structure, organization and open-ended knowledge, in a scenario where the political is enacted not as representation, but as intervention.

## **Staging Post 2. Breaks and Continuities: The Political as Intervention.**

Having proposed that the FUBA’s student movement can be understood as an aesthetic community embedded within a larger distribution of the sensible, and whose members have developed a variety of political and aesthetic practices

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<sup>14</sup> By the use of the term emancipation throughout this thesis I refer to how Rancière (2009) and Zibechi (2012) describe it; as a process through which subjects become political agents by blurring the division of roles between those who look and those who act through the polemical implementation of equality. Emancipation as such has a connection to the local terms “*lucha*” (struggle) and “*aguante*” (loosely translated to resistance).



that facilitate processes of emancipation by actively engaging with the political, this section reflects on what will be meant by “the political” throughout this thesis. The political and the aim of politics are understood not as a fixed, institutionalised and coherent category, but rather as an unstable process which is always on the move; by way of emergences and transmissions, as well as splintering and fragmentation.

On this note, I refer back to the notion of “politics” as conceptualised by Rancière to identify politics, above all, as “an intervention in the visible and the sayable” (Rancière 2010: 45). Politics (and political and aesthetic practices of the FUBA’s student movement) will be understood as a form of “dissensus”; that is, as a process that stands against and suspends the logic of “the police” (the guarding of the division of the sensible between those who have a part/voice/agency and those who do not). The aim of politics will be understood to be a fracturing of the social hierarchies that maintain the distribution of the sensible of the police. Thus the intention and the result of the political process will be taken to be a re-ordering of the senses, and a redistribution of the sensible. Politics will not be taken as a form of exercise of power, but rather will resonate with Rancière’s suggestion of politics as being about the contradictory terms that define the emergence of a subject as a political agent (Rancière 2010). And in the emergence of that subject as political agent, politics will be understood to play its role, “in the course of” doing so; not in the function of achieving or changing State or institutional power, but rather in the course of changing the social fabric of the sensible through the political experiment (and experience) itself.

The reason for approaching the political through this focus of processes through which political subjects define their emergence, is because such an approximation is particularly suitable to try to grasp and understand how political processes have unfolded in the case of Argentina - particularly in relation to the emergence of grassroots organisations and social movements<sup>15</sup>, and when considering categories such as youth, students, workers, and women, since

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<sup>15</sup> These social organisations and movements include student *agrupaciones*, but also Human Rights organisations (family members of victims of the 1976-1983 military dictatorship), and more recently since 2001, neighbourhood assemblies, worker-run companies, *piquetero* organisations, cooperative cultural centres, among others.

these are all categories which have leapt onto the political stage to self-identify as political subjects through a long history of contestation. As Jelin notes of the student movements, they have a long history of involvement and entanglement with the political life of Argentina, defining themselves as political agents through the complex and unstable processes of politics in the country, alongside the aforementioned groups (Jelin 1985). So as a result of continuous emergences through episodes of struggle, we can understand these groups as Rancière understands political subjects resulting from a process of subjectivization (Rancière 2004); that is, resulting from the long process they have undergone extracting themselves from the dominant categories while attempting to implement equality - amongst themselves in the first place and society as an ultimate horizon.

It is important to note that these processes of political emergence have happened in the midst of what we can frame as an unstable series of breaks and continuities with the past - echoing Rancière's notion of political processes happening in the tensions and contradictions between regimes of representation and aesthetics - which I will briefly illustrate here so that we may better understand why the suggested notion of the political as a form of dissensus can be useful in analysing the FUBA and the student movement it articulates. In order to do this, I propose to consider moments of breaks with a representational political regime in the development of new political horizons, mainly in regards to two episodes: a break resulting from the aftermath of the last military dictatorship<sup>16</sup> (1976-1983), and a break resulting from the 2001-2002 financial crisis and the events of the *Argentinazo*, both of which reaffirmed forms of intervention as a political modes of action. While also keeping in mind a continuity of a (dys)functional form of State political power; that is, dysfunctional in terms of articulating a coherent response to the needs of the people, yet functional to the particular interests of local and trans-national forms of capital.

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<sup>16</sup> By last military dictatorship throughout this thesis I refer to the "*Dictadura Cívico-Militar*" (Civic-Military Dictatorship) that governed Argentina from 1976-1983; self-referred to as "*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*" (National Reorganization Process). I often encountered the term "*última dictadura militar*" (last military dictatorship) in conversations with my research participants and in local texts. Therefore, I use this term to differentiate the 1976-1983 dictatorship from earlier dictatorships.

In terms of the first break which I will reference here - in the aftermath of the last military dictatorship - it is important to note that this break did not happen in an isolated manner, but rather followed from developments in the political emergence of groups that had previously opposed alternating instances of dictatorships and elected governments in Argentina from the 1930s up until the last military dictatorship, all the while being the targets of violence and repression from the State power, be it through the police, military, or paramilitary forces, in an escalation of violence that culminated in the military rule of 1976 (Denissen 2008; Calveiro 2013). However, what we can characterise as a radical break which manifested itself during and after the last military dictatorship, was the recognition of the role of the State (in ideological and logistical forms) in the manufacturing of death; the unveiling of its machinery to implement a rule of State Terrorism (Tonkonoff 2014) to facilitate the way for the implementation of the neoliberal programme. The demand for this recognition, spearheaded by the intervention of Human Rights organisations composed mainly of family members of the victims of the last military dictatorship (such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, and later H.I.J.O.S), ultimately forced the elected governments which followed the dictatorship to recognise the crimes committed by the military government and to punish some of those responsible, although only to a certain extent (Denissen 2008).

However, perhaps more relevantly for our analysis, the influence of the intervention of these Human Rights groups lay in establishing a foundation for a collective form of memory that would be articulated, passed down, and transmitted to newer generations informing their mode of political action (Jelin 2002). As Tonkonoff suggests, we can speak of a before and after that would inscribe the demand for the recognition of State Terrorism as a sort of founding myth for a democratic culture in Argentina. Yet while State forms of recognition would choose to focus on the “*Nunca Más*”<sup>17</sup> (Never Again) form of history - a version which clearly delineated certain actions (and not others) as forms of State Terrorism and certain people (and not others) in the military government as the

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<sup>17</sup> “*Nunca más*” (Never Again) is a demand that relates to the crimes committed during the last military dictatorship and is also the name of the official 1983 Report of CONADEP (*Comisión Nacional Sobre la Desaparición de Personas*; National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons).

sole responsible authors of something that should never be allowed to happen again - members of Human Rights organisations (together with certain social organisations and social movements) would choose to continue campaigning for the “*Aparición con vida*” (live appearance) of the victims, not necessarily because they thought this was possible, but perhaps for the impossible nature of this demand. Because of the limitless and unending character that this demand proposes (Tonkonoff 2014). This characterisation would charge the discourse of Human Rights with a politically militant understanding, and would cause their recognition to expand to wider social and economic aspects (Goddard 2015). In that constitution of a militant notion of collective memory and Human Rights, and the unmasking of the State as the guarantor of violence, may lie a break that conformed a redistribution of the sensible of what was visible and what was sayable, with profound effects beyond merely changing the rules of the State, changing instead the social fabric of what was considered politically possible.

A second major break that I propose to explore here is also related to the institution of the last military dictatorship, for as Goddard suggests: the 2001 economic crisis and the *Argentinazo* can be understood in relation to the longer histories of interests that were forged in 1976, since after the military regime of the dictatorship came to an end, the economic policies of the ensuing elected governments remained unchanged (Goddard 2015). The deepening of the structural crisis that unfolded, and the conditions of impoverishment which affected major sectors of the Argentine public, while a privileged few concentrated the majority of wealth in the country or channelled it to the exterior - while State power facilitated this process of ensuring inequality through an agenda of privatization as the only way forward - are well documented (Goddard 2006, 2015; Grimson 2004). The result was a major collapse in terms of a crisis of representation; a wholesale rejection of political and economic elites that was reflected in the famous “*Que se vayan todos*” (Everyone must go) (Goddard 2015).

Stemming from this collapse, as Graeber has reflected on the Argentine case, there came to be multiple strategies developed by social movements and organisations aimed to delegitimise all forms of government and create alternative institutions rejecting the government, and declaring the entire political system to be absolutely corrupt, and irrelevant to people’s actual lives. There was

an emergence of organisations based on the self-recognised principle of horizontality, including popular assemblies to govern urban neighbourhoods, worker-run factories and workplaces, solidarity and fair trade movements, and even barter clubs and alternative currency systems; all of these emerging as political subjects (Graeber, 2013). Indeed, as Goddard suggests, the *Argentinazo* cannot be encompassed in a single perspective due to its complexity and heterogeneity (Goddard 2015). But what we can recognise in it, is a moment that was characterised as “living history” by its participants, who recognised this rupture within a larger history of contentious politics and mobilisation, yet who affirmed in this succession of breaks the importance of such a massive spontaneous emergence (Goddard 2006). Again, beyond the official actions that these massive mobilisations later forced the incoming government of Néstor Kirchner to take in order to alleviate some of the symptoms of crisis, it seems as if the profound importance of such an episode of intervention lay more in the social fabric that was re-articulated “in the course” of its unfolding and in its aftermath, as an episode that once again redistributed the sensible of what and who were considered to be political actors. As Svampa and Corral recognise, the events of December 2001 opened a new space for the reappearance of activist politics, and pointed to a displacement towards new forms of political action, rupturing with the limited world of formalistic, self-centred institutional politics subordinated to the established economic and financial interests that typified the 1990s (Svampa and Corral 2006).

Yet while we have seen two examples of moments of breaks with regimes of representation that have defined the emergence of grassroots organisations and social movements as political subjects, it is important to note that these breaks have occurred precisely at that level: of the political as a form of dissensus. Meanwhile, however, through all forms of military or elected governments, the continuity of a (dys)functional State has remained, and its repressive nature has been manifested through other, softer or more veiled means (Svampa 2014). The continuity (to a greater or lesser extent) of economic and social crisis has also remained - characteristic of Latin America in its entanglement with global capitalism, but perhaps particularly acute in the case of Argentina; a place where the neoliberal model, as well as the model of centre-left redistributive governments have ultimately resulted in forms of extractivism and

transfer of wealth to trans-national financial institutions or corporations (Goddard 2018). More so, the centre-left governments that were in place from 2003 to 2015 (the Kirchner administrations) also mounted a challenge for social movements and grassroots organisations in terms of their attempts to co-opt them or govern them through strategies of re-approaching them, as occurred throughout other countries in the Latin American region (Zibechi 2012); a dynamic that proved divisive for certain social movements and organisations in Argentina, including the FUBA itself.

Rancière's proposition on the political confronts us with the challenge of possibilities, to open up forms of thinking on democracy precisely at a time when both the "left" and the "right" have come to an agreement that some form of capitalism and its political form of "liberal democracy" are the ultimate horizon. As he points out, there lies a paradox in which political oppression takes the guise of an exercise of liberty. This is something that can be argued, has happened throughout all forms of elected government in Argentina – during the governments of the right-wing sector, through all of the sectors of Peronism and centre-left administrations, the paradox has remained. As Chantal Mouffe states, no amount of dialogue or moral preaching will ever convince the ruling class to give up its power (Mouffe 2000). Faced with such a scenario, the political must present itself as a struggle in which political speech emerges through a rupture between speech and social position, or lack thereof, between what is said and who says it (Rancière 2010). Expressed in the words of the motto of the FUBA: "*Si el presente es de lucha, el futuro es nuestro*" (If the present is a struggle, the future will be ours).

### **Staging Post 3. In-between History and Memory: A Landscape of Re-emergences.**

When studying the case of Argentina through flux and movement, and particularly the environment of contestation which the FUBA inhabits, we see a social landscape in which events from the past are not separated from the present or the future, but rather they re-appear constantly to inform present political action, and time is not necessarily perceived as a linear progression, but rather

what we may assimilate to a circular or recurring form of time. We are faced with a scenario where memory is a space of political struggle (Jelin 2002).

In order for us to better comprehend this landscape which the FUBA navigates, and how its members perceive past events, it will be useful to do away with an understanding of history as a factual representation of the past, intentionally researched and composed according to rational principles, which assumes that previous events inscribed within “history” belong to the domain of the past. Instead we will take on board the notion of historicity, as promoted by Hirsch and Stewart, which as they point out will allow a description of human situations in flow, where versions of the past and future assume a present form in relation to the sensory fabric of the present; current events, political needs, available cultural forms, and emotional dispositions (Hirsch and Stewart 2005). The benefit of understanding past events through such a dynamic lens allows us to contemplate the mutual conditioning that occurs between objects (past events/memory/history) and subjects (political agents), as a reflective process. For as Hirsch and Stewart recognise, there is relational quality in the production of knowledge regarding past events: historical situations affect historical descriptions. In this sense, the “historicity” of an object is always moving according to the demands of the present (Hirsch and Stewart 2005).

Thinking about how past events are inscribed in a sensible distribution through the form of a historicity avoids falling into the trap of considering events as either inscribed in an unmoveable history which is purely analytical, stable, and detached or perceiving past events to belong to a field of memory that is completely malleable, unconscious and spontaneous (Nora 1989). Instead we may recognise the active dynamic of relational production of knowledge that has generated the category of “collective memory” in Argentina as a process that happens in the gaps between these two categories (Jelin 2002).

Collective memory is an active category which itself is a field of struggle, particularly because it revolves around episodes that are linked to violence and repression. As Jelin recognises of the Argentine case, memory is a frayed and de-centred construction, and so too are the works or theoretical frameworks that engage with it - as is the case of the interpretations or theorisations on this subject

by members of the FUBA. This is because in Argentina the process of constructing or piecing together a historicity regarding the memory of traumatic events is in itself a way of dealing with trauma that has had at least two dimensions: attempting to reconstruct a past for legal and criminal purposes, and to appropriate the past as a symbolic banner for present struggles (Jelin 2002).

In order to better comprehend this dynamic of struggle that the articulation of collective memory has represented, it is useful to turn back to the notion of the political as it was proposed in the previous staging post: as the processes which define the emergence of a political subject and suspend the logic of the police. This conceptualisation seems adequate for the case at hand since, as Jelin points out, one of the main symbolic resources employed in the process of nation building by Latin American States was that of the "*gran relato*" (grand tale) as a mechanism to define, reinforce, and guard a national sense of identity, which inevitably highlighted certain actors and aspects as heroic (rulers, military, etc.) while selectively silencing episodes that did not conform to this narrative. In this sense, the presence of a strong State would imply the policing of ideas, relegating alternative or non-complying narratives to the fringes of private memory. And the function of History in this interplay would be precisely to guard the construction of the grand tale of "the police". And it is exactly here, through the irruption of collective memory to the forefront of the public and private space, that a challenge to the logic of the police was mounted. An opening emerged for those that were repressed and marginalised to emerge onto the political stage demanding the recognition and legitimacy of their demands; what was once marginal and silent comes to public emergence. However, as Jelin (2002) recognises, this opening of the political does not simply imply a binary relation of the State vs. society, but has rather been a complex and contentious process with various stages in which multiple actors in both State and society have confronted (and continue to confront) each other to express their interpretations of the past in relation to the present and to future projects (Jelin 2002).

The exploration of these interpretations about factual events of the past around which narratives have been constructed, can be helpful to illustrate why this is an open process that has a tendency for re-emergence. As Jelin suggests, we are talking about continuous layers of signifying and re-signifying, where in a first stage the discourse of the State was cantered around the figure of a



subversive threat which had to be eliminated to safeguard the wellbeing of the nation-State, whereas from the point of view of Human Rights organisations there was the construction of victims in the figure of the “disappeared”- an elusive figure whose construction itself was full of challenges in terms of representation. From there we see a move in the field of representation to the “*teoría de los dos demonios*” (theory of the two demons) in which a “democratic” State presupposed an equivalence in the responsibility for the violence committed in the hands of the military State and of the subversive forces (Feierstein 2018); a version which supposes criminal responsibility emptied of notions of political militancy and agency. And then once again we see a change in representation, where the factual evidence of crimes committed by the State allows for the reclaiming on behalf of Human Rights organisations and social movements of the identity and political militancy of victims of State violence (as active political agents); an open door that then allows for the transmission of memories of past events – and their demands – to newer generations who did not live this past personally (Jelin 2002).

In this morphing set of interpretations we witness the transition of personal memory to a historical memory (and back), elaborated by groups that symbolically and politically appropriate a past which they did not live, particularly pertinent to the analysis of contemporary social and political organisations and movements composed of young people (Jelin and Sempol 2006). However, very importantly, we also witness a certain appropriation of the discourse of collective memory by the Argentine State (particularly from 2003-2015 during the Kirchner administrations) (Guglielmucci 2011), in a move consistent with the policies mentioned in the previous staging post of progressive centre-left governments re-approaching Human Rights organisations and social movements in order to govern them (Zibechi 2012). And this interplay of memories that were previously opposed to the State, being, in a certain (selective) fashion, incorporated by the State, goes on to set in motion a particular dispute over who and *when* (what timeframes) are the subjects of collective memory and political violence.

Again, the question of the interplay between history and memory regarding the category of “collective memory” takes centre-stage. Because, as Jelin acknowledges, whereas certain actors (in State and society) believe that abuse and repression are a matter of a dictatorial past confined to “History”, others focus

their attention in the ways in which today's mechanisms of domination and inequality reproduce and re-enact the past; making the dictatorial past an active component of the present (Jelin 2002). In such a way that the acts of political repression occurring today in the political field (in times of "democracy") re-activate the memories of the dictatorial past for Argentine society, and bring back the traumatic image, instilled in society, linked to the memory of the disappeared, the image of the great repression and annihilation: therein, the mobilising and solidary potential of collective memory regarding the dictatorship (Svampa 2014).

The personal involvement of those working in or with collective memory constitutes an important collective force, be they State officials, academics, activists, *trabajadores de la memoria* (memory workers), etc. - for there has been an approach towards militant and professional work on collective memory by many who are related to victims of State violence, or by those who are survivors of State violence themselves. Advisedly, as Jelin is keen to point out, work and theorisation around the collective memory of violent and repressive events, is a process that can rarely be carried out from the outside, presuming an objective position, but rather tends to involve the personal convictions and beliefs of those invested in such an enterprise. Therefore, as Hirsch and Stewart argue, through the lens of historicity we should perceive the way in which persons operating with present social ideologies make sense of the past, while anticipating the future (Hirsch and Stewart 2005) – in a form that is reminiscent of the dissensual community which anticipates a future and is itself the product of that effect (Rancière 2009). This is a particularly important in the case of Argentina, since the confrontation of painful memories of violence and repression began to take place even before the last military dictatorship collapsed, and immediately an intense contest over the meaning of this recent past was set in motion, mainly by family members and individuals personally affected by prosecution, exile, etc. (Robben 2005)- which has had the effect of locally collapsing the categories of history and memory in the everyday language of the public and members of the FUBA.

In such a landscape, as Jelin argues, the history that concerns itself with hard facts and factual events is helpful, but not to understand how individuals construct memories and narratives around events. And by the same token, memory as something flexible should not be discarded as capable of producing

valuable information because of its subjective nature. Rather, in the gaps between these two, the questions regarding a past that recurrently comes back under different guises and concerns can be explored (Jelin 2002). And it is in those gaps that a focus through the lens of historicity may shed light on the ongoing social production of accounts regarding pasts and futures; helping us to recognise the complex temporal nexus of past-present-future (Hirsch and Stewart 2005).

This interplay - which Robben describes as an incessant return to a painful past for individuals, groups and organisations, where memory, violence, and trauma coexist in contradictory ways, and where there is an obstruction to either total recall or total erasure (Robben 2005) - seems to situate the local category of collective memory as a form that resembles Nora's *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1989). A collective form of memory in which individuals remember by placing themselves in a group perspective, transforming the memorialised events through constant repetition according to present knowledge (Halbwachs 1992), constituting a site of remembering which results at the same time simple yet ambiguous, natural and artificial, and that - as we will see throughout this thesis - is open to abstract elaborations on behalf of members of the FUBA, in the material, symbolic, and functional sense (Nora 1989).

#### **Staging Post 4. Antagonism, Agonism, and the Politics of Difference.**

The next proposition invites us to consider the political field in which the FUBA's student movement operates as a field characterised by antagonisms, agonisms, and the politics of difference (Mouffe 2013). The relevance of taking on board this theoretical viewpoint is to consider political space and the political sphere - and all that is encompassed within it in terms of space, time, theory, and memory - as traversed by the two key categories that Laclau and Mouffe suggest: antagonism and hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe 2014), both of these are central to the analysis of the political - not as a neutral or free space, but rather as a space of power, conflict and antagonism, as well as the politics concerned with the conflictuality of this space (Mouffe 2005).

Throughout this thesis, any given order (in and outside of social movements) will necessarily be an expression of power relations, charged with a hegemonic dimension, where there is always the possibility for antagonisms to exist. And, as Laclau and Mouffe advise for our analysis, when dealing with the field of politics in which the FUBA exists and navigates, the possibility for a consensus without exclusion, and the viability for a perfectly reconciled and harmonious collective, will be abandoned (Laclau and Mouffe 2014).

Furthermore, having recognised that any social order is the product of power relations traversed by hegemony and antagonisms, it will also be necessary for us to recognise the specificity in terms of temporality that any given order may have at a given time. For as Mouffe points out, every social order that may be observed is a temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. And according to shifts in power relations and changing hegemonic practices which shape social orders, things could always be different, in a dynamic in which every order requires the exclusion of other possibilities (Mouffe 2013).

With this recognition will come the need throughout this thesis to be aware of how certain hegemonic practices - whose aim is to establish social orders – as well as counter-hegemonic practices, have left their mark in the form of traces that we might liken to the figure of a palimpsest, within the FUBA and outside of it, in such a way that informs the manner in which we see members of the FUBA engage politically with a wide array of aspects today; from the infinitely small, to the largest of scales, in a landscape where all (imaginary, physical, mental, and social) spaces inside and outside of the university are to be considered battlefields traversed by hegemony; where no molecule is left untouched by this dynamic - resembling Lefebvre's account of a struggle for hegemony that shapes the production of all social space (Lefebvre 1991).

So in order to appreciate the multiple forms and levels in which antagonistic and agonistic relations take form, as a dimension that can never be eradicated, it should be stated here that these processes happen both within the FUBA as well as beyond it. And I argue, both types of relations, of antagonistic and agonistic nature are articulated by members of the FUBA.

At a first level, there exist a series of relations which resemble Mouffe's description of the agonistic model in which political subjects conform an adversarial ensemble, where others are not considered as an enemy to be destroyed, but rather as adversaries, who are fiercely fought, yet whose rights to defend their ideas is not to be questioned (Mouffe 2013). In these relations, which tend to happen within the FUBA - towards the inside of the student movement - an allegiance is shared among student militants, members, and organisations (*agrupaciones*) of the student movement; and disagreements on this plane exist mainly in relation to political positions and interpretations; a dynamic which was many times expressly recognised by participants in my research. Differences at the agonistic level seem to be manifested among organisations belonging to the different political sectors of the FUBA<sup>18</sup>, but also very importantly among organisations self-identifying within the same political sectors of the FUBA, where the adversarial debate often takes its most intensive form. However, in consonance with Mouffe's agonistic model of relations, while rivalling organisations fight for their political stance or interpretation to become hegemonic within the FUBA, to give meaning to the student movement and beyond, they do not throw into question the very right of their adversaries to carry out their own struggle. Therefore, we witness what we could characterise as an agonistic struggle, among adversaries who self-recognise each other's legitimacy (Mouffe 2013).

Yet at a second level, we also witness what we could equate to Laclau and Mouffe's description of antagonistic relations where, rather than there being adversaries to fight, there are enemy forces to be destroyed (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). Relations of antagonism tend to exist in relation to forces and actors outside of the FUBA's student movement; forces which members of the FUBA refer to as oppressive governments, capitalist institutions, heteronormative patriarchy, among others, that we might equate to Rancière's notion of the police (Rancière 2010) as wider guarantors of divisions of inequality. Antagonistic relations on this level exist against such actors since their existence as an "other", threatens and limits the very possibilities of members of the FUBA's student movement to exercise the mode of being that they envisage for themselves and

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<sup>18</sup> The main political sectors of the FUBA at the time of my fieldwork are detailed at greater length in Chapter 4: Historical Background and Structure of the FUBA.

others – be it through attempting to privatise public education, co-opt social movements, perpetuate gender violence, etc. At this level, as Laclau and Mouffe suggest, the antagonism exists because of the impossibility to fulfil one's own existence when faced with the existence of that other (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). This level of relations is articulated in different degrees according to the various members and organisations within the FUBA, who may perceive different threats from such actors in different scales according to their political horizons (i.e.: some may perceive in the State itself a greater existential threat than others), but the importance here lies in recognising the existence of antagonisms as inevitable and necessary, varied as their manifestations may be. And as Mouffe points out, we should recognise that in both the agonistic and antagonistic level, what is at stake is the struggle between opposing hegemonic projects, which can never be reconciled rationally (Mouffe 2013), therefore requiring an open-ended process of confrontational deliberation, which then serves as an internal mobilising force for the FUBA's student movement.

We should also acknowledge the concept of a logic of equivalence that may be shared across the FUBA's student movement - at least through the active sectors of the student movement (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). While adversarial confrontation can be understood as a mode of operation that allows the student movement to be sustained, there is also a common ground in the social fabric in which the members and organisations of the FUBA operate, as elaborated through the previous staging posts, that allows the political and aesthetic practices examined in this thesis to be performed by political subjects within the FUBA, across sectors of the student movement. Without this common ground, it would be hard to imagine the student movement as a sustainable project. Therefore, we may recognise a constant interplay between the creation of a common yet diverse "we" that includes members of the FUBA's student movement, and also internal an "us" and "them" that differentiates between members, organisations, and sectors within the FUBA's student movement itself; a continuous and conflictual process in which neither a complete difference nor a complete equivalence can ever be totalised (Laclau and Mouffe 2014).

The importance of this relational interplay leads us to the subject of how agonism and antagonism contribute to the construction of political identities and subjectivities within the FUBA, for as Mouffe observes, the political is, from the

beginning, concerned with collective forms of identification, where there must always be the formation of an “us” as opposed to “them”. And in this dynamic, in which identity is relational, the construction of an identity necessarily implies the establishment of a difference; difference then becomes a pre-condition for any identity to exist. Such a scenario, where a “we” always requires as a condition of possibility the demarcation of a “they” (whether real or imagined), situates difference as a productive force for the student movement, rather than a force which hampers its reproduction, as there is always a process of demarcating one’s political identity versus other political subjects existing within the FUBA as well as outside it, in an attempt to practice hegemony. As Mouffe states, identities can only be constituted through difference, and social objectivity through acts of power. Thus, for the formation and sustainability of political identities, (and of the student movement, we might argue) antagonisms cannot be eliminated (Mouffe 2013).

Antagonisms, within the FUBA and beyond it, can be understood to be the main driving force, externally and internally, of the FUBA’s student movement. For, ethnographic material presented in the following chapters, suggests that it is the enactment of antagonisms, in the process of vying for hegemony within the student movement and beyond, that constantly motivates and shapes the FUBA’s political and aesthetic practices, and seems to drive the struggle to give meaning to the political field on behalf of its members through adversarial confrontation. These may be informed as being against organisations within the FUBA or “the police” outside it. And this irreconcilable confrontation of “unity” versus “difference” itself is the subject of intense debate and contention within the FUBA, as there are those organisations that argue for a united front against the State government, while others see difference as a necessary mode of operation, questioning the terms on which any so-called unity can be attained<sup>19</sup>. So while driving the force of the student movement, the antagonistic dimension also has the effect of denying a collective and unified (universal) will of the FUBA’s student movement, provoking instead a constant process of revision and reformulation, of recognition and mobilisation, spurred by its equivalences and differences,

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<sup>19</sup> This debate of “unity” versus “difference” concerning different sectors of the FUBA is further elaborated in relation to the Federal government of Argentina at the time of my fieldwork (2016-2017) in Chapter 4: Historical Background and Structure of the FUBA.

which once again, can only be articulated “in the course of” becoming something else; not as an objective but as a way of life.

Here we are once again reminded to abandon notions of an individualistic rationalism which favours a calculated logic when we are dealing with the engagement of social movements with the political, for as Mouffe suggests, we must recognise that political subjects are not only motivated by reason, logical interests, and moral considerations, but also by a variety of material and immaterial affects (Blackman 2012), and passions that constitute a driving force in the political field (Mouffe 2013). Yet with these dimensions we should also recognise the conflicting possibilities of appropriation, spillage, or contamination that have been inherent to social movements in Latin America and Argentina (and perhaps elsewhere), where even practices of co-optation and clientelism may exist, as Quirós argues of the case of Buenos Aires and its conflictual terrain which political subjects must navigate (Quirós 2011). However, under this conception, we must accept conflict and division to be inherent to the political field, resulting in the denial of a complete unity of “the people”. For otherwise, to imagine a pluralist democracy as a perfectly instantiated order would be to transform it into a self-refuting ideal, since the condition of possibility for a pluralist democracy to exist is by the same token the condition of impossibility of its perfect implementation; paradoxical in nature (Mouffe 2000).

Finally, regarding the case of Argentina, political commentators have pointed out the programmatic use of the notion of political antagonisms, as theorised by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, as a political tool by the centre-left National Governments of Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2003-2015). In this sense, it is important to recognise that the theoretical models used in anthropology by academics may also have a local life politically among the communities of our research participants. However, it is not in the aforementioned manner that I encountered the term to be used among the members of the FUBA’s student movement<sup>20</sup>, and it is not in a programmatic way

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<sup>20</sup> In fact, as noted in Chapter 4: Historical Background and Structure of the FUBA, members of the FUBA’s student movement who self-identified with the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sector of the FUBA argued for a “unity” of the student movement vs. the Macri Federal Administration, whereas self-identified members of the Independent Left/Trotskyist sector of the FUBA recognised antagonism within the student movement as a necessary political dimension.



that I intend for this term to be used throughout this thesis. Rather, I use this term as an analytical category which, I argue, reflects and resembles the internal and external lines of discussion and struggle in which members of the FUBA participate in their day-to-day.

### **Staging Post 5. Movements and Network Sociality.**

The final staging post of this chapter focuses on mechanisms beyond the aforementioned antagonisms that seem to aid the life and sustainability of the FUBA's student movement, as well as the forces that may be driving efforts of resistance on behalf of its members. I focus here on the overlapping layers of identities that members of the FUBA may have, as well as the circulation through a network sociality that may inform these identities and facilitate an involvement in the FUBA's student movement through other aspects of the lives of its members. The importance of networks is vital in facilitating associations, relations, chains of materially heterogeneous elements that allow the existence of an entity or actor (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón, and Milstein 2018).

Rancière's discussion on politics and aesthetics, proposes aesthetic acts and what he terms the aesthetic regime to disturb the clear partition of identities, activities, and spaces, as the specificity between discursive forms and practices disappears (Rancière 2004). If we consider this argument in relation to social movements, it can lead us in the direction of the guiding point that I suggest here: the forms of identities and spaces of circulation that social movements may draw upon today, and the way in which they may reconfigure them in the political process.

If we are to consider the forms of identity that may inform participants' involvement in the FUBA's student movement, we must acknowledge the lived dimension of risk and uncertainty that both neoliberal and redistributive models of economic and social policies in Argentina have caused (to a greater or lesser extent) dating back to the 1960s. This interplay - echoed in the Latin American region and beyond - in which power has been increasingly acquired by trans-national agents while State-based politics remain of local reach, has resulted in

uncertainty for citizens that makes official political institutions and their undertakings seem less relevant to members of society (Bauman 2007). Yet not only has the rollback of State-endorsed insurance deprived State participation of much of its past significance, but the rollout of the repressive nature of the State, when the State does become visible - as has been increasingly the case since 2016 throughout South America - has placed social movements in an increasingly complex situation (Zibechi 2019).

In such a landscape of risk, flexibilisation, and uncertainty, which attempts to erode collective forms of action and favours instead individual narratives, we may consider the challenge that the FUBA's student movement (and other movements perhaps) faces regarding processes of identification and recognition, where, as della Porta suggests, the construction of feeling and belonging must somehow adapt to the complexity and multiplicity of memberships that participants of social movements partake in in their daily life. Hence, categories of autonomy, creativity, imagination, spontaneity, and self-realisation take on a central role for the development and understanding of social movements (della Porta 2007).

Applied to the the FUBA's student movement, these insights suggest that FUBA members may (to a greater or lesser extent) be involved in a constant process of having to inhabit or perform different identities in other aspects of their daily life. And this will be an important point to think through since, as della Porta and Diani propose, not enough attention is paid to the systems of relationships inside and outside of movements in which actors of social movements are involved - therefore preventing the multiplicity of alliances and allegiances among militants and groups within them to be recognised (Della Porta and Diani 2006). This leads us back to the consideration of how conflict, equivalence, and difference need constantly to be acknowledged within social movements as Laclau and Mouffe suggest (Laclau and Mouffe 2014).

And it is a discussion that seems fitting when considering the mode of operation of the FUBA's student movement, which articulates (within the FUBA and beyond) an array of political organisations (*agrupaciones*) and groups of independent members that come together to participate in certain emergences

and visible manifestations, but not necessarily in others, where lines of division and conflict emerge; where particular configurations of groups in the movement are manifested according to particular times and events. With this dimension of multiplicity and heterogeneity of identities, comes the need to deconstruct the notion of a uniform “movement identity”, which can only be the result of multiple different interventions and mediated accounts, but not necessarily representative of the many accounts, perspectives, and projects existing, and vying, side-by-side in emergences and articulations that become visible through the FUBA’s student movement. This dynamic leads us to consider the construction of a movement through the form of a materially heterogeneous network sociality, in which a variety of different organisations and causes, entangled as part of a larger social matrix, become articulated in different expressions of the student movement (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón, and Milstein 2018).

In this sense, we can consider how pre-existing networks and spaces of association throughout the city of Buenos Aires affect participation in the student movement; and how in turn, participation in the student movement may constantly shape the networks it articulates. As della Porta and Diani point out, there is an importance in this interplay - in the duality between individuals and the organisations or groups to which they may choose to belong - in which the uniqueness of an individual is determined by their particular combination of different group memberships and affiliations, and where by being members of multiple groups, they may establish new connections across them (della Porta and Diani 2006). Here, as della Porta and Diani observe, overlapping memberships can contribute to the activities of social movements in many ways, such as facilitating the circulation of information and the speed of decision making among groups, as well as contributing to the growth of mutual trust among different bodies. So we may keep in mind how this scenario of dense overlapping connections between groups and individuals facilitates their articulation (della Porta and Diani 2006).

Yet as della Porta and Diani note, being directly linked through organisational ties with people who already participate in the FUBA’s student movement may not be an essential precondition for participation to occur (della Porta and Diani 2006), as contact with, and interpellation by, the student movement may happen through a variety of spaces (inside and outside of the

University, as we will see) in which the material or sensible dimension may enable the political. And directly in line with this acknowledgement, it is of key importance throughout this thesis to note that the creation, articulation and nurturing of networks which may then inform political activism, does not only happen within the social movements themselves, but also takes place in various types of social and cultural spaces and activities that deal with the distribution of the sensible noted by Rancière (Rancière2004) - through a variety of leisure-time practices that even in a ludic way may offer spaces and opportunities for countercultural manifestations and protest activities. These sociocultural environments may help conform and sustain informal networks of spaces that inform communities and lifestyles which can at some point articulate social movements and render such systems visible. An ecology formed by such networks, spaces, and activities is relevant to portraying experiences that members of the FUBA, or of the wider cultural and artistic groups associated to it, interact with in their daily lives.

Therefore, throughout this thesis we should keep in mind, as della Porta and Diani are keen to point out, that environments such as these, where networks of groups concerned with cultural activities operate, may come to represent cases where the daily participation in the life of a social movement consists mostly of the involvement in cultural and social activities, and where the participation in social movements may consist of a very lifestyle in itself (della Porta and Diani 2006). While also keeping in mind their suggestion that such a network sociality, together with its possible spaces of circulation and articulation for social movements, may also help to keep the collective and political identities of their members active when open challenges to authority are not taking place, aiding their sustainability, as I argue happens in the case of the FUBA's student movement on a day-to-day basis.

The subject of a network sociality through which members of the FUBA's student movement seem to navigate, and the possibility of exchanges between communities across networks, brings this staging post to the next proposal relating to the reach of porous boundaries and networks. The question of how the networks of social movements operate and extend beyond their local physical and political context, to articulate trans-national instances of collaboration or articulation of social movements is particularly important when we consider the FUBA's involvement in initiatives such as the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign and the

wider feminist Women's Movement, as well as the FUBA's campaigning and denunciation against State and political violence internationally.

As a trans-national movement, della Porta and Tarrow's comments come to mind. Although the model of the nation-state has for many years served as the target of protest, cultural and geopolitical changes like the ones we have discussed, have transformed the ecology of social movements (della Porta and Tarrow 2005). As della Porta suggests, the withdrawal of State power in favour of trans-national actors and organisations seems to have increased the tendency of social movements to address global concerns instead of focusing solely on nation-state matters. Furthermore, these social and political changes seem to also have allowed informal networks to spread across borders more widely (della Porta 2007).

With these developments, which have also been manifested in the case of Argentina, processes of trans-nationalisation for social movements have occurred in forms such as diffusion, domestication, and internalisation, as well as transnational collective action, though which international campaigns on behalf of networks of activists may confront international actors, other States, or international institutions (della Porta and Tarrow 2005). This trans-national diffusion may be caused by a spatial proximity or cultural similarity between movements (della Porta and Kriesi 2009). In the case of Argentina and the FUBA's student movement, it seems to be deeply informed by the combative notion of Human Rights, collective memory, and disappearance regarding victims of State violence that was referred to in Staging Post 3. For, as Jelin and Sempol recognise, in Argentina, a change in conditions since the end of the 1990s allowed an outbreak of memories and social re-significations regarding the recent past of forced disappearance, in which youth organisations, both new and existing, became the protagonists of the public sphere. Henceforth, it is common to see the influence of recent historical periods in these new generations and in the process defining their future strategies and alliances with other social movements in diverse modalities (Jelin and Sempol 2006).

As I mentioned above, this dimension of trans-nationalisation of social movements through a network sociality will be particularly helpful when we consider the diffusion that has occurred between social movements denouncing

political and State violence in Latin America (and beyond), as well as when considering the trans-nationalisation of the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign and the feminist Women's Movement together with the efforts of members of the FUBA (particularly women) on these issues - which members and organisations of the FUBA's student movement seem to have spearheaded internationally, particularly since 2015 – resulting in what is arguably the most adhered-to and visible of social movements in Latin America today (2019) (Zibechi 2019). It appears to be primarily around the elastic category of collective memory that trans-national efforts of solidarity by the FUBA seem to be articulated<sup>21</sup>.

Finally, on trans-nationalisation of social movements and their adoption by the FUBA on the grounds of collective memory regarding State violence, we are reminded, as Goddard observes, to take into account the network of many organisations that have articulated around this subject in Argentina and Buenos Aires, many of whom continue to campaign on this issue today, having formed heterogeneous alliances and relations of support with other movements, that may not always be necessarily enduring or stable, but which have proved important for wider social struggles (Goddard 2007). As Jelin and Sempol suggest, the collective memory of episodes of disappearance, historically linked to communities such as the FUBA, informs how these groups remember and interpret such events (in Argentina and beyond) through generations (Jelin and Sempol 2006); raising questions as to how groups of young people today define themselves in relation to these episodes, and around which issues expansions through networks with other social movements tend to occur. As della Porta notes, particular movement traditions in each country - as is the case of Argentina with the concern of Human Rights and collective memory - can play an important role in contributing with their histories to mobilisations, while also interacting with groups that may have different characteristics and strategies (della Porta 2007).

Resulting from this discussion, it will be of vital importance for us to consider how pre-existing networks - which deal with everyday cultural and leisure-time activities as well as activist concerns - may facilitate the articulation of social movements such as the FUBA's, rendering them visible in certain

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<sup>21</sup> The subject of trans-nationalization of social movements involving the FUBA around the category of collective memory is elaborated on particularly in Chapter 7: The Role of Collective Memory in the Student Movement.

manifestations, on a local level and also on a trans-national scale; a process which reflects these underlying networks and concurrently drives their articulation and construction.

## **Conclusion**

The propositions outlined in the previous five staging posts, relate to recurring concerns that emerged during during fieldwork and in the writing-up process. They relate to how this community is inscribed within a larger distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004) and a genealogy of protest (Goddard 2015; Zibechi 2003), which informs its members and may facilitate processes of political subjectivization, in which, in the form of an aesthetic community as a dissensual figure, the FUBA's student movement can stand in relation to the present and the future. We may then acknowledge that in the political terrain in which the FUBA operates, the category of the political is best understood as a process of intervention in which the emergence of a political subject is defined; in the moving course of changing the sensible fabric of a society (Rancière 2010). We may keep in mind that the landscape inhabited by the FUBA's community is one in which the past is a battleground that constantly informs the present as a symbol and a source of information for the future (Jelin 2002). We may further acknowledge that as a result, the political space of the FUBA is one that is always traversed by power and hegemony, where internal and external antagonistic dimension are always present (Laclau and Mouffe 2014). Finally, we may appreciate the physical and social networks and spaces through which this student movement is nurtured and sustained, reconfiguring its social context in the process of its existence.



*Image 4.* A student chairs a general assembly of the FUBA following a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Education, in the context of strikes by teachers' unions. Red and blue banners indicate the presence of Independent Left and Peronismo/Kirchnerismo agrupaciones, respectively.



## IV. Historical Background and Structure of the FUBA

### Introduction

This chapter provides information about the history and the structural characteristics of the *Federacion Universitaria de Buenos Aires* (FUBA) and its student movement. Given that members of the FUBA emphasise the importance of recognising the inheritance and transmissions from past generations of the student movement in shaping their contemporary militancy, it is of key importance for us to consider these trajectories and the way they have informed the distribution of the sensible (Ranciere 2004) for today's members of the FUBA.

First, I make the invitation to appreciate the key difference between the FUBA as an organisational body (composed of a structure of students), and the effects of the FUBA for its members and the community around it: the effects of an entity that facilitates processes of political intervention and subjectivization (Ranci re 2010) for its participants and the wider public it may articulate. That is to say, there is a distinction between the body itself, and the social phenomenon that this body facilitates. The latter subject of the wider social effects and political processes it may trigger are the subject of interest for this research, in the measure that they have helped develop a repertoire of aesthetic and political practices that are discussed in this thesis.

Then, I attempt to draw an outline of the trajectory of the FUBA and the community around it, from the early origins of the student organisation and its political intervention, intertwined with the story of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), and the larger institutional political shifts in Argentina. In this account, I note historical episodes and references that occurred through the decades of the 1900s and 2000s, which left significant marks that became embedded in the process of the imaginary, collective memory and aesthetics of the student movement throughout the years until the time of my fieldwork.

After this account, I make a note about the institutional political situation at the time of my fieldwork in terms of the Federal Government of Argentina, which had profound implications within the FUBA. This is to help us consider the political shift that occurred in Argentina at the time of my arrival, with the move from centre-left governments that were in place since 2003 (following the financial crisis of 2001-2) to a government that was elected on an agenda of re-embedding the Argentine economy in the global financial markets. The chapter then considers how this trajectory (and others) is mapped on to the resulting distribution of positions with the FUBA, in what we can call the three main sectors of organizations in the FUBA: The Independent Left/Trotskyist, the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, and *Macrismo*, plus independent students and organisations.

The chapter also explains how the FUBA is organised and how it operated at the time of the research; its organisational body made up of 13 student centres elected annually, and its general *conducción* that was supposedly elected once a year. It lays out the positions relating to a current issue surrounding the elections and the disputed legitimacy of the FUBA's leadership. It also describes how political organisations locally called *agrupaciones*, operate in the daily activities of the student movement, and how students who are not members of these can also participate in the many initiatives promoted by different organisations and/or the FUBA itself.

Though I do not by any means claim this to be a definite "History" of the FUBA, which aims to prove or disprove past episodes, I argue that it is an illustration that may help us better comprehend the political panorama of which members of the FUBA consider themselves to be a part of. Therefore, assimilating the events inscribed in the FUBA's trajectory to the form of *lieux de memoire* (Nora 1989); flexible sites of memory (physical or symbolic) which are constantly revived in relation to current events, I argue that it is vital for us to understand these imagined histories as a key constituents which have actively shaped the distribution of the sensible which informs today's members of the student movement - providing them with a series of familiar political and aesthetic elements to draw upon and to develop political subjectivities themselves.

## The FUBA: Organisation and Effects

Following the note on the distinction between the organisational body and its wider effects, we should note that as a student organisation, the FUBA is an organism which was founded in 1908 with the aim of serving as a mechanism for the representation and participation of the students of the *Universidad de Buenos Aires* (UBA), the largest university of Argentina and the second largest in Latin America, with over 262,000 students as of 2011 (UBA 2011). Although it is an independent federation led by students of the UBA, the FUBA is also a part of the wider *Federación Universitaria Argentina* (Argentine University Federation, FUA), an umbrella organisation which articulates the students of all universities of Argentina, and of which the FUBA is the largest member body. I should say however, that in the daily activities of the FUBA and its resulting student movement, the FUA had no noticeable participation during the time of my fieldwork<sup>22</sup>.

The FUBA as a body declares itself independent from governmental authorities and institutions. Indeed, it openly defines itself as a group that fights day to day against the adjustment policies and privatising interests supported by governments and institutions. On its internet profile on Facebook for example, a tool widely used for the diffusion of its initiatives, representatives expressly considered the FUBA to be a platform for organisation, debate, and struggle; fighting for the rights and recognition of students while also attempting to be a protagonist for the student movement in the larger political debates occurring in society. Therefore, the FUBA stresses an attempt to support not only university matters, but also to actively intervene in the struggles faced by workers and other

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<sup>22</sup> Technically, the *Federación Universitaria Argentina* (FUA) represents the students of all universities in Argentina. However, in practice, active members of the FUBA's student movement repeatedly highlighted the politically inactive character of the FUA. Students from the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sector, those of the Independent Left, as well as active independent students attributed the lack of political mobilisation of the FUA to the fact that its general *conducción* is led by the *Franja Morada* organisation, which at the time of my fieldwork was aligned with *Macrismo*. It should be noted, as stated in this chapter, that from the return to democracy in 1983 to 2001 the *Franja Morada* organisation also led the general *conducción* of the FUBA. Following the events of the *Argentinazo* in 2001, however, the general *conducción* of the FUBA moved to the Independent Left.

marginalised sectors of society in the face of capitalist crises. The *conducción* of the FUBA emphasised, in its own words, “the absolute collaboration and union” of the university community with these groups. Likewise, the FUBA’s representatives stated its role in organising the everyday struggles of students for the knowledge produced and transmitted in their environment, aiming to generate critical thinking practices that “oppose the status quo”. Representatives of the FUBA admitted its purpose of opening up spaces of intervention and socialisation through the organisation of activities such as festivals and cultural events as arenas where students can express their opinions and raise their political demands. Its *conducción* defined the FUBA as the principal student organisation of Argentina, fighting on a day to day basis against policies of commercialisation and privatisation instituted by all forms of government, while declaring its defence for “a free public education at the service of workers and popular sectors of society” (FUBA 2015).

Organisationally, the body of the FUBA is composed of 13 student centres from the 13 different faculties that compose the University of Buenos Aires, as well as of a general administrative presidency elected by student representatives coming from each faculty. Within the FUBA, a series of different student political organisations, locally called *agrupaciones*, participate in political militancy and campaign across the 13 faculties of the UBA with the aim of representing the students of the university, being elected into positions to administer the organism. Elections occur once a year at the level of the 13 student centres, and once a year at the level of an Ordinary Congress to renew the general presidency of the FUBA (though as we will see, this aspect depends on particular political circumstances).

It is vital to highlight that there is a wide array of *agrupaciones* which participate inside the FUBA, and these are configured in a particular way in each faculty of the UBA, according to the local elections, alliances, and power balances of each student centre. At the time of my fieldwork, participants cited a “countless” number of *agrupaciones* existing across the FUBA, expressing that: while not all of them have a permanent presence in all 13 faculties, there was clearly over a dozen of them which tended to be central to the political life of the FUBA across the 13 faculties. These political organisations or *agrupaciones* have had changing roles in the *conducción* of the FUBA throughout its history, owing to shifts in

alliances and electoral results that have many times been influenced by the larger political panorama of Buenos Aires and Argentina, in which the FUBA is situated.

At the time of my fieldwork, the majority of the *agrupaciones* which were active in the FUBA's student movement proposed a "left-leaning", "anti-neoliberal" agenda through different approaches and characterisations. Yet participants regularly described the ensemble of *agrupaciones* within the FUBA as being segmented into three main sectors: *La izquierda independiente* (The Independent Left), *Kirchnerismo/Peronismo*, and *Macrismo*. The Independent-Left was composed mainly of Trotskyist political organisations (usually around 5), *Kirchnerismo/Peronismo* was composed of political organisations supportive of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner and Peronism (usually around 8), and *Macrismo* was composed of political organisations that were part of President Mauricio Macri's right-wing governing coalition (usually around 3, this sector being one that was not regularly visible in the activities of the student movement).

Members of the FUBA acknowledged that deep political rifts cut across these sectors, and adversarial confrontation existed within these sectors themselves. Some of the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA self-identified as part of a political party or as a segment of a political party, while others described a greater independence from institutional political parties. The dynamic of this adversarial confrontation within the FUBA resembled a series of agonistic and antagonistic relations (Mouffe 2013) that occurred among the distinct *agrupaciones*, while they vie for hegemony of the student movement. The ethnographic accounts throughout this thesis illustrate that the resulting interplay serves as an internal motor for the activation and mobilisation of the FUBA itself.

Having talked about the FUBA as an organism, we should acknowledge the effects this student body has in the community around it. In this sense, we should appreciate and understand that, beyond State-based and institutional political affiliations, many campaigns and initiatives proposed by the FUBA are supported by the participation of countless independent students (certainly, students who are independent from any *agrupación* compose the majority of the student body), as well as by individuals and groups outside of the university in the general civil society. In this sense, the FUBA contributes in articulating a heterogeneous participation of social organisations, trade unions, workers'

organisations, Human Rights groups, cultural centres, artistic collectives, and many others around it. It is in this measure that it becomes important to differentiate between the FUBA as a body itself, and the wider public that is articulated through the multifunctional campaigns in which it participates. For example, the FUBA may help organise a music festival outside an occupied factory, and participation in this festival will include performing artists, a variety of students from different *agrupaciones*, independent students, and members of trade unions or neighbourhood assemblies; a wider participation base is in effect articulated by it.

Such groups and individuals appear to participate in different initiatives in varying degrees of involvement and prominence, but together they seem to form information and action networks that interpellate not only those who may be actively engaged in the daily militancy, political life, and running of the *agrupaciones*, but also a wider public that we might call “on the fringes” (in the sense that they are not full-time *militantes*) of such campaigns, activism, and political discourse, and who may be in one measure or another attracted and activated towards political intervention by the social movement articulated by members of the FUBA. Therefore, between the organisational body and its effects, we see the operation of porous and shifting boundaries - through the initiatives promoted by the FUBA as an organism, the student movement around it, and beyond. I argue that this capacity for interpellation which the FUBA mobilises, opens up the political scope for the development of political identities and subjectivities for a greater field of association than that of its student militants; in turn, reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible around it.

### **Tracing the FUBA and its wider communities: changing modalities of resistance through time**

We have made a first approach to the subject of the FUBA’s organizational body and its wider effects on the community surrounding it. Now, in order to better understand how the FUBA articulates its student movement today, it is important to understand this organisation’s origins and trajectory. Therefore, I present here what could be considered a subjective account (due to my positionality as a foreign researcher, although a member of the FUBA at the time of my research)

of the FUBA's involvement in political spaces, both in Argentina and trans-nationally. What is outlined is by no means a definite "History" of the community and groups around the FUBA and should not be taken as one. Rather, it is a mapping exercise drawn from a particular, situated account and which undoubtedly cannot cover all of the episodes members of the FUBA may consider to be meaningful, as many of these will change according to their political perspectives and personal trajectories. Certainly, there may be as many histories of the FUBA as there are *agrupaciones* or members belonging to it, so my main concern here is not to presume a final recollection of all dates and characters that have at some point exerted an influence on the FUBA and its shifting community, but to present a guide to some of the elements and situations that shape this imaginary, inscribed in-between history and memory. These elements are continuously hailed and recalled by members of the FUBA in response to present challenges and circumstances, as sites of memory or *lieux de memoire* (Nora 1989). By recalling these trajectories, members of the FUBA, like other activist groups in Argentina, situate themselves within a longer historical time of struggle (Lazar 2014). The hailing of these episodes of struggle, in turn, contributes to the development of political and aesthetic practices of contemporary members of the FUBA. And they play an active part in shaping a distribution of the sensible that informs members of the FUBA's student movement, their notions of political militancy, as well as their ways of intervening in the political field.

As I once overheard a fellow student at the Faculty of Philosophy recall the origins of the student movement in Argentina to another foreign student during an assembly (as if to explain why the assembly was happening in the first place), we can consider that from its creation in 1908, prior to the 1918 University Reform in Argentina – a period which saw a wave of student activism demanding autonomy for universities and the participation of students in the elective processes of their governing bodies – the FUBA, together with the communities in which it operates, have long been involved in contentious episodes of resistance against different levels of governments and institutions. They have been, as Elizabeth Jelin notes, an integral part of the political history of the country, whose expressions have followed the complex and unstable process of politics in Argentina (Jelin 1985). These expressions appear to have occurred prominently during the periods of the military regimes that took place in Argentina

throughout the 1900s, during the events unfolding from the 2001-2002 economic crisis, and more recently through the present day accompanying the consequences of the shift in the Federal government from the State-led political agenda of *Kirchnerismo* (2003-2015) to the neoliberal reforms of *Macrismo* (2015-). In this panorama, contemporary members of the FUBA highlight its role in supporting not only student matters and national causes, but also trans-national efforts of solidarity joining diverse social movements by way of an internationalist stance, through events which in the last decade and a half seem to have changed the fabric in which the FUBA's community articulates and mobilises. Throughout the years, the initiatives and campaigns of its student movement have been closely linked, as the FUBA recognises, with the history of struggles of students, workers, and diverse movements that have organised under the pressures generated within their social context.

So as part of the mapping exercise previously mentioned, we may briefly recount how the FUBA's membership and community have been affected throughout the changing political landscape of Buenos Aires and Argentina. This will allow us to better understand how the connection between the categories of students and youth came to be closely associated with political intervention, and how the sensibility in which the FUBA's student movement operates today came to be constructed as an active process. Given the close links that exist between the FUBA's community and the University of Buenos Aires, we can start by considering processes affecting the students of this university, as recognised by the University of Buenos Aires itself.

The 1918 University Reform granted autonomy from the State to public universities in Argentina, following a student rebellion at the University of Cordoba, at which point students emerged as a political category and subject within the national landscape. Often cited as a point of departure for student mobilisation by today's members of the student movement, this struggle for autonomy and the democratisation of the teaching and learning process - as Alba, a young teacher of the UBA and past member of the FUBA expressed it to me while recalling the history of the student movement at a street-side café, and as it can be commonly heard in the language of the FUBA members - would have seemed to define the university as a public site to be governed by students themselves, situating students as political agents in the university space. And it



was upon this principle of autonomy and self-government that the initial episodes of contestation against federal governments would play out. The basic mechanism of struggle being that, at various times, passing governments intervened in the public university system, stripping universities of their autonomy, and the students and staff responded accordingly. The first intervention of the UBA took place as part of the military coup of 1930, when President Hipólito Yrigoyen (whose first government passed the 1918 University Reform) was deposed by the military dictatorship of José Félix Uriburu, and, for the first time of many, the autonomy gained in 1918 was lost. This occurred again with the military coup of 1943 when the dictatorship with an authoritarian Catholic-nationalist stance sought to align the University of Buenos Aires with its policy (UBA 2015), and again stripped it of its self-government and labelled student organisations such as the FUA illegal.

Further intervention happened in 1947, during the first presidency of Juan Domingo Perón, when the UBA was officially aligned with the executive power by the emission of a law that allowed the President to appoint the university rector, seeking to neutralize it as a field for political discussion. And it was also during this time that the government attempted to create a student federation separate from the FUBA, which was meant to be aligned with its mandate (the CGU organisation), but which did not prove to be successful with the students given its close links with the Peronist government. The university itself acknowledges that these times of intervention seem to have led student organizations such as the FUBA to operate in a semi-clandestine state, with their activities severely hampered (UBA 2015). Change continued with the onset of the military coup that ousted Perón in 1955, when student organisations such as the FUBA, having previously opposed Perón, were once again able to elect the governing bodies of the UBA. However, ensuing government policies that aligned the university towards a perceived scientism and were distanced from the social reality, led to discontent and student protests, so that students came to be perceived once again by the government as a threat that had to be neutralised. The military regime of General Onganía, which entered power after the military coup of 1966, suppressed the autonomy of the university once again and dissolved its governing bodies.

This episode of intervention led to a reaction of protest where members of

the FUBA, together with university faculty members, occupied the UBA in 1966. On July 29<sup>th</sup> they were violently removed and repressed by the military forces in perhaps one of the most notable of such clashes that came to be called *La Noche de los bastones largos* (Night of the Long Batons). In protest, over 1,300 faculty members resigned from the university (UBA 2015), while a regime of strict censorship was instituted in the university to suppress the strong politicisation that was taking place within the student community. As an example of the persistent importance of *La noche de los bastones largos* in the student movement, at the time of my fieldwork in 2016, a series of panels and glass-table cabinets containing news articles and photographs chronicling this episode of struggle were on display in the central foyer of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences in the *Ciudad universitaria* campus site. It was a testimony of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the repressive action, reminding all the students who passed by of what occurred on that night in a museum-like fashion; a display that was coupled with the live reminder in the form of students' voices who often cite this episode as a watershed moment in the course of the student movement.

As the social climate of the 1960's progressed, youth culture took on a greater social relevance, and student organisations throughout Argentina continued to have a central role together with workers' movements in the process that eventually led to the downfall of the military regime. In terms of student protest and interventions, it was the time of the *Rosario* uprising in Rosario, and soon after the *Cordobazo* uprising in Cordoba in 1969, in which workers and students surged side by side to condemn the actions of Onganía's dictatorship. The *Cordobazo*, particularly, was an episode that most of the participants in my research recognised and hailed frequently as having profound implications for the student movement as a demonstration of student-worker solidarity and as a form of combative rebellion. "*Como en el Cordobazo*" (just as in the Cordobazo) was a phrase I commonly heard throughout the student movement, in conversations, meetings, and even chanting; as an example and a demand for students to step-up to struggle in the same way.

Elizabeth Jelin considers that, throughout the 1960s, times of dictatorship and social crisis led to other spaces for entities like the student movement to be found in and to expand through. This was part of a process of change happening throughout the country. Mass consumption was increasingly oriented towards



*Image 5.* A series of displays in the central foyer of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences (FCEN) commemorates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Noche de los bastones largos*. This space would likely be transited on a daily basis by all of the students of the faculty.

youth culture, in terms of fashion, music, etc., and important cultural and political manifestations followed in the same direction. The 1960s also witnessed the onset of armed struggle as Calveiro agrees (Calveiro 2013), and the appearance of the first bands of *rock nacional* or national rock; all signs of the emergence of youth culture and of the politics of youth as an active subject, as an addressee of messages being specially directed towards it (Jelin 1985).

Young people who could not channel their activism through the student movement and its organisations found other outlets and venues for participation and communication, afforded by cultural phenomena such as national rock or independent theatre, among others. These constituted anti-establishment forms of expression whose vitality may be understood as originating from the empty spaces generated by the censorship of participation outlets that had previously been there, such as university student organisations. Due to the impossibility of collective action, and because of the lack of attraction that official political proposals had towards young people, these were cultural channels through which mutual recognition and solidarity were expressed, representing a constructive process of collective identity and sense of life, while expressing opposition to the regime (Jelin 1985).

The 1960s saw a process of ideological and symbolic construction of new values and symbolic behaviour models. This is a relevant aspect, since in movements like national rock, independent theatre, or the non-commercialised production of culture, we see the symbiosis of various elements that constituted new forms of expression. Forms that involved the political and the aesthetic merged into one activity; the expressive and symbolic linked to a construction of identities and collective values. Forms that provided a place which served as a refuge for the demand of values such as peace, justice, and solidarity in a time when other outlets were not available (Jelin 1985). All of these expressions contributed to the cultural landscape that brought about a new official political order. And the articulation of these political and cultural expressions continues to serve as an outlet and a tool for the student movement and its community to this day, as well as for other social movements, to generate and maintain participation. This construction of other channels for artistic and political participation and communication encouraged the creation of other physical sites of circulation and diffusion for an anti-establishment discourse to be enacted, and



Image 6. “Today, like yesterday, workers and students, united and forward! *Cordobazo*, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1969”. An online flyer posted on Facebook, similar to those distributed physically around the UBA, commemorates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Cordobazo*.

these sites continue to play an important role in the student movement's reproduction today.

To continue the mapping exercise of meaningful episodes inscribed in the student movement, the 1970s would also prove to be turbulent times for organizations such as the FUBA. The year of 1973 saw the return of Perón to power, and brought the community around the UBA under a process of reform once again. A greater number of students entered the university and students of certain faculties were able to offer a series of programs for marginalised sectors of society – programs and practices similar to those which current-day *agrupaciones* in the FUBA carry out, fusing academic theory as part of their political practice. However, due to mounting tensions between different factions within the Federal Government, after the death of Perón the extreme right-wing sector of the government would intervene extensively in the university system. As Calveiro recognises, the promise of Peronism that had long loomed over Argentina appeared to have ultimately spiralled out of control and failed (Calveiro 2013). This process brought violence upon members of the university community with the onset of attacks by groups such as *La Triple A*, (Triple A: Argentine Anti-communist Alliance), a paramilitary death-squad which targeted left-wing sympathisers. Additionally, the prohibition of political activity within the university was established alongside with police surveillance of students' activities and associations (UBA 2015).

This violence against the university community was consolidated with the military coup of March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1976. The military dictatorship that followed carried out immediate and deeper interventions into the university system. As Goddard, amongst others (Jelin 2002; Calveiro 2013; Tonkonoff 2014) points out, the 1976 coup cleared the way for the implementation of neoliberal reforms throughout the country, albeit unevenly as there were differing positions within the alliance of military, naval, and aeronautical bodies regarding the direction of the country in relation to the global economy. The clearing of the path for the neoliberal reforms entailed specific local projects (Goddard 2015). One of these projects was the elimination of universities as potential spaces for political alternatives.

During this period of State Terrorism in the 1970s and 1980s, communities like student organisations became a central target for military repression. The

extreme right-wing military dictatorship, seeking the elimination of what they considered to be subversive ideological factors, prohibited the activities of student groups and dismantled their centres; needless to say all autonomy of the UBA was lost. Violence against those perceived as subversives and opposed to the regime reached its highest point in the university's history. Most of the dictatorship's victims were young people, 21% of those disappeared by the *Junta* were university students, and over 3% were university teaching staff (UBA 2015). As participants in my research repeatedly recognised, all of the faculties of the UBA would suffer the disappearances of students, today officially memorialised in the spaces of the university. Furthermore, as recognised by the University of Buenos Aires, this period saw a policy of reducing its student intake by 59% from 1976 to 1977; from having 40,000 students entering in 1974 to just over 13,000 in 1977. In this process of closing down spaces, the social sciences and humanities were the worst affected. Once again, student groups and organisations such as the FUBA and those articulated through it, existed only in precarious and clandestine conditions, with students only permitted to address a narrow range of university related issues. This drove some of the university political groups to seek refuge in alliances and collaborations with political parties, although these did not enjoy significant resources or autonomy either (UBA 2015). As Alba spoke to me of this period of State Terrorism: "Most, if not all of the political organisations that are active today in Argentina had comrades who were disappeared, assassinated, or who fled in exile."

This heavy state of repression remained in place until 1982, with the downfall of the military dictatorship, when student groups were once again permitted to participate in the elections for student representation in the University of Buenos Aires. The return of student organisations to university life saw the *agrupación* (student organisation) *Franja Morada*, associated with the *Union Civica Radical* party (the political party of Raúl Alfonsín, the first democratically elected president after the military dictatorship), win the *conducción* of the FUBA. From 1983 to 2001 the *Franja Morada* would continue to win the *conducción* of the FUBA, until the crisis of 2001, when they were replaced by a coalition of Independent Left organisations, setting a trend that continued until the time of my fieldwork and the present-day, of different alliances of Independent-Left organisations administering the FUBA's *conducción*. In the

instance of 1982, however, there was also a meaningful sector of university groups which rejected the association of university *agrupaciones* to political parties, arguing for their independence from party politics (UBA 2015).

Reflecting on the responses to the repression of the military dictatorship of 1976-1983, the profound difficulty and bereavement experienced by the communities of the student movement would bring to the forefront the demand for justice and Human Rights. As Jelin acknowledges, mobilisations linked to the victims of violence and abuse would come to occupy the most private aspects of experience, such as being mother to someone who was disappeared, to the most public spheres involving open discussions regarding the violations that had been committed (Jelin 1985). As participants from all the active sectors of the student movement expressed, this process deeply embedded a local militant and combative understanding of Human Rights and of “collective memory” of victims of forced disappearance into social movements in Argentina and organisations such as the FUBA until the present day. The constructive process of collective memory in relation to the State Terrorism of 1976-1983 was, according to Calveiro, the only one of its scope in Latin America - achieving public recognition of the direct responsibility of the Argentine State, and, to a certain extent, the trial of those responsible (Calveiro 2013). The process entailed the demand from a wide collective of Human Rights organisations (spearheaded by the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* organisations and the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*), political parties, trade unions, student and social organisations for the “*Memoria viva*” (Living Memory) of the victims of State violence. And on the other hand, it would lead certain institutional political actors to look for an institutionalisation and “consecration” of this “collective memory” into the discourse of the Argentine State, particularly in 2003-2015 (Guglielmucci 2011). Furthermore, the process would encourage groups campaigning on Human Rights to extend the understanding and recognition of these to wider social and economic aspects, perceiving in the neoliberal agenda that continued to be implemented throughout the 1980s and 1990s, a legacy of the military dictatorship (Goddard 2015).

As the dictatorship came to an end in 1983, the community around the FUBA continued to undergo changes in its social context, with a process of re-establishment of autonomy and normalisation taking place in universities. This so-called “return to democracy” occurring throughout Argentina meant that



throughout the following years the student population of the Universidad de Buenos Aires grew once again, reaching 170,000 students by 1992 (UBA 2015).

However, the process of “re-democratisation” that took place in the 1980s and through the 1990s also shaped the environment of university groups and youth social organisations in other ways, with the advent of civilian rule and political liberalisation in Argentina being accompanied by an extension and deepening of neoliberal structural reforms in macroeconomic policy. As noted by Goddard, the incoming government had to deal with a highly damaged political system, pressured so as not to prosecute those responsible for Human Rights abuses during the *Junta*, as well as continuing the economic policies implemented by the dictatorship (Goddard 2015). As James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer elaborate, a move on behalf of the United States to turn away from the resort to armed forces in the region of Latin America, as it had done throughout the 1970s backing military dictatorships, saw the implementation of institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization to set up a “free-trade” regime in order to make Latin American countries safe zones for US capital (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011).

The following process of indebtedness and the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs of said institutions consequently caused severe periods of economic crisis throughout these two decades, significantly affecting the public sector, threatening public education and the university communities once again. The neoliberal offensive in the period from 1982 to 1993 saw an increase from 78 to 150 million people living in poverty throughout Latin America, which resulted in a huge equity gap among the population (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011). To illustrate the social impact of these policies in Argentina, in 1995 unemployment had reached 20% of the economically active population (Quirós 2011), by 2001, unemployment had increased to a rate of 24% and over 30% in large urban areas (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011), and by 2002, the poverty index reached 53% (Quirós 2011). As a result of the implemented structural reforms, by the end of the 1990s billions of dollars had been transferred out of the region from countries such as Argentina, Mexico, Ecuador, and Venezuela into the accounts of multinational corporations, with GDP growth in the region barely averaging 0.5% a year from 1981-2002 (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011). Furthermore, the policy of convertibility, implemented in 1991, which pegged the

Argentine Peso to the US Dollar, had the ultimate effect of deepening the country's deficit (Goddard 2015), all of which brought about a state of severe economic and political crisis.

Yet, as López Levy points out, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as neo-liberal policies encouraged the State to shun its responsibilities, social endeavours grew and many people began to self-organise in order to carry out basic welfare provision, to pick up where the State had left off or had never been at all (López Levy 2004). In Argentina, the process of neoliberal policy adjustments, privatizations, and public education reforms (or 'blatant looting' as Petras and Veltmeyer label it) being implemented particularly by the governments of Carlos Menem and later Fernando de la Rúa towards the end of the 1990s, would provoke a wave of popular uprisings that would see strong mobilisations by numerous social and student organizations including the FUBA. In this sense, as López Levy states, the solidarity and the upsurge in mobilisation highlighted the emergence of what was termed the *Tercer Sector* (third sector- not government, not business): civil society, community organisations, and NGOs, which grew steadily throughout the 1990s (López Levy 2004). These organisations would come to cover a varied array of interests and necessities, from cultural and social clubs to neighbourhood assemblies, work cooperatives, and unoccupied persons' associations, among many others.

The appearance of these groups and their intervention as actors in the political arena was particularly noted towards the end of the 1990's, and notoriously in the economic and political crisis that detonated in 2001: *El Argentinoazo*. An instance in which the collaboration of not only student groups, but a large array of Human Rights groups, trade unions, workers' and unoccupied persons' movements, popular assemblies, and social organisations in the city of Buenos Aires - as well as large movements in the rural areas surrounding the city with the articulation of the *piquetero* organisations (composed of unoccupied rural workers) - and a large sector of the population belonging to no specific political group or organisation, gave way to the happenings of December 2001 and their repercussions.

As Goddard suggests, these mass protests came to constitute a historical moment for their participants with possible long lasting effects in the imaginary of

society. An episode in which the needs of individuals were fused with the needs of the country in demanding an alternative (Goddard 2006). The downturn in the economy and the disgust towards neoliberalism had reinforced the appearance of social movements as major players in shaping the contours of politics in the country. This articulation of “mass protests involving citizens from across the social spectrum, uniting unemployed workers and impoverished members of the middle-class in ephemeral but profoundly meaningful solidarity” (Goddard 2015), resulted in the events that gained worldwide attention and recognition. In this sense, we could consider the *Argentinazo* in the light of a critical event as proposed by Das, an event which caused new forms of action to come into being, redefining codes, meanings, and forms (Das 1995); a watershed moment that marked a before and after, particularly for the FUBA community and its student movement. For as participants in my research repeatedly noted, the *Argentinazo* led to the onset of the *FUBA Piquetera*: the first instance in which its *conducción* was won by an alliance of Independent-Left organisations, who owing to the combative character of the protests inspired by the *Piquetero* movement<sup>23</sup>, informally baptised the FUBA with this adjective which they continued to use until the time of my fieldwork 15 years later.

With the crisis, the case of Argentina turned into an object of international interest, as Quirós notes. On one hand, for the local and international establishment, representing a bad example of economic debacle and financial default. But on the other hand, for those with a progressive agenda, representing an exemplary case of popular resistance to neoliberalism and its exclusionary effects. The processes of privatisation of the public sector, deindustrialisation and relaxation of workers’ rights; the irruption of structural unemployment that had characterized Argentina in the 1990s had created, among other things, the conditions of possibility for the emergence of new experiences of collective mobilisation. This process strongly appealed to both militant and academic research, and the intellectual arena became an active participant in the construction of the Argentina of resistance (Quirós 2011).

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<sup>23</sup> The *Piquetero* movement was composed of organisations of unemployed rural workers who used roadblocks on the main accesses to Buenos Aires as their principal mode of protest. Their protest strategies and symbolic language were later appropriated by urban social movements in Buenos Aires.

The famous slogan of the mobilisations “*¡Que se vayan todos!*” (Everyone must go!) came to highlight the attitude towards the political class that was being taken by the groups articulated in the events of 2001 and 2002. As Svampa and Corral recall of the political developments that emerged from the events of the *Argentinazo*, this scenario increased the visibility of social movements and allowed them to develop ties across social sectors, with links between the unemployed poor and the middle class. This opening promoted the emergence of forms of self-organisation, such as neighborhood assemblies, barter clubs, worker managed factories, and counter-cultural collectives. The neighborhood assemblies particularly constituted a novel form of organization with a heterogeneous participation. These spaces for organization and deliberation broke the traditional forms of political representation; favouring self-organisation and direct action. They fundamentally challenged the status-quo by shattering the manufactured illusion that there could be no alternative to the neoliberal programme; returning to individuals their agency as actors in political life. And these spaces provided the middle class with an important political identity and a place in the political sphere. Therefore, spaces such as neighbourhood assemblies allowed spaces for intermixing, encounters and diffusion that had no previous articulation (Svampa and Corral 2006).

The upheaval of the *Argentinazo* saw five different Argentine Presidents pass in a matter of three weeks. And among the results of the commotion, as Graeber suggests, the incoming government of Néstor Kirchner in 2003 had to take some radical form of action in order to restore any sense of credibility in its legitimacy as an institution. As a consequence, came the default on a large part of Argentina’s international debt, setting off a series of events that severely challenged international enforcement agencies such as the IMF, and contributed to the end of the Third World debt crisis, benefitting billions of the world’s poor and marginalised (Graeber 2013). This also allowed Argentina’s economy to begin to recover from its critical state, having a rate of sustained GDP growth of 8.3% from 2003 to 2007 (Petras and Veltmayer 2011).

To help us picture the prevalence of social organisations in the *Tercer Sector*, and their role in the everyday political life of the country we can consider that, as López Levy documented, by 2003 there were 78,000 duly registered groups, and many more operating informally. As she indicates, a national poll in

Argentina evidenced that 3.5 million people (almost ten percent of the population) carried out some form of voluntary work (López Levy 2004). Such was the network and social fabric that became articulated in the process leading up to the *Argentinazo*; social organisations playing a protagonist role as political agents in response to the void left behind by neoliberal policies.

From these events and the creation of such social organisations came numerous objects of study, as Quirós recognises, that found their way into the academic production in many different ways. They expressed themselves in a wide variety of research forms and collaborations, practices and publications, among others, of what were labelled new forms of social protest and collective action (Quirós 2011). In the process, a new sensibility seems to have been created, changing the fabric in which organisations and collectives like the FUBA were inscribed, which would inform how they were constituted and how they articulated social movements. And while some of the organisations born out of these events were later co-opted by the national government, or may have been used for political aims in instances of “clientelism” during the Kirchner Administrations, as Quirós notes, many of the networks and self-governing institutions created during the upheavals have been preserved to this day, bearing influence on contemporary collective action.

In institutional terms, the consequences of the emergence of mass movements unfolding from the crisis of 2001 included the election of numerous centre-left politicians in the region, such as Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, who as Zibechi notes, appeared to denounce neoliberalism, taking advantage of the popular disenchantment towards it, while trying to establish dialogue with social movements and organisations throughout Argentina in order to govern them (Zibechi 2012). However, social movements and organisations in their new forms would continue to play an important political role in society, and their discourse would continue to be influenced by following economic and political episodes such as the economic crash of 2008.

In Latin America, the 2008 crisis would see the GDP per capita fall -2% from 2008 to 2009 (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011), despite political assurances that the area would not be gravely affected. This resulted in increased bankruptcies, unemployment, and decreased government spending in social programs.

Consequently, as Petras and Veltmeyer point out, Latin America experienced a delayed entry into a period of profound recession. In response to these developments, sectors of the intellectual and social left, as well as trade unions, social organisations, and social movements throughout the region coincided in the 2008 crisis reflecting the demise of neoliberalism as an ideology and as a model to guide government policy (Petras and Veltmeyer 2011).

However, it should be said that in Argentina, coupled with the downturn resulting from the crisis, also came accusations of corruption against the Federal Administration of Cristina Kirchner, as well as personal smear campaigns against her figure. These accusations, as well as the policy implemented by her government, resulted in a loss of popularity for the political project of *Kirchnerismo* that would deeply polarise the public in the lead-up to the conclusion of her second presidential term in 2015. The polarisation around the Kirchner administrations would also be reflected within the FUBA, and old standing divisions that had been present since the onset of *Kirchnerismo* would emerge to the surface in what members of the FUBA considered to be fundamental differences within the student movement. Such a scenario meant that while active members of the FUBA stated an intention to counter the adverse effects of neoliberal policy nationally and internationally, divisions would come to be expressed as to where, how, and with whom.

It was this conjuncture that was taking place as I was about to embark on fieldwork, since not even a month prior to my departure to Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri had caused an international surprise by winning the 2015 Presidential Elections by scarcely 2% of the vote after a second round run-off in November of 2015 against Daniel Scioli, the candidate proposed by Cristina Kirchner's *Frente Para la Victoria* (the electoral coalition of *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*). With the looming installation of a political and economic order that for the first time since the *Argentinazo* promised a return to an alignment with the right-wing neoliberal agenda, came the question of the response that new policies implemented by the Macri Administration would elicit. Mobilisation from the FUBA, its student movement, and a wide range of social and political organisations seemed to be assured; yet it was along which lines the antagonisms would be drawn and the scale of these, that at the time promised to be informative to my research. To that point I turn now.

## Political Moment and Operation at the Time of Fieldwork

As I described previously, Mauricio Macri assumed the Presidency of Argentina on December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015, just a few days before I travelled to Buenos Aires to begin my main period of fieldwork (from December 2015 to January 2017). At that time, the outcome of the presidential election, which came as a surprise to many, inevitably seemed to mean a convulsed year ahead in terms of the activity of social movements in Buenos Aires and in Argentina. Personally, having seen the dynamism of the FUBA's student movement previously in a pilot that I conducted in June-July of 2014, during the progressive centre-left presidency of Cristina Kirchner, I could only imagine the activity that lay ahead throughout 2016, as the Macri Administration began to implement the neoliberal agenda on which he had campaigned. From the outset it was clear that the political moment being experienced at the time would come to tinge my fieldwork and research; in a way, the narrative of the incoming federal government, and the response to its nation-wide policy would take centre-stage for the FUBA's student movement.

For the first time since the financial crisis of 2001-2002, a shift had occurred in Argentina from the redistributive, progressive centre-left governments that were in place since 2003, headed by Néstor (2003-2007) and then Cristina Kirchner (2007-2015), to a government that was elected on an agenda of re-embedding the Argentine economy in the global financial markets and reverting the emphasis on state-led employment. In terms of the Latin American region, it was one of the first cases of the so-called "Pink Tide" beginning to recede, giving way to the backlash of a new neoliberal offensive, and though the scale of the new offensive was not clear at that moment in terms of its far reaching consequences throughout the region, in Argentina the first months and the first year of the neoliberal turn had immediate effects.

Immediately after the onset of the Macri Administration, massive employment cuts across the public and private sector were implemented in a move to "de-ideologise" the State. Members of the FUBA cited around 250,000 jobs being lost in this in the course of 2016 alone (Álvarez Rey 2016), many of them students. There was also the agreement with the *Fondos Buitre* (Vulture Funds), which

reverted the state of economic default that Argentina had been in since 2001, and which closely coincided with the visit of US President Barack Obama on the the *Día de la memoria* that commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Military Coup of March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1976; an incident Human Rights organisations considered a flagrant insult. Tied to the subject of collective memory there was a turn in the official discourse of the federal administration, with Macri himself questioning the number of victims who were disappeared during the Military Dictatorship and referring to the officially recognised period of State Terrorism as “dirty war”; casting the issue as unimportant (La Izquierda Diario 2016). Commentators identified in the new government’s public discourse a re-surfacing of the *Teoría de los dos demonios* (Theory of the two demons), justifying this as a neutral, de-politicised position, in relation to the actions of the last military dictatorship (Feierstein 2018). A security protocol to control public demonstrations that members of the FUBA described as repressive was also rapidly approved by the government (Página 12 2016). There was the quick devaluation of the Argentine Peso and the steep hike in utility bills reaching a five-fold increase in some cases. Inevitably, cuts to the public sector were wide-ranging and public education was quickly targeted. In the case of the national public university system an increase of 0% in the budget, coupled with an inflation of nearly 40%, painted a dire scenario for students, academic staff, and non-academic staff; the reason for the countless instances of protests, rallies, and takeovers that took place throughout 2016 and beyond, many of which are described as examples in this thesis. In some instances, faculty buildings of the UBA were left without electricity or gas for months (Elizalde and Arregui 2018). Gender violence and impunity was described as rampant by participants in my research, and generated massive demonstrations as part of the #NiUnaMenos campaign that had become visible the previous year (2015), articulated as part of the larger women’s movement. As a student speaker said of the neoliberal programme during one of the first assemblies of the FUBA that I attended: There was “a rollback of social welfare, and a rollout of the repressive apparatus”. These were a few of the noticeable effects that *Macrismo* quickly brought on and which participants in my research often quoted at the time of my fieldwork; all of which are impossible to elaborately describe here due to space limitations.



So what did members of the FUBA's student movement make of this political moment? How did they consider it to be different from previous instances of contention against governments? To consider here is the fact that, as university students predominantly aged 18-25, most of the current members of the FUBA at the time of my research would have experienced their lives as higher-education students in post-2001 Argentina, during the time of the Kirchner administrations; although past members of the FUBA with whom I spoke could make a comparison in terms of a greater timeline with past events, considering the times of the *Argentinazo* as students themselves.

All of them, however, concurred with the fact that the onset of the Macri administration brought about the highest levels of general mobilisation by the FUBA's student movement since the crisis of 2001 and 2002. They quoted multitudinous student demonstrations of up to 50,000 participants during 2016 as the largest since the *Argentinazo* (Vales 2016). Added to these was the massive collaboration with the striking teaching unions who demanded a greater public education budget throughout 2016, which generated what students referred to as the most adhered-to industrial action or *paro* by independent students in their years at the UBA. Along with many other heightened measures of campaigning exemplified through this thesis, worth noting was the heightened participation of members of the FUBA in the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign against gender violence, and across the wider women's movement articulated throughout Argentina and wider Latin America.

These actions seemed to mark a change of scale in contrast with previous years of mobilisation, which - although hugely dynamic and eventful to an outside observer (like myself in the case of 2014) - to militants in the FUBA had been relatively "calm" from 2011 to 2015. Seemingly, the advent of the Macri administration had a two-fold effect. On one hand, as an active militant student let me know: it was easier to get independent students to participate in the initiatives of the FUBA since, "most young people" felt a readiness to rally against Macri's government, whereas in the years of *Kirchnerismo* this had not always been the case, as a sector of the FUBA was in fact aligned with the Kirchner government. But on the other hand, the government-fuelled perception of criminalisation of ideology and political militancy, meant that outside of the

student movement, a sector of the population saw a redundancy in the activities of the FUBA's student movement, as did the *agrupaciones* of the FUBA that were aligned with *Macrismo*.

This shift in perceptions, in terms of where to stand politically and how to intervene in politics to counter the Macri Administration, neoliberalism, or capitalism as a whole, was one that evidenced what members of the FUBA described as "fundamental differences" among the political organisations within it. And I argue, it is precisely those differences in the form of agonistic relations (Mouffe 2013) within the FUBA itself, that serve as an internal motor for the activation of the FUBA's student movement as a constant process, even in previous years when mobilisation had not been at such a peak; for the most intense campaigning and debating with the aim of adhering sympathisers to their political direction, and to characterise their outlook as the way to face social problems, was usually carried out not only between different sectors of the FUBA, but among *agrupaciones* belonging to the same political sector themselves. It was this process of vying for the hegemony of the student movement that kept student militants on their feet around the faculties of the UBA, the university in a continuous occupation, and the university community itself in a general state of mobilisation.

In this sense, the political panorama of *agrupaciones* within the FUBA at the time of my fieldwork was divided into what students characterised as three segments: The Independent Left, *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, and *Macrismo*, with the addition of independent students and a handful of *agrupaciones* who were not necessarily aligned with a single sector. And the interplay among these sectors was telling of how agonisms and antagonisms helped to fuel the student movement. The Independent Left, mostly of a Trotskyist direction, with its largest *agrupación* (the UJS-PO) having co-presided over the FUBA since 2001, advocated for the rejection of both *Macrismo* and *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, and constantly campaigned instead for an independent way to counter all levels of government on the local, national, and international scale, as had been their proposal during the previous years. The *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sector, campaigned for a return to the Peronist policies of the Kirchner administrations and advocated for the construction of a *Frente Unico Anti-Macri* (Anti-Macri Unity

Distribution of *agrupaciones* in relation to the three largest sectors of the FUBA  
 Independent Left (red), Peronismo/Kirchnerismo (blue), Macrismo (yellow)

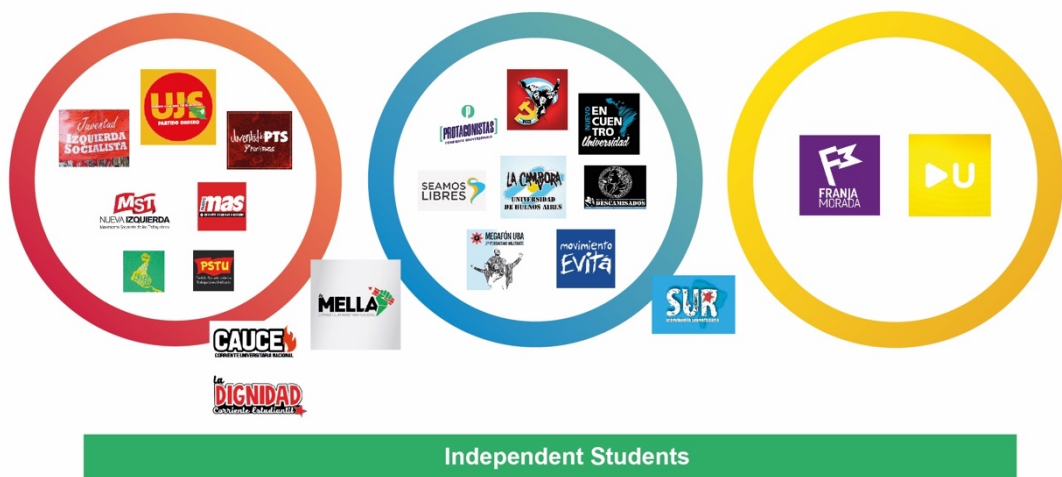


Image 7

Front) throughout the FUBA; whilst the sector of *Macrismo*, mainly composed of the *Franja Morada*, was notably inactive in the campaigns of the student movement (except in those denouncing gender violence, where they did participate) during the time of my fieldwork. The independent students meanwhile, judging by the results of the elections in the 13 student centres of the UBA, seemed to be polarised between the proposals of the Independent-Left and those of *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, with a slight majority of the students who were active in the student movement choosing to side with the Independent-Left organisations.

To help us picture the configuration of the many *agrupaciones* across the different faculties of the UBA and better understand the operation of the FUBA as a whole, it is useful to consider how these three sectors of the student movement were mapped onto each of the student centres of the FUBA. In the elections held during my fieldwork the resulting *conducción* of the 13 student centres of the FUBA was the following:

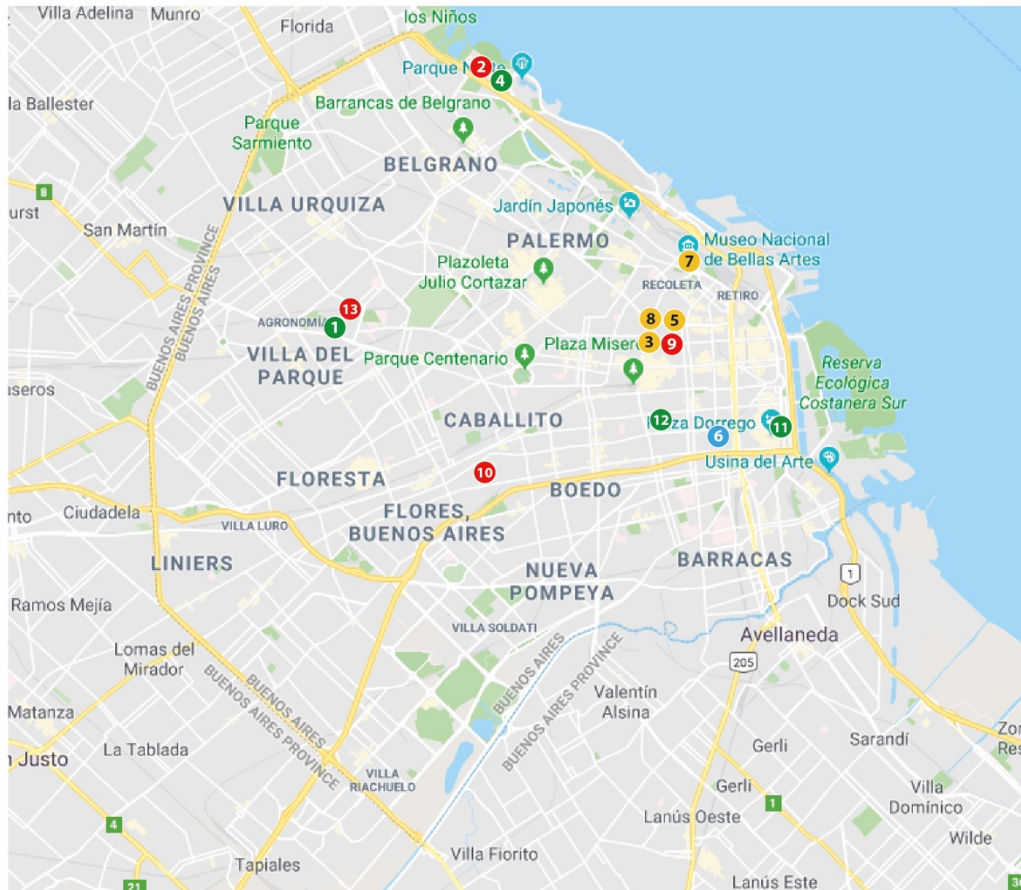
- Organisations that self-characterised as belonging to the Independent-Left presided over four student centres:
  - CEFyL (Faculty of Philosophy)
  - CEADiG (Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism)
  - CEFyB (Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry)
  - CEV (Faculty of Veterinary)
  
- Organisations that self-characterised as belonging to *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* presided over one student centre:
  - CECSO (Faculty of Social Sciences)
  
- Organisations that self-characterised as belonging to *Macrismo* presided over four student centres:
  - CECiM (Faculty of Medicine)
  - CECE (Faculty of Economic Sciences)
  - CED (Faculty of Law)
  - CEFO (Faculty of Odontology)

- Organisations not formally aligned with any of these sectors presided over four student centres:
  - CECEN (Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences), presided over by *La Mella*.
  - CEP (Faculty of Psychology), presided over by *La Mella*.
  - CEABA (Faculty of Agronomy), presided over by *Línea de Agronomía Independiente*.
  - CEI (Faculty of Engineering), presided over by *Movimiento Lineal Independiente*.
  
- The general *conducción* of the FUBA itself was co-presided over by the UJS-PO (of the Independent-Left), and *La Mella*, (previously closer to the Independent Left, yet informally associated with *Kirchnerismo/Peronismo* since the onset of the *Macri* Administration).

It should be said that although this setting of three main sectors plus the independents proved hugely dynamic in terms of agonism, antagonism, debate, and mobilisation throughout the student movement, it also created a deadlock in the renewal of the FUBA's general *conducción* as a student body - which is supposedly renewed once a year in a General Congress with representatives stemming from every student centre - that had not been renewed since 2013 at the time of my fieldwork. This led the FUBA at a general level to operate instead with a representative council, derived from the presidents of the 13 student centres (who were elected each year). That council would then "officially" decide whether the FUBA as a student body adhered to a certain campaign or not (be it a student campaign, an initiative with trade unions, social organisations, etc.). Owing to this, debates around the issue of legitimacy were voiced by *agrupaciones* outside of the Independent Left, particularly those of *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* who demanded a seat to co-preside over the FUBA together with the Independent-Left. Those belonging to *Macrismo* also challenged the legitimacy of the FUBA's *conducción*, opting instead to block the possibility of a quorum in the General Congress to impede the renewal of the FUBA's *conducción*.

**Distribution of FUBA student centres according to the political character of their presiding *agrupaciones* after the 2016 student elections**

Independent Left (red), *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* (blue), *Macrismo* (yellow), Non-aligned (green)



- |   |  |    |  |
|---|--|----|--|
| 1 | CEABA: Student Centre of the Faculty of Agronomy.                          | 8  | CEFO: Student Centre of the Faculty of Odontology.                 |
| 2 | CEADIG: Student Centre of the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism. | 9  | CEfYB: Student Centre of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry. |
| 3 | CECE: Student Centre of the Faculty of Economic Sciences.                  | 10 | CEfYL: Student Centre of the Faculty of Philosophy.                |
| 4 | CECEN: Student Centre of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences.        | 11 | CEI: Student Centre of the Faculty of Engineering.                 |
| 5 | CECIM: Student Centre of the Faculty of Medicine.                          | 12 | CEP: Student Centre of the Faculty of Psychology.                  |
| 6 | CECSO: Student Centre of the Faculty of Social Sciences.                   | 13 | CEV: Student Centre of the Faculty of Veterinary.                  |
| 7 | CED: Student Centre of the Faculty of Law.                                 |    |  |

Image 8

As evidenced throughout this thesis, this issue did not keep the FUBA from articulating intense campaigns of mobilisation with its student movement and the community around it throughout the time of my fieldwork. But perhaps, thinking in terms of the larger pros and cons of a student body organising through elected representatives, it did highlight issues of legitimacy which may not have appeared in a more freely organised movement. The mode of organising through *agrupaciones* seemed to provide great logistical efficiency and debate in terms of agonisms and antagonisms, yet it elicited questions of legitimacy for some. It should also be said though, as I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, that this debate played out at the level of the FUBA as a student organisation, rather than at the larger level of its student movement and the effects in the community around it, where participants could freely adhere to any particular initiative, be it of a single *agrupación* or of the FUBA as a whole.

### **Conclusion: A Repertoire of Intervention through Politics and Aesthetics**

As highlighted through the trajectories of the FUBA and the communities around it, we can appreciate the significant social, economic, and political consequences that the struggles of social movements and their communities have had in shaping the contemporary political landscape of Argentina, and the wider region of Latin America. In the case of Argentina, its turbulent political history seems to have drawn a path for social movements and social organisations to become protagonists of the political stage. Through times of development alongside governments; through violent repression in episodes of military dictatorships; through the voids left behind by the abandon of neoliberal governments; in their support for popular causes, their rejection of further interventionism, and their disgust towards neoliberal capitalism, in Argentina and internationally, these organisations seem to have accompanied the social life of the country with their constant intervention in the political field. These groups have, out of necessity, blurred and crossed the boundaries between those who look and those who act (Rancière 2009), and have made processes of emancipation a way of life (Zibechi 2012).

In the arduous struggle between these social groups, the political establishment, and the capitalist forces; in the overlapping territory, and in the tensions and contradictions between them, developments seem to have been

generated for the creation and imagination of new forms of social practice and organisation, as is the case of the FUBA and its student movement. As Rancière suggests, the conditions of possibility lie in the contradictions between regimes, where the essence of politics resides in acts of subjectivization, that separate society from itself by challenging the natural order of bodies in the name of equality, and polemically reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible in the process (Rancière 2004).

These acts of emancipation, as forms of dissensus (Rancière 2010), in which the FUBA's community has been involved in, have marked its trajectory. In the processes unfolding all the way from its creation - through the episodes of dictatorship and State Terrorism, through the 2001-2002 crisis, and through the periods of *Kirchnerismo* and the shift to *Macrismo* - we can consider how its members have played an active role in defining themselves as political agents, and in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible which informs the FUBA's student movement today. This trajectory allows us to consider how changes in the forms of performing, doing and making, and intervening politically that have appeared through the struggles of FUBA's communities have become embedded in what we could call a repertoire of political action and protest for the FUBA today. And the importance of such a repertoire of political action lies in allowing the FUBA an array of political and aesthetic practices for intervening in the political field - through which its members continue to generate a process in which political subjects extract themselves from the dominant categories of identification and classification by treating a wrong and attempting to implement equality (Rancière 2004).

In this sense, the FUBA's trajectory seems to have provided it with an imaginary of elements, upon which current members of the FUBA can revive and draw according to their current political agenda, and which conforms a set of political and aesthetic practices that, regardless of the political direction of a particular member or *agrupación*, seemed to be shared across the student movement. I go on to outline in greater detail what I considered to be the most relevant fields of political and aesthetic practices in this repertoire in the following chapters. To introduce them briefly here, we can consider that the FUBA's history seemed to have defined the public university as a public space, with students as political agents, and with the student movement occupying this space as their



right. It defined the need for academic knowledge to be involved as part of the political practice of students, not simply for knowledge to stay in classrooms, but to be taken outside of the university into the streets and to be used as a tool of political intervention. The FUBA's trajectory also seems to have defined a demand for collective memory of the victims of State violence, during periods of dictatorship and democracy, in Argentina and internationally; carrying with this notion a wide and combative understanding of Human Rights. This trajectory also seems to have played a part in creating a network of forms of anti-establishment expressions (music, theatre, literature, etc.) and venues for their performance, for non-commercialised culture, in which students participate to this day, that conform other sites for the circulation and diffusion of the student movement, where the boundaries of the student movement blur into the everyday lives of their participants and into the rest of the City of Buenos Aires. Finally, we should be aware that this is a process which is always active, in which these practices are wielded according to the agonistic and antagonistic relations that exist within the FUBA and beyond, and thus a flexible form of remembering the episodes embedded in the FUBA's trajectory is always enacted according to the present.

## V. Occupation

### Introduction

Occupation in the *Universidad de Buenos Aires* (UBA) by the political organisations or *agrupaciones* within the FUBA, and the student movement at large, is a matter of everyday life. The term occupation should be understood throughout this chapter as a constant presence of the student movement inhabiting the space of the University, yet at the same time differentiated from the recurring episodes of *toma*, literally meaning “take”, where faculties are taken over by actors of the student movement as living quarters for possibly days at a time as a means of protest. Here, I refer to occupation in the physical sense of the word, but also in its perceived affects. Occupation through the visuals inside and around the faculties, in the teaching rooms, in the corridors, in the language of students, and even in the official programmes of certain courses. Occupation in the form of the actual bodies of *militantes* – militant students working, discussing, handing out flyers, and recruiting others at the tables of their *agrupaciones*, called *mesas*, which are spread across the halls of the different faculties – and in the form of bodies that are remembered through images and signs, those that live in collective memory, since in almost all of the 13 faculties in the UBA memorials are displayed, depicting the faces of students who were disappeared during the last dictatorship (*Dictadura Civico-Militar* 1976-1983) or during periods of democracy, taking on a revered importance. Occupation that is encountered in an almost omnipresent state when walking along the corridors of the faculties, in the shape of banners and posters, referred to as *carteles*, that signal the demands of the different *agrupaciones*, or invite students to attend a certain demonstration, campaign or event. It is found as if it were a tapestry or skin which covers the walls of the university, changing with time and season, signalling different demands and messages according to the agenda of a particular moment. It can also become embodied in the endless succession of events organised independently by the *agrupaciones* in the form of assemblies, lectures, debates, screenings, parties, barbecues, and many more combinations, usually taking place in the classrooms and halls inside the faculties or the streets

around them. Disputed as this occupation may be by the different *agrupaciones* within the university, the students themselves, or the university's institutional mechanisms and authorities, it is useful to consider the UBA to be inhabited by the student movement. To picture this occupation as complete. To realise that it is in these spaces in which the student movement lives and is reproduced. And from here to think of the consequences that such an occupation may entail, the lived meaning and experience it may signify for the student community and beyond.

In this chapter I discuss how students belonging to the FUBA's student movement interpret the practice of occupation. Starting with the meaning that they attribute to the constant occupation of university spaces, and in certain instances, public spaces. Following on to how they perceive this practice to have been constructed over the years to signify an elemental part of public university life in Buenos Aires. As well as the effects that this state of occupation in terms of infrastructure, bodies, language, visuals, etc may have on students, whether they are actively involved in the student movement or not, given the role that such occupation may have in drawing in students who may not already be involved in activist or militant activities towards the FUBA's initiatives. Also considered is the degree to which occupation by the student movement extends into the official teaching materials in the form of programmes and coursework, and the role that the many members of the teaching staff who were previously involved as activists in the FUBA during their university studies may have. Then there is the consideration as to what degree, if any, university authorities influence the occupation of university by students for their own agendas, as well as the possible disagreement of some students toward the constant state of occupation, taking into account existing differences within the 13 faculties of the UBA. Furthermore, I explore how students would imagine the UBA without this occupation, to highlight by way of contrast how fundamental occupation appears to be to their university experience. Finally, discussion is opened up to explore what other sites, apart from the university, students may also consider to be occupied and inhabited by the student movement, as branches or extensions. As a resulting point, I reflect on the degree to which the university experience in the UBA itself is constructed by the student movement and its occupation of everyday life there; to picture the university itself as a product of the student movement, as the result

of the tensions between the push and pull, and the constant conflict and negotiation that occurs in the midst of a state of occupation.

Throughout the chapter I propose to think of occupation in relation to the category of space as theorised by Doreen Massey and Henri Lefebvre. Thus, while thinking of occupation by the FUBA's student movement, we can conceive a notion of space that includes the physical, mental, and social space: "the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias" (Lefebvre 1991: 12). To consider the space in and around the UBA as the product of interrelations. To understand space, and its occupation, as the sphere which facilitates the existence of multiplicity in the sense of a contemporaneous plurality for the student movement. As well as to recognise space as always under construction, never finished and never closed (Massey 2005). One hopes that this approach may help us turn our attention not only to certain elements as things occupying the university space, but rather to how occupation may shape the production of space itself in the UBA. Since as Lefebvre suggests, social space, as a social product, may work as a tool for the analysis of a society (Lefebvre 1991).

### **Understanding the Meaning of Occupation.**

Upon first arriving to the UBA as an outsider, the state of occupation of university spaces seemed the most striking. It was a feeling that remained with me during my first weeks of fieldwork; its presence was materially overwhelming; and though I could feel this occupation around me, its inner codes and symbols were not immediately accessible. As time went on, however, this feeling was replaced by a familiarity towards its presence. Occupation appeared then like a constant reminder, interwoven in the fabric of the UBA, of an entity (the student movement) that lived within those spaces and which had at some point come to inhabit the university as a sort of host that allowed it to live on. If as Lefebvre argues, a social space can be decoded and read through specific codes which members of a society may have (Lefebvre 1991), to what spatial codes did students who had experienced this distribution of things since the start of their



university experience, or perhaps even earlier in their *secundario* (high school) studies, refer when speaking of occupation? According to Rancière, the principal work of politics is the configuration of its own space; intervening in a space to transform it into the space for the appearance of a political subject: here, students. The political must first re-configure space, what is to be done in space and what is to be seen and named in space (Rancière 2010). In interviews with participants in my research we talked about the meaning that this constant presence had on their everyday university life. How did students envisage the re-configuration of the university space into the space of the FUBA's student movement?

Among the students with whom I spoke, notions of appropriation, taking back, defending, or claiming a territorial space as symbolic came up regularly, echoed in the language used among students, particularly *militantes*, and emphasised in their political activities.

Mora, a history and anthropology student who is a UJS-PO militant and had recently been appointed as the FUBA's gender secretary, having previously been president of the CEFyL for a year, explained it like this: "The occupation of the university's panorama in spatial terms on behalf of the *agrupaciones* is something that we were able to recover after the dictatorship." It appeared to be very important for her to highlight that this practice was carried out regardless of the political differences among the many *agrupaciones* within the FUBA. She emphasised the performance of occupation by *agrupaciones* across the whole political spectrum, all the way from the right wing *Franja Morada* to the Independent Left. As she stated, "even from the 80s and 90s with the *Franja Morada*, it was as if young people reappropriated the university space and claimed it as political", referring to the return of democracy after the end of the last military dictatorship in 1983.

While acknowledging certain differences in the degree to which the practice of occupation is carried out in the 13 faculties of the UBA, depending on the *agrupaciones* present or the local university authorities, she mentioned that "from a symbolic point of view [occupation] is very powerful". "Because [as a student] you have a diversity of *agrupaciones* from which to choose, which are visible, and which have their own space. And you know that if you go to that space



Image 10. "Let all of those who love this people rise". Posters accompany a *mesa* belonging to the Peronismo/Kirchnerismo *La Cámpora* in the Faculty of Philosophy (FFyL). The "V for victory" sign is a common symbol of Kirchnerismo.

and speak to those people, they will be promoting a certain political position about reality, which symbolically is very important". Adding that occupation "implies a use of space that doesn't exist in other educational contexts".

Another insight which helps in understanding the meaning of occupation for the FUBA's members comes from Maria, who as a student in the UBA was an active member of the Independent Left organization MST. She expressed its significance as coming "from the foundations of the militant tradition in the UBA". Saying: "For me, what is expressed through this permanent physical presence is very telling of the identity of the UBA as a political space and a place for political intervention. Expressed not only through the activities organised by the different *agrupaciones*, but even in the contents of course programmes, the political positions of deans and teachers, relationships between faculties [...] In all, it serves as a photograph of the political identity of the University of Buenos Aires". An identity which according to her, "defines faculties as places for political intervention". Maria found in occupation "a very rich element" that was "intrinsic to the UBA".

Indeed, as Zibechi argues, one of the main shared characteristics of radical Latin American social movements is their territoriality based in spaces that have been recuperated as the result of long lasting struggles (Zibechi 2012). This sentiment was perceived in many informal conversations held with other students taking part in the FUBA's initiatives. Whether they were members of a political organization or acting as independent students, there seemed to be an agreement that through occupation a material and sensorial appropriation was being signalled. A brief example may be found in a conversation I recall with Jorge. He was a student from Chile who had previously been involved in the Chilean student movement before moving to Buenos Aires to pursue his degree in philosophy, owing to the lack of public universities in Chile. As a student in the UBA, he regularly participated as an independent in the FUBA's activities. One day, while sitting at the CEFyL's cafe in the basement of the Faculty of Philosophy, where a mural depicting Salvador Allende had been painted by the students on one of the walls, along with other leftist figures killed for their political activity, Jorge told me, "I don't know if its nostalgia I feel every time I look at that mural because it reminds me of Chile. On the other hand [...] I feel we can truly





Image 11. Mesas of Independent Left *agrupaciones* sit empty at night in the Faculty of Philosophy. These spaces are heavily transited during day-time and serve as sites of encounter for students.

say that this faculty is ours, and that we are the ones who have built it the way it is. And I would not be able to say the same in Chile or perhaps in many other places in Latin America.”

Taking on board these opinions, it could be argued that beyond political differences in the perspectives of the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA, occupation of the university space constitutes a shared practice. An aesthetic and political practice; insofar as it is concerned with the sensible definition and intervention of a political space, that students very frequently tie to notions of a reappropriation; of that which was forcibly taken away, and which is understood to have been transmitted through different generations. Occupation also appears to be considered by students to be inscribed in a larger tradition that goes so far as to define the university space as political, and defined by students. And this is a key point to consider since as Massey argues, thinking the spatial in a particular way can be an essential element in the imaginative structure which enables in the first place an opening up to the very space of the political (Massey 2005). So in thinking that from the outset the university space is considered by students to be a political ground, we can begin to picture the occupation of it as a fundamental aspect of public university life.

From these testimonies we can also understand occupation to be a basic element of the spatial practice of the FUBA. A spatial practice understood as Lefebvre describes it: that which secretes a society's space, propounds and presupposes it in a dialectical interaction, producing it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it (Lefebvre 1991). And if, as Lefebvre argues, every society produces its own space, it would appear that occupation may well be the means through which the FUBA has produced and continues to produce its space.

From these brief testimonies we get a clearer picture of the meaning that the lived state of occupation in the UBA holds for members of the student movement. Yet as Lefebvre argues, the creation of a social space and its practice by a society does not appear at a single moment, but rather is part of a constructive process which facilitates social continuity. So as a brief exercise we may also ask: Where do students understand this aesthetic and political practice to come from? In their eyes, how do they perceive it to have been constructed



Image 12. “Let’s organise to face Macri’s adjustment plan. Down with the vulture pact.”. Carteles of various agrupaciones express the demands of the student movement towards the beginning of the 2016 academic year.

over the years? When did such a state of affairs begin to present itself? The main concern here would not be to trace an exact trajectory of occupation of university spaces in the student movement, as it may be understood differently by the many agents within the FUBA. But rather, to tease out the role that students today interpret as their own in the continuation of this practice.

As a sociology student once told me jokingly: “You could attempt to write the ‘Bible of the FUBA’. With the different gospels of ‘the FUBA according to such and such political organization’ [...] You would never end!” he laughed. Certainly students and *agrupaciones* in the FUBA have come and gone, some leaving behind greater traces and some perhaps unnoticed today, yet each with its own interpretation of matters. So presuming to write an all-inclusive account of occupation in the UBA by the student movement is certainly a daunting, if not impossible task. Still, common threads may be found among the expressions of the FUBA’s members which are informative.

I turn here to an excerpt from an interview with Alba, a former member of the FUBA in the 1990’s, who was now a teacher in the *Ciclo Basico Comun* (CBC, Common Basic Cycle), the mandatory first year of study at the UBA. In her words she gives a clear account of images which commonly circulate in the student imaginary as being predecessors of the occupation that is experienced today. This was her response when asked from where she understood the practice of occupation to come:

“I think that the University of Buenos Aires, together perhaps with the University of Cordoba, Rosario, or La Plata, is a university with a political militancy that goes back decades”. “We’re talking about universities, which being the country’s historic universities [...] are also the expression of the political history of the country”. “Ever since [...] the Cordoba students in the *Cordobazo* of 1969, through to students of the University of Buenos Aires and *La Noche de Los Bastones Largos* in 1966, through the level of political intervention of the University of La Plata, the students of Rosario in the *Rosariazo* and the rebellion of Villa Constitucion during the *Rodrigazo*...”. “They’re universities which have had such political intervention, not only in terms of students there, but universities united as political entities, through what we could consider the most important episodes of class struggle in the country. Not only have students in these



Image 13. “Subscribe to the *Prensa Obrera*. 200 pesos for 6 months, 340 pesos for 1 year.”. An invitation to subscribe to the *prensa* of the UJS-PO at their *mesa* in the Faculty of Philosophy. In 2016 a year’s subscription would have cost around fifteen pounds sterling.

universities intervened politically and taken the streets for their own educational demands, for example the public education budget, etc., but they have intervened in the greater general struggles of the country.”

Though these are the words of a former student who is now a teacher, they illustrate the notion of what is perceived to be an inherited practice of militancy and occupation on behalf of the student movement. Indeed all of the episodes of rebellion and repression she mentioned, are, among many others, known by heart by practically all of the members of the FUBA and almost certainly by all active *militantes*. These are dates deeply inscribed in the collective memory of the student community and it is a matter of everyday language to hear these references being thrown around in the activities of the student movement.

Also representative of the conversations of students that one could hear around the activities of the student movement is the opinion of Manu, a philosophy student in the last year of his degree who had been president of the CEFyL for the past two years: “Here (in Argentina) we have public universities because students have organised themselves in defence of public education. Resisting against dictatorship, resisting against all governments, etc. And this is all part of a historical process that began with the University Reform of 1918, which was followed by a whole process of organization”. “And I think that this level of consciousness is demonstrated with each passing year.” Manu explained this process as we sat down for an interview outside the occupied printing press of *AGR-Clarín*, which had been taken by unionised workers after employers tried to close down the plant forcing a lockout<sup>24</sup>.

Just as Manu mentioned, the University Reform of 1918 is where consensus would largely lie for students in order to begin explaining the student movement and its larger political activity. In fact, the FUBA was only founded as a student body a few years before the reform, and as Alba noted, “the University Reform of 1918 began with a student rebellion from the Student Federation of Cordoba”, after “they mobilised in favour of the democratization of the teaching and learning process.” As such, it can be argued that members of the FUBA

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<sup>24</sup> The involvement of the FUBA’s student movement in the *AGR-Clarín* campaign is detailed at greater length in Chapter 8, Spaces of Circulation and Diffusion Outside of University.



Image 14. Carteles of various agrupaciones stand in contrast next to each other at the Faculty of Philosophy. Through them, sectors of the student movement hail different figures. “Love beats hate” reads the legend next to the image of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, by *La C mpora*. “The building rock of our work is youth; in it we deposit our hope.” reads the quote of Che Guevara, cited by *La Mella*.

usually trace a long and contentious history of occupation of university spaces since 1918. Recognisably, with breaks in periods of dictatorship and overwhelming political violence, but perhaps even then, with university spaces defined by its absence and prohibition.

Admittedly though, the *Argentinazo* of 2001, which led a coalition of Independent Left *agrupaciones* to win the *conducción* of the FUBA until today, marked the beginning a period of occupation on a greater scale, where students signalled increased involvement with political life outside of university matters; the time of the self-proclaimed *FUBA Piquetera*. Whereas, they recalled, from the “return of democracy” in 1983 until 2001, the FUBA under the *conducción* of *Franja Morada* would be present in university spaces, but usually limit its field of action to purely academic matters, and as an UBA classmate once told me “throwing student parties”.

Yet even in the years from 2001 to 2017 students recognised that there were variations in the intensity of occupation and political activity on behalf of the FUBA, as if speaking of rising and receding tides, or periods of latency. If we look at timelines, clearly, these periods have been correlated to the policies being implemented by the Federal Governments in turn, and the student movement’s responses to these. As Manu recalled, “There were a few years [...] from 2011 to 2015, where nothing happened. No one took to the streets to defend anything [...] But there was a whole level of work underneath which was carried out by the *conducción* of the FUBA, so that if any government came along wanting to intervene with public education, this whole thing would explode. Said and done. This government (the Macri administration) came along, they wanted to intervene in the university and you had seventy thousand people on the streets on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May (2016). Something that hadn’t happened since 2001. Epic, very strong. So imagine if one day they come and try to set tariffs on public education [...] it would be the Argentine revolution!” he laughed. “Because people understand it to be their conquest”.

Perhaps here also lies a fundamental nerve explaining the occupation of university spaces and their larger collective imagination. Adding to the previous insights of re-appropriating a space, occupation could be understood as defending a conquest that has been hard fought by the student movement over





*Image 15.* The interior of a classroom at the Faculty of Philosophy, painted by students. “Anti-capitalist university. The future is ours.”, reads a poster of the MST. “Enough of profiting, adjustment, and privatisation. A greater budget for education, not foreign debt.”, reads the poster of *Izquierda Socialista*. Students may sit in classrooms like this up to four hours at a time for lectures.

the years, as a constant guarding mechanism for the spaces it inhabits. Indeed, Lefebvre proposes that any social existence without its own social space would be a strange entity. Perhaps it is the necessity of the FUBA not only to produce such a space, but to also keep it in the face of episodes that mount pressure upon the student movement and public university life. Which also leads us to think of the occupied university as having a representational role of the rights to the university as a public space, and to the city or society at large, that members of the FUBA may envision for themselves. As a representational space described by Lefebvre: redolent with imaginary and symbolic elements which have their source in the history of a people and in the history of each individual belonging to that people (Lefebvre 1991).

From the previous testimonies we get the sense that today's members of the FUBA seem to situate themselves within a sort of genealogical tree of protest, mobilisation, and occupation that considers past movements and organisations before them. They seem to emphasise the layering of transmissions from past generations. In a telling way, such a tree was literally depicted in a mural made by students on a stairway in the Faculty of Philosophy, with episodes of social struggle as the ones mentioned by Alba and Manu rising up from previous roots and branching out into further events. Whether the genealogical tree is real or imagined may be harder to say; if real, certainly its branches are nuanced, segmented, and twisted. But perhaps that is not the main concern here, insofar as members of the FUBA may consider themselves to be a part of it. As long as the resulting situation and antagonistic relations within the FUBA and beyond provide students with a reason to continue the practice of occupation.

We may further consider other, more immediate, reasons and motives for the continued occupation. As other participants in my research commented, without referring to the long historical episodes previously mentioned, occupation appeared as something that students simply do. Part of a larger culture which some are more interested in exploring than others - certainly the *militantes* - but which may still be interesting, attractive, and fun to take part in for the student community at large, even if one is not continuously looking to be involved in political activities. Positively, some students may simply see in occupation an embedded spatial practice that is today part of university life. For as Lefebvre suggests, the past leaves its traces and becomes inscribed in space, as space is



always a present space, which presents itself with its associations and connections. And thus, production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as separable ideas (Lefebvre 1991).

It should also be said that apart from temporalities of occupation and action on a larger scale through the years, as Manu commented, there are yearly cycles of occupation with higher and lower points in its expression. The lowest points in activity are understandably when the UBA is in vacation periods: from December through to mid-March for the summer holidays, and for the month of July for the winter holidays. Higher points in activity and occupation occur towards the end of March, with the beginning of the first academic period of the year together with the commemorations of the 24<sup>th</sup> of March (*Día de la Memoria*, Day of Memory); as well as during the beginning of August, with the beginning of the second academic period of the year. The highest points in occupation occur during the annual FUBA Congress, which usually takes place in mid to late June, and particularly during the elections for the student centres of the 13 faculties of the UBA, which take place during late August and October.

### **Occupation and its Effects**

From the few testimonies above, I have tried to convey a sense of the understood meaning of occupation shown by members of the FUBA, and where they understand this practice to come from. It is now convenient to turn our attention to the effects that this state of occupation has on the lived experience of being a student at the University of Buenos Aires. Effects understood in the broad sense of how the occupying presence of the student movement may affect those who study there as well as the university itself through the exposure to the elements that the student movement presents. In all, the embodied consequences that such occupation may entail for those transiting these spaces, thinking of the affects that may be transmitted in such an encounter and exchange among students, student movement, and institution, allowing us to consider how political subjectivities or processes of political subjectivization may be developed through the exposure to all that the student movement's presence may display in its sensible distribution. For indeed, as Massey argues, spatiality may be, from



Image 17. Militant members of various *agrupaciones* campaign by speaking to students around the Faculty of Philosophy, in the midst of yearly student elections. Encounters such as these are humorously referred to as an inevitability by students.

the beginning integral to the constitution of identities, including political subjectivities. Since identities, entities, the relations between them, and the spatiality which is part of them are all co-constitutive (Massey 2005).

As a friend once commented of the omnipresent inhabitation of the University of Buenos Aires by the student movement: “You cannot ignore it. You simply have to come face to face with it at one point or another. Whether you want it or not. And if you’re not the one to approach it, it will approach you”. Indeed, this comment can be taken quite literally, as upon entering a faculty of the UBA one immediately finds the variety of *mesas* from the different *agrupaciones*, and almost assuredly if you happen to pass near one of them, a *militante* from that organisation will approach you and at least hand you a flyer for you to take, or offer to sell you their *prensa*. And from there, as Mora mentioned in her account, you may quickly end up in deep discussion about the political characterisation of reality they have, you may be invited to one of their events, you may take home their particular *prensa*, you may just take the flyer, look at it and dump it a few steps away, or simply reject it. But the encounter has happened, and in one way or another it has affected you.

At a very basic level these were interactions that I saw day in and day out when carrying out participant observation along with *militantes* of different *agrupaciones*, inside or outside the University. Reactions from students were mixed and wide-ranging. Less common were those willing to engage in deep political discussion for over a few minutes; this owing more, I believe, to the likelihood that students are already familiar with the political perspectives of the different *agrupaciones*, at least along broad strokes, or perhaps because they were on their way to a class, but also possibly due to a lack of interest. Amongst those who decided to engage in deeper conversation over a certain issue or event were those who agreed with that particular organization’s take on things, or those who disagreed but were still up for a discussion. And after these encounters of disagreement, it was not uncommon for the student militants I was with to tell me with a smile and a proud tone in their voice “*Bueno, igual le pase la prensa!* (Well, I still sold a *prensa* to him/her!)”, though admittedly, other encounters ended up in dry disagreement. The shorter encounters where flyers or other bulletins were freely handed to students were the most common, and students would usually take these as they passed by.



Image 18. “Let’s stop Macri’s hand. *El Colectivo*, including *Kirchnerismo* and *La Mella*, do not confront him. Let’s take the path of a rebellion for education.” *Carteles* by the Independent Left *Nuevo MAS* argue for an “independent” student centre at the Faculty of Philosophy.

So what did students think of the effects of occupation on themselves or on their fellow students and the larger university environment? Was this presence and constant proximity of the student movement having a role in attracting students who might have been more “on the fringes” so to speak, of political activity and activism? Did it help the construction of new types of political identities for students? Did it make it possible for themselves or others to undergo a process of political subjectivization that transformed their political outlook and made them active in the student movement? Or on the other hand did it alienate students? What could all of this be doing? Again, I find it useful to turn to the voices of students themselves.

“I think that students may feel comfortable with the political positions being expressed in university spaces, they are permeable to those positions, and they may start to develop them. There is a receptivity on their behalf. And obviously, the unfolding of political approaches, be it through the interruption of a class, the interpellation of a student in a hallway, a *cartel* or a *mesa*, has a lot to do with the propagation of these political ideas finding their way across”, remarked Mora on a rainy day while busily working at the FUBA’s headquarters.

Adding to Mora’s insight, we might look at considerations including the background of students entering the UBA. I turn again to the words of Alba, who touched upon this point, saying: “the effect of occupation might also depend on where students are coming from. There are several *colegios secundarios* (high schools) in Buenos Aires that have a tradition of (political) organization. For example, two which have a direct relation to the UBA, the *Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires* and the *Carlos Pellegrini*”, “but the majority of *secundarios* are not like this”. So, admittedly certain students coming into the UBA may already be familiar with activist initiatives or may even be members of an *agrupación*, but for the majority such a state of occupation may present itself as more of a novelty. Remarking upon the change of scale in political activity for students entering the UBA, she commented: “Clearly... whether you had any political experience during your previous studies or not, university marks a qualitative jump up in the offer of militant activities, debates, etc. from what you may have had before.”

These two contributions give us a sense of the impact, at least in terms of the political offering, that occupation may have on students of the UBA. They give





*Image 19.* A public class takes place in the middle of a hallway in the midst of teachers' unions strikes. Sights like this are a common occurrence during strikes. Students and teachers take desks and chairs from classrooms to assemble in hallways or streets.

us accounts of exposures that may lure students into the political field of activity. Processes of familiarization towards a political discourse and identity that can play a role in attuning students towards a political frequency being expressed by the student movement; in any direction within the wide array of perspectives on offer and which a student may choose to identify with.

To illustrate some of the actual paths and dynamics of involvement through the presence of the student movement in the university space, I'd like to present three examples. The first is that of Manu, whom I have previously mentioned. The story of his political involvement in the student movement, and later on in the PO, serves to illustrate an individual case in what we might characterise as one extreme: going from having no previous political involvement, to presiding the CEFyL, one of the most politically active student centres of the UBA, and becoming one of the most visible characters within the structure of the FUBA himself. I present part of his story here to picture such a journey.

Recalling his early days in the student movement Manu began: "It is very hard to study at any faculty in the University of Buenos Aires, and more so at the Faculty of Philosophy, without being crossed by the political debates.", "whether you want it or not, you're part of the political life of a faculty. A faculty which is truly politicized, from the minimal aspects like every day academic matters, all the way to discussions on national politics and governments. And I think that completely influenced me... since the CBC, when I started studying on the year that Mariano Ferreyra was killed... Mariano was a militant in the CBC. And that generated a commotion in the UBA, a commotion in the whole country, but particularly in the university and more so in the CBC's. Because suddenly, a *pibe* (local for young guy) who you could see all day long sitting there, going through classes speaking to students, organizing with teachers and students, is killed two meters away. I was studying at the CBC centre in La Boca and he was assassinated in La Boca (an economically marginalised neighbourhood in southern Buenos Aires)". "That was strong. After that I started asking myself loads of questions. I mean, political clarity only appears gradually with time". He reflected: "For example, in a first instance... I had some activity within *Kirchnerismo*. But, finally the experience and political debates ended up with me approaching the *Partido Obrero* (PO)". "And in a short time I started having a more lived experience, with greater knowledge of the student movement, of



*Image 20.* The interior of a classroom at the Faculty of Philosophy. “Unity for victory”, read posters of *El Colectivo*, while others announce the yearly congress of the FUBA, in April of 2016.

competing political orientations, etc.” And pointing to the foundational moment in his political militancy he ended “I consider myself to belong to the generation of Mariano Ferreyra... just like a huge part of the country is political heir to the episodes of the *Argentinazo*, well I started my militant activity out of the movement triggered by Mariano Ferreyra.”

Manu’s path through the student movement is illustrative in a number of aspects. One is the transformation from a detachment of political activity towards the innermost sphere of the student movement and its organization, all within the course of his six years of study at the UBA, which is the usual time it takes students to graduate. Also worth noting is his journey across different *agrupaciones*. Although Manu is now a member of the UJS-PO he admits having started his political activities through *Kirchnerismo* organisations. And indeed, this is not uncommon to see, as many members of Independent Left *agrupaciones* today acknowledge taking their first militant steps within *Kirchnerismo*, or even within *agrupaciones* such as *Franja Morada* – a telling aspect as it speaks of exchange and spillover among organisations and their environment. We see that once a student starts becoming attuned to the student movement and begins a greater approach into its gravitational field, he/she may well transit through different *agrupaciones* and political perspectives before settling into a particular one, or as we will see ahead, the student may decide to act independently from these organisations.

Another key aspect of Manu’s account is his emphasis on his militant practice being sparked by the assassination of fellow student Mariano Ferreyra. Here I’d like to point out the strong tie that this episode has with inherited notions of collective memory, political violence, and Human Rights, which play a fundamental role in student militancy today, discussed in depth in the chapter on collective memory. However, beyond links to the larger discourse on collective memory, I associate this aspect of Manu’s testimony with the practice of occupation and its effects, as Mariano Ferreyra was occupying the space of the UBA when Manu acknowledges first meeting him and sympathising with his figure as a *militante*. Indicative, as Mora remarked, of students becoming receptive to the political positions being promoted by the student movement through occupation, in order to develop their own characterisations later on. As a final note on the degree of involvement that Manu developed within his university



*Image 21.* “We must organise to defend public education.”, reads a *cartel* by *Nuevo Encuentro*. It hangs above a public class taking place during the evening at the Faculty of Philosophy, in the context of teachers’ strikes.

studies at the UBA, we might reflect on the following fact: His 25<sup>th</sup> birthday party, his last as a student, was promoted personally and through social media as an event of his *agrupación*, the UJS-PO. The party was labelled “*Secta Fest*”, in a mocking gesture towards criticism commonly aimed at his organisation of sectarian behaviour; whilst the food and drinks being consumed at the party were sold as a fundraising mechanism for the UJS-PO. We can even consider aspects of his private life such as his birthday party to have been occupied by a branch of the student movement.

For the second example I refer back to Jorge in order to illustrate two different things. One is how a student coming from outside Buenos Aires or Argentina, in this case Chile, might be interpolated into the local student movement through the occupation of the university space. And the other is his self-characterization as “independent”; not being a member of any political organisation, but frequently participating in a variety of events organised by both the individual *agrupaciones* and the FUBA itself.

Jorge described the effect of occupation in the UBA, the political possibilities it enabled, as well as his involvement in it, the following way: “Previously (in Chile) it was harder for me to carry out political activity because I was in a private school [...] and we can’t really speak about public education as we do here (in Argentina).”, “at the most I could pass on a flyer about a certain activity to a friend I knew, but very much underneath the table”, “so, It was shocking for me to arrive here, seeing papers all around university, everything! People discussing politics with you like ‘Ahhhh!’” he exclaimed and continued, “Why did I decide to get involved? Because my life can’t simply be reduced to my university degree. If I came to Argentina it’s because I’m carrying out a life plan, I don’t mean to simply study here and then go back to Chile [...] and in tune with that I can’t situate myself outside Argentine politics”. Reflecting on his decision to remain independent from any political organization he elaborated: “I’ve discussed and participated with many *agrupaciones*, but I didn’t feel the need to take a particular position.” “So until now my position is to carry out political activity through my academic programme, and I think that in this way I can have a greater impact (and) a greater degree of empathy with other independent students, who are in fact the majority. And I am comfortable this way”. Also, remarking on the level of compromise that entering a political organization would entail, he expressed not



*Image 22.* A permanent blackboard, mounted on a wall at the Faculty of Philosophy, serves to indicate the date for the next assembly of anthropology students.

having enough time to address specific party commitments due to studying and working at the same time.

As a second example, Jorge's insight allows us to illustrate another stance which students may take towards the student movement inhabiting the UBA, and another form of the effects which the presence of the student movement may have. Although Jorge had previously been involved in activist initiatives as a student in Chile, we can see that upon entry into the UBA, contact with the political organisations created greater scope for his political activity, which as he mentions, had been somewhat muted before. Also, in our conversations Jorge mentioned agreeing with a sector of the student movement, yet finding it hard to commit to a single political orientation out of the many present.

We can consider Jorge to illustrate political practices negotiated by many independent students, who are in fact the majority as he mentioned. It is not uncommon for *agrupaciones* across the whole political spectrum to invite independent students to participate in their particular activities, therefore, making it possible for students to attend events from different *agrupaciones* and to sympathise with them in one degree or another without having to commit to formal membership. We could however, also consider this as a sort of "courting" on behalf of the *agrupaciones* for students to ultimately join their ranks. Finally, a key point to look at is Jorge's comment on his decision to carry out his political practice through his own academic degree. This is indicative of a notion in which students do not necessarily suppose a separation of their academic programme and their relationships with fellow students from the political field, but rather may see their own degree as an opportunity through which they may carry out political activity; an aspect which is further discussed in the chapter on theory and political practice.

Until now we have looked at two different cases which exemplify different forms of effects and associations in relation to the occupation of the university space by the student movement. To conclude this section, I present the last example. This is the case of Pablo, a student at the Faculty of Agronomy. I include his case so we may also consider someone who may be unaffected or even indifferent to the spatial practice of occupation.

Pablo is a friend of mine, who I should say, was somewhat surprised to





Image 23. Militant members of different *agrupaciones* campaign around their *mesas*, speaking to students as they enter the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism, in the context of yearly student elections.

hear of my interest in studying the FUBA from the very beginning. “What do you want to look for here!?” he would constantly ask me in a joking manner when I saw him. I had met him two years before conducting my fieldwork and even from then he advised me against taking the FUBA as a case study; already that was telling of his perception of the student movement and of the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA. On several occasions when conducting participant observation, when I invited him to join me in attending a demonstration or cultural event organised by the FUBA, he would quickly reply by exclaiming “*Ni en pedo!* (Not a chance!)”, instead inviting me to meet somewhere else to drink *mates* or play chess. So in one of our chess meetings, when I asked him what he made of the constant state of occupation by the student movement and its *agrupaciones* he replied by saying: “Look, it’s not that I don’t care about the political state of the country or other situations. It’s not like I want to look away from all of it... it’s just that I don’t see this as the way of going forward”. Instead, Pablo seemed to emphasise a more personal focus on which to act upon.

A few aspects may be insightful about Pablo’s brief account. One is his position as a student in the Faculty of Agronomy. A faculty whose student centre had for years been presided by a local independent coalition (*Línea de Agronomía Independiente*), and which rarely entered a greater dialogue with other organisations presiding the majority of the student centres of the UBA. So although Pablo was aware of some of the measures and initiatives being taken at his faculty, as well as by the other *agrupaciones* within the student movement throughout the 2016 academic year, he was not fully up to date with the activities being carried out, which was indicative of a lesser degree of occupation in his faculty. However, the Faculty of Agronomy was not the only university space which Pablo frequented; in fact, he lived in the neighbourhood of Caballito, where the Faculty of Philosophy is located and would regularly go to study at the library in the Faculty of Philosophy, where he encountered its highly occupied space. So it seems as if his lack of interest in the student movement did not stem from him being unfamiliar to it, but rather out of personal convictions and individual practices. To add to this was his personal dislike for large crowds and loud atmospheres, which the student movement naturally seems to exude and which will inevitably come when dealing with the FUBA. As he stated humorously, “I can’t stand the loud *bombos* (bass drums usually played during



*Image 24.* Occupation spills onto the street of *Puán*, in front of the Faculty of Philosophy, as students prepare to join a march in demand of the *Boleto educativo*, in April 2016. This occasion marked the first time that a march for the *Boleto educativo* was mounted during the Macri Administration; weeks later the demand was amplified in a march of thousands of students.

rallies or demonstrations) in my ears and all that noise!”. Nonetheless, this does not mean that he was unfamiliar to the state of occupation, rather, as he let me know, he saw in it something that appeared to him as natural, and therefore was not of much interest, instead - ordinary.

So what can we take from these three examples? In order to close this section on the effects of occupation, I would like to make the following reflection. These are three separate accounts of experiences through university life at the UBA. Certainly they cannot encompass the infinite amount of experiences and interpretations that the student community, those actively involved in the student movement, or the political organisations as entities, would give to the spatial practice of occupation. And it is not my intention to presume that they do. Rather than narrow our perspective of the student experience and practice of occupations with these three accounts I attempt to open it up, allowing us to read between the lines and picture a dynamic of open relations between and across them. For, as Massey argues, in an open interactional space, there are always connections and juxtapositions yet to be made, or not, for not all potential connections have to be established (Massey 2005). And just as space is proposed as a process which can never be a completed simultaneity, the production and occupation of such a space by the FUBA may always have open ended consequences.

Certainly one cannot say that it is occupation by itself that causes students to become involved in activism. Rather, if we consider students' accounts of how this practice was constructed, occupation itself appears as a consequence of the many episodes of contention and struggle that the student community in the University of Buenos Aires and beyond, has undergone and continues to do so. It may still be those larger political and social episodes that ultimately shape students' perspectives today, but it is usually through everyday casual encounters and interactions that we experience larger political events and agendas. So it is useful here, as Massey recommends, to go beyond a notion of the university as an entity that is a closed “place”, separated from a “space” outside it; and from this larger perspective, to consider occupation as the result of forces and interactions that traverse such a spatial divide, connecting and articulating manifestations within university spaces with events occurring in the outside world, in the rest of Argentina, and internationally. For as Lefebvre



Image 25. The outside, and inside, of a classroom at the Faculty of Philosophy are completely covered by *carteles*; only chairs are visible through the windows. “White walls were the walls of the dictatorship”, expressed a student in an online thread, discussing the practice by students of putting up *carteles* on the walls of faculties.

argues, the hegemony of space may be observed on all planes, micro or macro, and in the interconnections between them (Lefebvre 1991).

In this light, I propose to see occupation as an aesthetic and political practice which today may be correlated with the involvement of students into the student movement. A practice which secretes the student movement's space, and acts as a mechanism that offers a nearby contact point for political theorizing and action. An accompanying presence inhabiting the university, with which students may choose to engage or push aside, but which may hardly go unnoticed.

### **Occupation in Academic Material**

Here I expand on another aspect of the notion of occupation: its presence and effect in the official course programmes and academic material being imparted at the UBA, the impact it has of entering the official curriculum of the university and the mechanisms through which this may happen. This can help us picture how occupation looms over the classes that are taught at the university, therefore broadening our understanding of the reaches of occupation beyond the physical and the discursive or symbolic, as it enters academic and institutional spaces. Through this reflection we can contemplate the degree to which the UBA itself as an educational institution can be considered to be constructed by the student movement and its occupation.

Indeed, as Mora once told me, the UBA's academic programme represents a point of contention between the student movement and the university's authorities, and at stake is the orientation of what kind of university students want. "There is a polarisation. Whether it's going to be us as students who form the basis of an independent academic direction, putting our formation and services in the hands of the community, of the working class, and of women, for example... Or if the academic programme will be placed at the service of private corporations." Given that we are here concerned with the exploration of physical, mental, and social space, we should recognise, as Lefebvre suggests, the active role of such a space in the production of knowledge and action, as well as in the reproduction of a certain hegemony (Lefebvre 1991). Which in turn,



*Image 26.* A public class takes place during the evening in a hallway at the Faculty of Philosophy, in the midst of teachers' strikes.

leads us to consider academic programmes as a battleground which the student movement also looks to occupy<sup>25</sup>.

Here I discuss three general ways in which we can consider the student movement to occupy the official academic programmes taught at the UBA. The first is through the government mechanisms of the university, which allows spaces for student participation and in which militant members usually take part. The second is through university teachers themselves, who may have previously been involved in the student movement or its activities, and now in their role of teachers draw on their political experience to guide their academic activity. The third is through what we may consider the shadow of the student movement; this is to say the unspoken ways in which its presence may influence academic material at the UBA in terms of what can or cannot be said or taught by a teacher, what teachers may deem “off-limits”. However, as I have acknowledged throughout this chapter, we should keep in mind differences that exist among the 13 faculties of the UBA, according to their local political profile and academic practice.

Starting with the occupation of the curriculum through the government mechanisms of the UBA, this can happen through the following process. The University of Buenos Aires states that in terms of the government of each of its 13 faculties: “each Faculty, possesses a government composed of the Dean and the Directors’ Council, which is made up of eight faculty members, four graduates, and four students, all of them elected through a direct and obligatory vote of their respective peers.” (UBA 2017). Similarly, students will be represented in the directive boards of each academic department through elected members.

The result of this dynamic is usually that militant students of the strongest *agrupación* within each faculty will be those sitting on the departmental councils, representing the student population. It could be said that these students will therefore push for the items in their political agendas to be discussed and

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<sup>25</sup>Although this chapter touches upon activities and practices which, as we will see, are concerned with theoretical and political aspects, discussion on independent theoretical-political activities of the FUBA’s student movement is elaborated upon in Chapter 6, Theory as Political Practice.





*Image 27.* A public class takes place during a fall evening in the street of *Puán*, directly in front of the main entrance of the Faculty of Philosophy, in the context of teachers' strikes.

implemented, or possibly on the other hand, overlooked. In theory, this means that the demands of students in terms of academic matters can be addressed within these spaces and considered through the official government mechanisms of the UBA. In practice however, many among the student movement consider that they are under-represented because of the way the representative system is designed, with students being the minority sitting at the boards.

Thus, a sector of the student movement poses these boards and their academic programmes as “a fundamental mechanism through which (university) authorities develop a privatising and negotiating orientation”. So, “in the majority of cases, the student movement assumes a position of confrontation regarding the changes in direction that university authorities want to implement in the academic programmes”. Indeed, in certain cases, the proposals made by the student movement have come out on the winning side in such a battleground, not only defending existing academic programmes, but also creating new alternatives for students through them. As one of the participants in my research illustrated with initiatives such as: “whether a certain degree should carry with it a gender perspective, or having *catedras paralelas* (parallel courses) for a certain subject, etc.”

For example, Federico, a History student in the Faculty of Philosophy explained that in his degree, students had succeeded in demanding parallel courses for a certain subject, which meant creating “four different courses on the same subject... in order to express the problem of Contemporary Western History”. Yet on the other side, Camila, an Odontology student and a friend of his, complained in disappointment that, according to her, “Odontology (was) the most ‘privatised’ faculty in the UBA”.

Clearly, there are variations according to the different faculties and the *agrupaciones* which might represent the student movement within them. The Faculty of Philosophy for example, is considered to be a stronghold of the Independent Left, but the Faculty of Odontology, as Camila stated, has a reputation among the student movement for its lack of political organisation. Yet this difference may also be owed in part to the professional characteristics of the courses which are taught at these faculties, as well as to the economic interests and actors at play within. Certainly, the contrast between faculties may be stark.



*Image 28.* A public class takes place during the evening at a major intersection, a couple of blocks away from the Faculty of Philosophy, in the context of teachers' strikes. Classes like these are directly set up by students and teachers, with cars circulating nearby.

To exemplify one such disparity, we may notice that Federico himself mentioned that in the Faculty of Agronomy “you can even find postgraduate programmes which were designed by Monsanto”.

From these accounts we may get a glimpse of the contending interests at play in the battleground for the hegemony of academic programmes and their construction. Admittedly, as we have seen, it is hard to generalise and say that occupation by the student movement happens in the academic programmes of all degrees or faculties. In some of them student *agrupaciones* may even choose to align themselves with the guidelines of university authorities and actively ignore the demands of large sectors of the student movement; however, as dysfunctional as some students may regard it to be, the logistical mechanism for their representation is still there. As we can observe, this space can be occupied and inhabited by the student movement as a channel for the construction of academic knowledge that may go against the attempted hegemony of university authorities and private interests.

We now move on to the occupation of the curriculum through the channel of teachers who were previously involved in the student movement, and who today draw on their political experience when giving classes at the UBA. As a note, I would like to highlight that this is not uncommon - the UBA is by far the largest university in Argentina, so naturally most of its faculty members are UBA graduates themselves, with many having had past experiences in the student movement, and openly acknowledging this fact. To illustrate this point, I find it helpful to return to Alba's case; previously a militant in the FUBA during the 1990s, now an active member of the PO and a teacher of Sociology of Argentine History in the CBC.

Asked about the relationship between her roles as a militant and a teacher, Alba spoke of these two sides being complementary, since according to her: “being a teacher enriches my experience as a militant, and at the same time, the fact that I am a militant allows me to problematize education and educational practice - not only from a pedagogical perspective, but also in terms of the importance of contents, of the importance of students' role in the process of collective production of knowledge.” And reflecting on how her militant practice informed her teaching activity she continued, “I think that the interesting part of it



*Image 29.* “Non-academic staff strike and mobilisation, closure of 5 sites.”, reads the *cartel* hanging above the entrance to the Faculty of Philosophy; while the hand-painted sign inside announces “Teachers’ strike, public classes.”. A banner from AGD-UBA, one of the teacher unions on strike, also hangs from the inside of the faculty, on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

is problematizing education [...] the educational practice, the university, the university context, the social context in which teaching practice is inscribed”. Highlighting the interconnectedness of her roles, she elaborated: “In a way it is a very dialectical process. As a militant you defend public education and fight for its improvement and problematization. And this fight is doubled if as well as being a militant you are a teacher.” From Alba’s words we get the sense of her two roles being co-constitutive, perhaps indistinguishable, as she considered her teaching activity to be inscribed in her political militancy, occupying the teaching room with her academic practice.

To briefly illustrate an example of the recurring transmissions between generations of the student movement, at another point in our conversations Alba recalled being taught about the *Cordobazo* by a teacher who had previously been involved in the student movement himself when this episode took place. “After all, it’s not the same to read about the *Cordobazo* in a book as to hear about it from someone who was actually there! And in a similar way for my students, it may not be the same for them to read about the *Argentinazo* than if I can tell them about it, having been there myself.” she smiled.

Granted, we cannot say that all teachers in the UBA share the same life histories or political and professional perspectives as Alba. There are in fact those who oppose the entry of the student movement into the teaching room; literally illustrated by not allowing militant students *pasando cursos* to enter and make an announcement and speak to their group for a few minutes. But it is undeniable that stories such as Alba’s occur, and in them we can see a layering of transmissions between generations, of past experiences being lived, theorised, and passed on to current students. Something that we could even assimilate to intergenerational storytelling, constituting another door through which the discourse of the student movement may come to occupy the curriculum being imparted at the UBA.

The last mechanism that I will discuss through which the student movement may affect the curriculum of the UBA, is the shadow of the student movement and the possible effects it may have in rendering certain issues as “speakable” or “unspeakable”; the informal allowance or delimitation on the distribution of the sensible that the spatial code of its occupying presence may



Image 30. Posters of the MST condemn Barack Obama's visit to Argentina on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, 2016; the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military coup of 1976. "Building the popular, feminist, and Latin-American left," read posters of *La Mella*, inside a classroom.

come to exert in the teaching rooms in the UBA.

As a student sitting in a classroom in the UBA, one is almost always surrounded, visually and materially, by the student movement's production. As a teacher, one is imparting a class in the same environment. Indeed, one may be speaking to students from a concrete desk which has an "A" for anarchism graffitied onto its side and a hand painted banner demanding "*Memoria Verdad y Justicia*" ("Memory Truth and Justice", alluding to the crimes committed during the last military dictatorship) above the green chalkboard. So the question emerges as to the possibilities such a state of occupation offers in terms of allowing a discussion that would be hard to imagine in other contexts. And further, to what may be considered off-limits given such a presence inhabiting this space. I briefly illustrate this dynamic with two examples.

I remember sitting at a seminar on Collective Memory, Human Rights and Forced Disappearance at the Faculty of Philosophy, when the question of how many people had been disappeared by the last military dictatorship came up. The teacher who on that occasion had been invited to give the seminar explained that methodologically, because of forensic technologies available and incomplete records on file (many destroyed by military dictatorship and ensuing governments themselves), the figure was impossible to determine with exactitude. Bearing this in mind he mentioned that the number of executions that could be forensically proved as an irrefutable fact were possibly less than 30,000. However, he mentioned personally considering the number to be 30,000, since the lack of evidence available was also a direct responsibility and part of the crimes of the military dictatorship and subsequent federal administrations. Yet he went on to discuss with the students what could happen if, as an academic, he publicly questioned that number, asking students whether it would be ethical or something that an academic should even attempt to question. Through the dialogue this academic explanation was accepted by all students in the seminar. Yet it may motivate us to ask what would happen if in other classrooms other teachers cast into question issues which are in themselves conquests of social organisations, Human Rights groups, and social movements such as the student movement. We may see in occupation a safeguarding of hard won recognitions earned through long and arduous struggles.



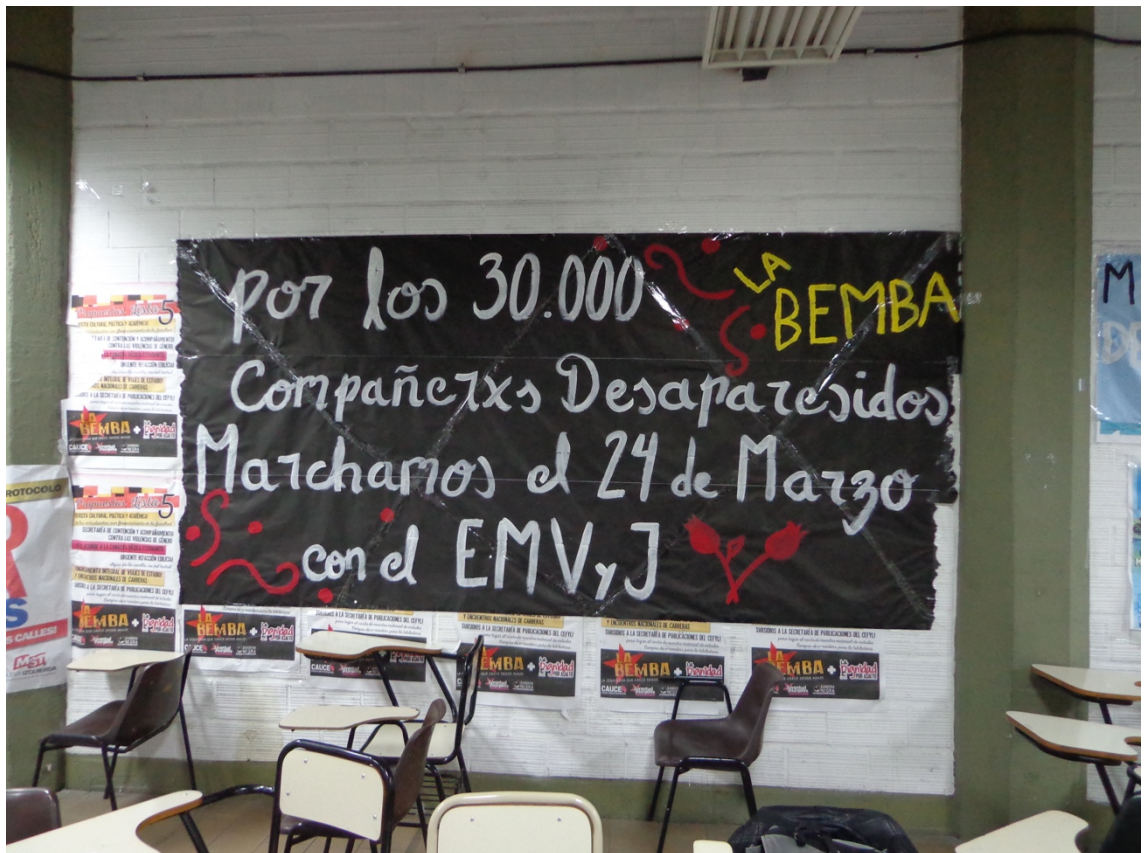


Image 31. “For the 30,000 disappeared comrades, we march with the EMVyJ (*Encuentro Memoria verdad y Justicia*) on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March”. A cartel by the Independent Left *La Bemba* demands that the FUBA march in the column headed by Human Rights organisations for the *Día de la Memoria*, on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

On the other side, I also recall experiences in which the occupation of the university space allowed types of discussion and theorising that may not otherwise have been considered in ordinary academic spaces. One such example happened when public classes were being held across faculties of the UBA in order to demand a wage increase for faculty members in April of 2016, amidst a large campaign of mobilisation by the FUBA. In this case, the street in front of the Faculty of Philosophy had been closed off by students and classes were being held directly on the surrounding streets, with students and teachers sitting in circles on a cold rainy day. On that occasion I was due to attend a class on General Problems of Aesthetics and I walked into the classroom unsure of whether the class would be held publicly. On the chalkboard was a message: "Public class, take a chair and meet on the street outside". *Clases públicas* (public classes), as a protest measure, typically begin with the teacher explaining why the class is being held publicly, and militants of the *agrupaciones* walking by to explain the action and the demands being made by the student movement. In this instance a woman who lived in the neighbourhood passed by angrily shouting at the classes that had assembled: "Get to work all of you!", before walking away.

I mention this case, because this brief encounter prompted a discussion which could be regarded as a masterclass on student mobilisation by the teacher who was imparting the class. Very calmly, and with the agreement of the students, she went on to theorise for over an hour why the passing woman had probably shouted at the students, and the reasons throughout the years for which measures such as public classes were taken up by the student and teacher community. I include this anecdote here because for me it clearly illustrated a theoretical discussion which one could not imagine happening had it not been for the occupation of the public space surrounding the university by the student movement.

From these two accounts we get a sense of how the presence of the student movement can come to occupy the classes being imparted at the UBA through its shadows; through its sensible delimitation of what can and cannot be said, in an unscripted manner. Through the spatial codes, to use Lefebvre's term, that its deployment supposes, incorporating verbal and non-verbal signs.

These three channels that I have discussed, present cases through which



*Image 32.* A public class takes place in the street of *Puán*, outside of the Faculty of Philosophy, in the midst of teachers' strikes. The encounter described in the previous page occurred in a similar setting.

the discourse of the student movement may inscribe itself into the students' distribution of the sensible through the academic programmes in the UBA. As members of the student movement consider - academic knowledge being imparted is not a neutral field, but a battleground for hegemony, contested in the physical, mental, and social space of the university. And as we have seen, be it through the official governing mechanisms of the UBA, through teachers' past experiences as militants in the student movement, or through the presence of the student movement as a shadow, encompassing the inside and outside of the classrooms, and possibly other channels, the student movement may make ground for its positions as it comes to occupy the theoretical as well as the material field of the University of Buenos Aires.

### **Confrontation Negotiation and Ambiguity in Occupation**

I now turn to another aspect of occupation: that of confrontation or negotiation in its manifestation. This is to say, the aspects of it that may happen "behind the curtain" and may not immediately meet the eye of a student at the UBA. We move to other battlegrounds which the student movement may also contest through occupation, yet in which there are also interests of university or faculty authorities at play in guiding the hand of certain political organisations; and we also consider the possible disagreement towards occupation that may exist on behalf of some students at the UBA. I argue though, that far from being an existential threat towards the student movement, these instances of confrontation and attempted co-optation actually serve to amplify activity from different sectors and *agrupaciones* within the FUBA who strive to promote their political directions; something that we might consider to sustain the student movement and its practice of occupation through the form of agonistic and antagonistic relations (Mouffe 2013; Laclau and Mouffe 2014). For as Lefebvre suggests, space, in addition to being a means of production is also a means of power and control, yet one which escapes in part from those authorities who would make use of it (Lefebvre 1991).

Following on, we should recognise the political interests from certain sectors of university authorities who wish to shape the student movement's



Image 33. Voting for yearly student elections takes place in the central foyer of the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism. Voting is closely scrutinised by militants of the different *agrupaciones* and by independent students who volunteer for the task.

actions within the different faculties, and thus use space as a means of power and control. This dynamic is usually expressed through attempts to influence the *conducción* of each student centre of the 13 faculties at the time of student elections, usually held in the months of September and October, when occupation of university space is at its highest visible expression.

As a teacher in constant interaction with faculty members and university authorities herself, in a work environment in which students may not be able to personally witness, I turn again to the words of Alba who explained how this mechanism of attempted co-optation usually occurs: “Maybe the direct influence of the deans (of each faculty) cannot be seen, but you will be able to see the influence of groups and organisations which are related to them”. Elaborating that if they shared a political outlook on university matters and where the university should stand on social matters, this influence would be expressed “through their student board members, graduate board members, faculty board members. Through teachers who will answer to the administration, through the very student organisations who do have a militant role in the student movement.” Stating: “that is how you will see, in a more subtle or crafty way, the official voice of authority”.

In keeping with Alba’s account, during my fieldwork I experienced two such instances of students’ alleged attempts of influence on behalf of faculty authorities, which I will describe here to illustrate this point. Both of them occurred through the process of student elections in 2016 for the *conducción* of the student centres.

The first case happened in the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism (FADU). In this instance, one of the participants in my research, Lucia, an architecture student who was a militant member of the *Tendencia Piquetera Revolucionaria* (TPR, a self-identified Trotskyist *agrupación* which during the last year had moved closer to the Peronismo/*Kirchnerismo* sector), mentioned that the dean of the faculty, who was believed to be aligned with *Macrismo*, had put together an electoral coalition named *Juntos por FADU*, in which a number of *agrupaciones* belonging to *Macrismo* as well as *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* had been grouped. This coalition was understood to be an attempt to win over the student centre of the faculty (the CEADIG), which had for years been presided over by an Independent Left coalition headed by the *agrupación La Corriente* (of



*Image 34.* During the week of student elections, flyers of different *agrupaciones* and their coalitions are found across the space of the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism. These usually outline the main proposals of the electoral coalitions.

a Maoist direction). However, a number of *agrupaciones* within the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sector had rejected this coalition accusing its alignment with *Macrismo*. The remaining *agrupaciones* were divided among a large Independent Left coalition which sought to retain its *conducción*, as well as other smaller minority coalitions.

This brings me to the idea of agonism (Mouffe 2013) as productive force for the student movement. Because the result of this scenario was that faced with such a challenge by the large and authority-backed *Juntos por FADU*, the rest of the *agrupaciones* became forced to increase their mobilisation in order to stand ground for their political agenda. The contrast even became evident in the promotional materials of the different coalitions, with *Juntos por FADU* having large plastic banners which were professionally printed, whereas the rest of the coalitions had hand painted banners made out of paper. In the end, the election result was very close but the Independent Left coalition headed by *La Corriente* managed to retain the *conducción* of the student centre.

The second case happened at the Faculty of Philosophy (FFyL). In this case, many of the participants in my research from different *agrupaciones* with whom I attended classes, pointed to the dean of the faculty, believed to be close to *Kirchnerismo*, assembling a coalition named *El Colectivo*. Similar to the case of the FADU, this was seen by a sector of the student movement as an attempt to gain the student centre of the faculty (the CEFyL) which had for years been presided by an Independent Left coalition headed by the UJS-PO. The *El Colectivo* coalition contained most of the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo agrupaciones* with the addition of *La Mella* (which during the last year had moved towards *Kirchnerismo*). So the Independent Left coalition, named *La Izquierda al Frente*, and *El Colectivo* were to battle head to head, whilst the rest of the *agrupaciones* remained as minority groups.

Here, agonistic relations also resulted in an eventful outcome, since such a scenario looked to split the votes of students half and half. So militant students of both coalitions campaigned arduously in the weeks prior to election, to ensure that their *agrupaciones* would attain the *conducción* of the CEFyL. The result was such a state of occupation in the faculty, that a music festival titled “*Sigamos de Pie*” (Let’s Continue on our Feet) was even staged by the *La Izquierda al Frente*





*Image 35.* Manu, acting president of the CEFyL, addresses the crowd of the *Sigamos de Pie* festival in-between bands. The crowd assembled in front of the stage, which was set up by students on *Puán* street.

coalition in an attempt to retain the *conducción* of the CEFyL. The festival as a large event in itself was set up in the street directly in front of the faculty and included the alternative rock band *Las Manos de Filippi*, famous among social movements for their political music. At the end of the intense election process *La Izquierda al Frente* won the student elections and retained the *conducción* of the CEFyL.

In both examples, the dynamic set out by Alba seems to illustrate itself with the influence of university authorities being channelled through support to *agrupaciones* that may sympathise with them. However, as we can see in both cases, these attempts did not have a silencing effect on occupation and activity on the rest of the student movement, but rather amplified it. It seems as if these episodes constantly trigger activity on behalf of the different sectors of the student movement. And through these cycles of internal hegemonic struggle, the temporality of the student movement is extended once and again, as a chain reaction, in such a way that the practice of occupation and mobilisation within the FUBA becomes a permanent process.

Also to consider in relation to confrontation regarding the occupation of the UBA by the student movement, is the opinion of those students who may not share a positive or tolerant view of occupation. There may be those who do not see in the constant presence of the student movement notions of appropriation as we have so far discussed, but rather they may view it as an obstacle in their daily academic activities. I should state though, that because of my position in the field researching action by the student movement, I was not very suitably positioned to encounter many testimonies which actively opposed the presence of the student movement in the UBA.

We should also bear in mind the possibility that economic and social sectors of the population that may tend to sympathise with a more politically conservative voice, may not be found so much in the UBA as in private universities in Buenos Aires. If they found the presence of the student movement an impediment to their studies and were financially able to access private education, it is possible these students would opt for such a choice. The opposite is also true, however, as many times I heard of students who openly admitted that, although they had the economic possibility to attend a private university,



*Image 36.* A barbecue and a bar were set up by the *conducción* of the CEFyL for the *Sigamos de Pie* festival. Food consisted of *bondiola* and *choripanes*, while the drinks on offer were sodas, beer, and fernet. These served as a fundraising mechanism for the activities of the CEFyL. Such a set-up is common for activities like festivals and parties organised by the FUBA.

they actively chose to carry out their academic preparation in the UBA because of the educational and political possibilities this allowed. Mora, for example, let me know of this decision during our conversations, stating that her studies at the UBA had not occurred as a necessity but as a conscious choice; indeed, she was one of the most active and visible militant students at the Faculty of Philosophy. A similar claim echoed around voices in the student movement when stating a defence of the public education system, affirming that students of the UBA were not “victims who had fallen into the public education system” but rather “students who actively chose this as an academic path”.

This seems to be reflected in the account of Santiago, a classmate and a militant, who in a conversation discussing possible negative reactions by independent students to occupation, once told me: “I think occupation of collective space in terms of its use and appropriation is pretty much naturalised across the UBA. Yes, at times it may become a little too much for students one or two weeks every year, generally in the period of student elections, when it becomes a pretty massive invasion of posters and flyers. In some faculties this can be quite impressive. But at the most people will say ‘enough with the flyers!’ or ‘yes, I already have this one!’, and it won’t go beyond that couple of weeks. And even then students who say this will do so in a funny tone. So no... I wouldn’t say that there is a generalised view that (occupation) interrupts the educational process”.

### **Picturing Occupation by Contrast**

We have so far discussed the spatial practice of occupation by the student movement in the UBA. In order to highlight what an elemental part of daily university life this practice constitutes for students, it was useful to pose them the question: What would happen without it? If it was taken away? To help us visualise the degree to which the process of occupation has been assimilated as a fundamental component of the UBA, I list some of their responses here.

“I just don’t think that it can be done” Jorge hesitated before affirming “it would be unimaginable.” Admitting that even though he had previously studied in Chile, where such a practice of occupation did not exist, it was now impossible



*Image 37.* “Proud to have fallen into public school”. The legend, stenciled on a street crossing during a demonstration, reflects the statement of actively choosing public education as a path for university.

for him to imagine university life without it. Indeed, his response was echoed by all the participants in my research, since in the words of Maria: “the inexistence of political elements in the faculties would imply the inexistence of everyday political spaces. Not only in the university, but the annulment of politics altogether.”

Another participant who had been a militant in the FUBA and later on went to teach at a private university once told me of the contrast she experienced: “I couldn’t believe that the walls there were so empty. There was not one poster to be seen! It made me want to put anything up there. I wouldn’t care what it said, but as long as there was something on the wall, please!” Affirming that all throughout her studies she had always thought of the presence of the *agrupaciones* as something “normal”.

These are a few gathered testimonies. However, I believe that they illustrate a shared sentiment among the student community at the UBA, which transcends political memberships and orientations. I remember being asked many times by students if my own university experience could be compared to such a state, to which I always answered that there was no possible comparison, that indeed to me it seemed unimaginable for such a state of occupation to have existed during my studies. It seems that our experiences had been diametrically opposed; apparently they could not picture university without the occupation, and I could not have pictured such an occupation before. An honest difference which gradually decreased as I became attuned to this spatial code, and at times made me question in the process how I would relate to a university context upon switching back and out of the occupation.

### **Conclusion: The UBA as Produced by the Student Movement**

To conclude this chapter, given the dynamics that I have discussed so far in terms of the practice of occupation by the student movement, I make the following invitation to explore a useful exercise in inverting the usual relationship which is assumed to exist between the UBA and the student movement. Taking into consideration the implications of asking ourselves the question: What if we



*Image 38.* Students dance at night to the rhythm of bands playing on *Puán* street, which has been transformed into a concert site, during the *Sigamos de Pie* festival.

see this not as a student movement stemming from a university, but rather a university stemming from a student movement? To consider the university and the university experience itself being produced from the occupation and inhabiting presence of the student movement; from the everyday tension, friction, and mobilisation occurring in the contest for hegemony among the university's institutional mechanisms and authorities, and the student movement. For us to consider the resulting university as produced from these exchanges, agonisms and antagonisms (Mouffe 2013; Laclau and Mouffe 2014); the university itself as a product of the student movement.

It is a question worth asking, since, as Massey argues, space does not exist prior to identities, entities, and their relations, for space is the product of interrelations. And according to this understanding, there is a relational contractedness in which identities, entities, and the spatiality in which these are situated are co-constitutive (Massey 2005). Therefore, no space or place, or student movement and institution as we may infer here, should be understood to be a coherent, seamless authenticity, but rather, processes which are always under construction, and which allow us to question the issue of their internal relations and negotiations.

This is a key aspect to consider since, when thinking of the FUBA and the *agrupaciones* within it, we are faced with a social movement which has found the resources to reproduce itself over an extended temporality in a variety of ways; through certain elements and resources existing outside the UBA, but in a very large part, I would argue, because of the spatial practice of occupation that it has developed in the university space. This is largely owing to the interplay of agonistic relations existing among the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA, as well as certain antagonistic relations of sectors of the student movement towards university authorities and forms of State and local governments. In this sense the FUBA's student movement has physically and theoretically come to occupy and inhabit the largest educational institution in Argentina, which allows it the material, theoretical, and spatial resources to sustain itself over an extended period of time, even in periods of reduced activity as those described by Manu, which to a greater or lesser extent may last for years.

Members of the FUBA always seem to refer to the student movement as a





*Image 39. Las Manos de Filippi play to the crowd, as the backstage area of the Sigamos de Pie festival is blocked-off from passing cars with chairs and tape. A number of students from the CEFyL were tasked with maintaining security for the event.*

permanent presence. And this might constitute a key difference with other social movements which tend to decrease in activity over an extended timeline. A difference in the sense that such movements may also use similar tools of mobilising and theorising, but which rarely have the material means to sustain themselves over longer periods of time. Yet in this case, occupation of the university space, seems to have provided the FUBA's student movement, the *agrupaciones* within it, and independent students, with a space for the possibility of a sphere of multiplicity and a point for meeting up of histories, as Massey suggests, which is vital in the production of political subjectivities. Through such an interrelation, it would seem that the body of the UBA has - as physical entity and institution - allowed the student movement to sustain itself, but not only that; in the process, the student movement has come to produce part of the university as an educational and political institution itself. As Rancière suggests, through emerging as active political agents in the delineation of their own space (Rancière 2010), students have thus ruptured through the established order of coordinates and through intervention have marked this space - in the functional and symbolic sense - as their territoriality.

This poses an interesting situation in which the UBA, a State funded institution, has been "hacked" so to speak by the FUBA's student, to operate against the State agenda many times. Admittedly, there is struggle and division within the FUBA's sectors over how to oppose the government, which is also expressed in the occupation of university space. Yet as of today, divided as students may claim the FUBA to be, such a scenario still allows the student movement, through a struggle for hegemony, to position the university as an educational institution against government and a privatising orientation in certain instances, as we have seen, through the occupation of the physical, mental and social space of the UBA. Such a state of affairs explains what members of the FUBA describe as a systematic attempt by the Macri administration and previous governments to undermine public education. As Lefebvre would say, the social and political forces (the State) which engendered this space, the university, now seek, but fail, to master it completely (Lefebvre 1991) as it has been occupied, and we could say, now even partly appropriated or constructed by the student movement.

Such a practice of occupation leaves us to reflect on what degree the UBA



Image 40. Banners and carteles from different agrupaciones hang over the central foyer of the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism, in the context of student elections, in October 2016.

itself, as an educational institution, can be considered to be the product of the conflictual relation and struggle among the presence of the student movement and the interests of the university's government and authorities. Certainly, as Massey argues, space is neither a container for always-already constituted identities, nor a complete closure of holism. Rather, it is a space of loose ends and missing links, since for the future to be open space must be open too. (Massey 2005). And the picture of occupation of the university would suggest precisely such a space, which is not closed and coherent, but rather problematic and constantly under production.

As a teacher of the UBA herself noted, "It is a dialectical process. And in that sense the student movement generates a certain impact in the UBA's own formation. In the contents, in the academic programmes, in the election of authorities. So the formation process of knowledge, the formation process of university professionals is a dialectical process. It is in no sense vertical. We may still talk about embedded caucuses and of a process which tends towards privatisation of knowledge. But students are also part and protagonists of that process."

As Lefebvre acknowledges, there is a necessity for a social entity to produce its own social space. For a revolution that does not produce its own space does not realise its full potential, and fails in changing life itself. In order for a social transformation to be truly revolutionary, it must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space (Lefebvre 1991). And it would seem that through their spatial practice of occupation, the FUBA and the student movement have done precisely this. It is this definition of the university space as the student movement's which in turn sets the stage and opens the door to further processes of political intervention and transformation.



*Image 41.* Chairs taken by students block *Puán* street for an assembly of the CEFyL at night. Assemblies are frequently staged by occupying public spaces as a means to visibilize the student movement; particularly during periods of strikes and increased mobilisation.

## VI. Theory as Political Practice

### Introduction

This chapter explores the political action carried out by the student movement through theoretical-political activities<sup>26</sup>. It considers the widely held practice among the many *agrupaciones* within the FUBA of organising theoretical initiatives that double as forms of political practice in and outside of the university space. Throughout this chapter I propose to think of the activities presented as political in the sense that Rancière understands politics: interrupting and reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible through the emergence of subjects as political agents (Ranciere 2010); who blur the boundaries between those who think and those who act (Rancière 2009). I consider the organisation and implementation of theoretical-political activities by the FUBA's student movement to be part of a series of aesthetic and political practices which have been developed by students through a struggle for hegemony in the midst of competing agonistic and antagonistic relations (Mouffe 2013; Laclau and Mouffe 2014) within the FUBA and beyond. I argue that for the FUBA's student movement today, these practices constitute "ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (Ranciere 2004, 13).

I first frame the theoretical-political activities that the FUBA's student movement regularly stages in relation to the idea of social movements as

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<sup>26</sup> I use the term theoretical-political activities to refer to extra-curricular activities that student organisations or *agrupaciones* within the FUBA frequently organise. These activities cover a wide range of topics: from critical academic debates related to university degrees, to workshops on biopolitics, film screenings on sexual diversity, panels on Human Rights, among many others. Students locally referred to these activities under names such as "*charlas*", "*debates*", "*prácticas*", "*talleres*", among others. Due to the varied names that these activities locally have, in conversations with my research participants we settled on the umbrella term *actividades teóricas-políticas* (theoretical-political activities) given that they entailed a co-constitutive process of theoretical reflection alongside political practice. We agreed to analytically group these activities together in our interviews since, according to my research participants, what these activities all had in common was the quest to put knowledge "at the service of students" as well as the furthering of the heterogeneous student movement of the FUBA through forms of intervening in the university space and beyond.



Image 42. “McRi™” (in reference to Mauricio Macri), “Study, don’t be the police”, “To struggle is to educate”. Hand painted signs place knowledge and education at the centre of political struggle, during a demonstration of the #NiUnaMenos campaign, to condemn the femicide of Micaela García, in April of 2017.

producers of knowledge. Taking on board Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 2000) as a point of departure, I reflect on how Freire's concerns closely resemble the way in which members of the FUBA conceptualise theoretical-political activity; its organisation and objectives. Starting from the recognition that knowledge and education as well as its institutions, are not neutral spaces, but rather hegemonic battlegrounds which sustain and reproduce logics of domination or possibly transformation, I then move to the concern of members of the FUBA to subvert the university space as well as the academic and theoretical knowledge it may produce, to use these as tools for struggle and emancipation.

Then, I present a series of ethnographic examples of theoretical-political activities that I documented during my fieldwork. Following this I try to uncover the meaning of such activities for students by listening to their accounts and interpretations of theory as political practice. I attempt to explore the function that these activities may play in the student movement as tools for the visibilization of its agenda, for the attraction and activation of non-militant members of the FUBA into the activities of the student movement, and also for the recruitment of independent students into a particular *agrupación* within the FUBA.

The chapter goes on to question how these activities are organised, taking into account who may participate in them and why, whilst considering notions of work and care that are necessary for the sustainability of these practices. I then explore the type of knowledge that is produced and transmitted through such activities. Throughout the chapter I attempt to give an account of the frequency with which these actions take place and the larger context of struggle in which they occur, to illustrate how meaningfully inscribed these practices seem to be in FUBA's student movement; in the midst of the tense political climate which it inhabits. As a result, I argue that - whilst they exist between opportunities and tensions of the student movement - theoretical-political initiatives conform a fundamental pillar for the reproduction and sustainability of the student movement, for the political formation of militants within the diverse array of *agrupaciones* in the FUBA, and also as a mechanism for the experimentation and visualisation of new social imaginaries.





Image 43. "Anti-capitalist university - Transgenic University: A model to transform", "CEfyL Assembly". Carteles at the Faculty of Philosophy point to a debate over which direction education may take, in August of 2016.

## **Framing Theory as Political Practice**

Authors informed by theoretical approaches ranging from structuralism to ANT have differently stressed the importance of recognising in the construction of knowledge characteristics grounded in social hierarchies or power relations (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Latour and Woolgar 1986). Yet to explore how members of the FUBA envision theory as political practice through the realisation of a series of activities whereby theory and practice exist in a dynamic movement through which both - theory and practice - make and remake themselves (Freire 1985), Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a vital point of departure. Freire's account of how knowledge and education may be subverted to act as tools for the transformation of society has been hugely informative to processes of struggle throughout Latin America; where groups of struggle fighting against the realities of colonialism, extractivism, and recurring episodes of crisis - that have taken on the role of active political agents - have locally applied practices inspired by Freire's approach as a means to reflect on reality and to facilitate emancipation; as tools for intervention. As such, Freire suggests for us to recognise that the articulation of knowledge, and all the practices related to it, is not a neutral space, but a space dependant on relations. As Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein argue, facts of knowledge are constructed through a set of semiotic and material practices and relations; they are constructed, material, and discursive assemblages immersed in politics and political strategies (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein 2018). Owing to this relational character, Freire proposes, modes of knowledge can either serve to reproduce a logic of oppression - which eliminates the political possibilities of human beings by reducing them to passivity, or spectatorship (Rancière 2009) - or it can serve to facilitate personal emancipation through critical consciousness and ultimately, the transformation of society (Freire 2000). Thus, the production of knowledge is situated as a site of struggle.

In line with the arguments that I present throughout this thesis, to consider the physical, social, and imaginary spaces in which the FUBA's student movement lives, traversed by a struggle for hegemony, whereby students vie to give meaning to their surroundings; it follows that we see the field of knowledge and the development of theory as political practice and its importance in the same light; as a battleground contested by students. Indeed, the production of



Image 44. “Series of talks: opening a path for popular feminism. Women, Prostitution, and Social Movements; Women and the Popular Economy; plus festival.”. The Independent Left *La Dignidad* and its gender sector *Mujeres en Lucha*, announce a series of theoretical-political activities during August and September of 2016.

knowledge plays a central role in constructing and reproducing social hierarchies, so it is vital for activist groups to question these relations to challenge and democratise process of the production of knowledge; be it from below, from the inside, and outside (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein, 2018). In line with this concern, Zibechi coincides, one of the common traits of Latin American social movements has been the formation of their own intellectuals. Many of these have taken education into their own hands by creating dedicated spaces for the intellectual and political training of their activists (Zibechi 2012), and the FUBA's student movement certainly shares these characteristics - to be expected of a movement composed of university students. As Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein consider of social movements that produce their own knowledge, they can be powerful conceptual machines; they may produce their own theories of the world. Therefore, liberating the theorisation of social movements from pre-established frameworks of analysis requires redistributing relations of authority between the "agents" and "patients" of social movements and their theoretical activity (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein 2018: 262).

Moving to the particularities of theory as political practice as enacted by the FUBA's student movement, we must first consider the character of this movement as a student movement; composed of public university students. For, as Zibechi argues, educational institutions (schools, universities, etc.) constitute a key site in the struggle between the communities of social movements and the State; in these sites such a hegemonic struggle takes on a very real material and territorial aspect. Therefore, social movements face the challenge of how to introduce new territorialities - self-managed by social movements - into the communities they operate in, based on the reconfiguration of previous ones (i.e. State institutions) (Zibechi 2012). Therein lies the question - in-between opportunity and tension - of how a social movement may re-function a space, such as a university - that was built and is economically maintained (even if very poorly) by the State - to serve the needs of the movement and its community.

At stake in this hegemonic contest is the delineation of who defines the university as an entity as well as the knowledge produced in its space; who becomes the university's principal actor. According to the members of the FUBA's

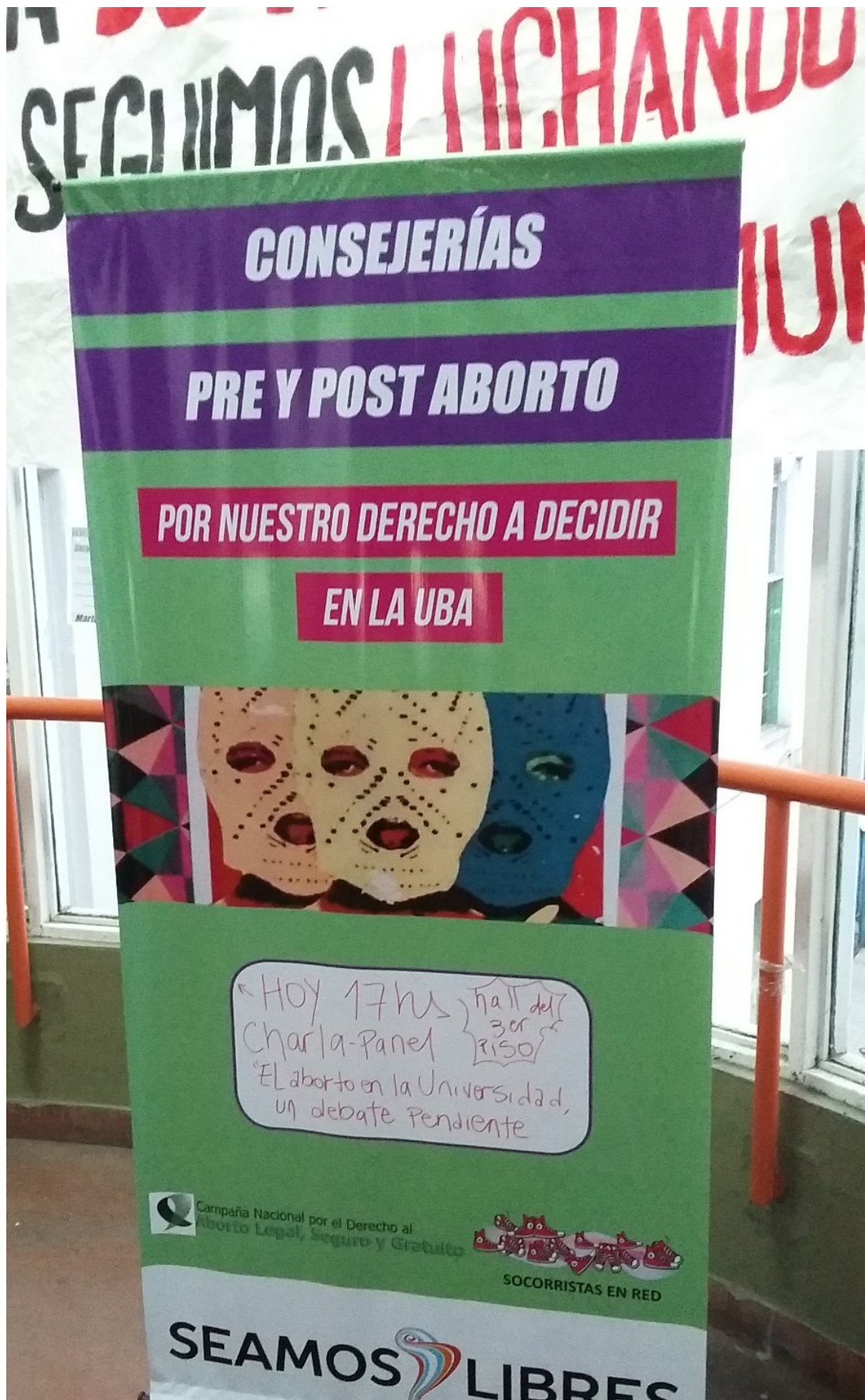
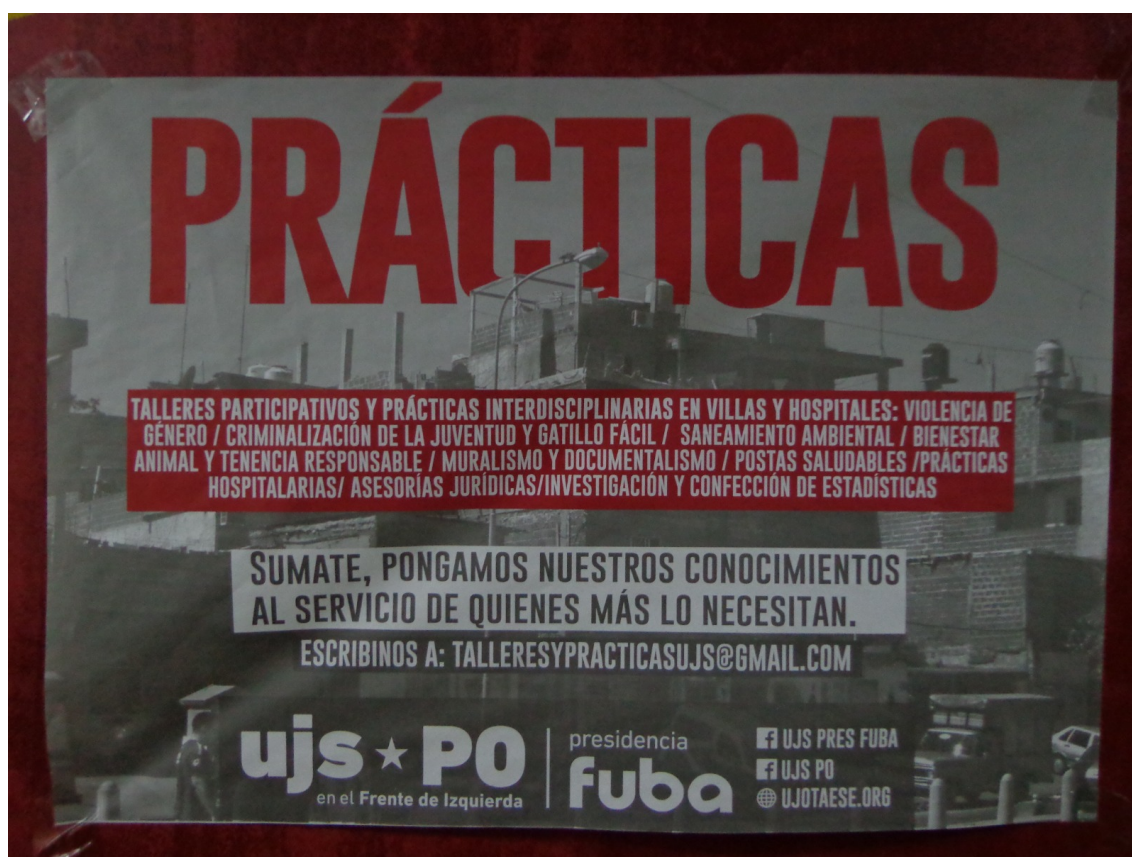


Image 45. "Pre and post-abortion advisory. For our right to decide in the UBA. Today, 17:00, Talk-Panel: Abortion in university, a pending debate. Hall of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor." *Seamos Libres*, of the Peronismo/Kirchnerismo sector, organises advisory talks for students, together with the *Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito* (National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion), and *Socorristas en red*, at the Faculty of Philosophy.

student movement, the response to this question determines the direction that the interactions in the physical and symbolic space of the university will take - as Freire suggests, either they serve to reproduce the dominant logic of the oppression, or they are subverted to serve the needs of the students and the community (Freire 2000); through a process in which the division of those who think and those who act is eliminated (Rancière 1991). Therefore, the importance of students claiming the university space as their own through through a variety of political and aesthetic practices concerned with doing and intervening in space. In the previous chapter I described how, through occupation, students re-appropriate and claim the institutional space of the UBA for themselves; to the degree that the student movement becomes a co-producer of the UBA itself. Here, through the own theory as political practice of the student movement, we see a double-move: students continue to claim the space of the university - through theoretical-political activities which take place there - yet outside of the university (and outside of their hours as students), they also claim knowledge as a tool for political intervention, for themselves and those who the student movement looks to interpellate (not only students), through their position as students, militants and theoreticians.

As Manu expressed in one of our conversations on the nature of universities as entities which reproduce power relations: "Universities have been created to reproduce a logic of exploitation. Although public, what's the purpose of a university? To produce a group of people that can then be exploited by companies, etc. It's quite perverse, because in a way they make you prepare yourself to be more eligible to be exploited later on. That's why it is so important for us as students to try to subvert this logic, so that we may put the university, its students, and the skills that it produces, to the service of communities". Manu's words closely resemble Freire's concern with what he terms humanisation and dehumanisation being part of the central problem of education. Humanisation, Freire argues, although sought out by people, is constantly negated by conditions of inequality and oppression (Freire 2000). As Zibechi acknowledges, the struggle over practices of knowledge is not something new; it has always been at the centre for the recognition of people's rights. However, what is new, is the intensity with which certain movements in Latin America have taken up the task of education according to their own precepts. These movements - as we have



*Image 46.* “*Prácticas*. Participative workshops and interdisciplinary practices in *villas* and hospitals: gender violence; criminalisation of youth and police brutality; sanitation; animal welfare and responsible ownership; muralism and documentary-making; health and wellbeing; hospital practices; legal advice; survey research and reporting of statistical data. Join us, let’s put our knowledge to the service of those who need it most.”. A poster of the UJS-PO announces a campaign of professional and political practices in economically marginalised areas; a common activity among *agrupaciones* of the the FUBA.

seen through occupation - mark educational spaces with their presence and practices. And through relationships that seek to articulate autonomy and self-management, new “schools” - partly or completely constructed by social movements - are born (Zibechi 2012). This dynamic seems to echo the prefigurative notion of new worlds being born in the shell of the old. Yet as Manu highlighted, in consonance with Freire, this kind of liberation is only gained through the recognition of the necessity to fight for it, and the praxis of the quest for it (Freire 2000). As Rancière proposes of intellectual emancipation, it can only happen through the exercise of equality, in the course of practicing it while seeking it out (Rancière, 1991).

### **Scene 1, “*Prácticas*”**

It was Autumn in Buenos Aires on Saturday the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, 2016, little more than one month after the start of the 2016 Academic year. Normal activity had resumed in the city after the Summer break, and with it the demands of the student movement were becoming vigorously voiced; partly a normal process (as described in Chapter 5, on occupation), yet this time it was amplified. Coming off the back of the massive demonstration of the 24<sup>th</sup> of March which had commemorated the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1976 coup, this academic year had the peculiarity of being the first since the Macri Federal Administration had assumed power. The government had commenced its implementation of adjustment policies, and together with budget cuts to public education and massive employment cuts across the State and private sectors, this meant that an agreement with the locally called “*fondos buitres*” (vulture funds) - bondholders who, following the default of 2001, had refused to restructure parts of Argentina’s debt in 2010 and blocked repayments to all parties in 2012 - had been accorded. Thus, on Monday that week, Argentina was technically out of its state of “default” for the first time in 14 years, which while celebrated by supporters of the government, was criticized by the opposition and all of the active sectors of the student movement, while the FUBA officially condemned the settlement, through a plebiscite it had undertaken among the students of the UBA. The plebiscite, self-led and implemented by students, opposed the agreement with the vulture funds by a landslide, and although it did not have a legally-binding character, it was a form of protest and symbolic shaming aimed at the Federal Government.





*Image 47.* A group of students from the UJS-PO and friends arrive to the locale of the PO in Villa Lugano to carry out the *prácticas*. The *prácticas* were part of an ongoing programme with local members of the *Polo Obrero*, a fellow organisation, who together with the students, facilitated the implementation of the different activities among the community. Pets are taken by their owners to be vaccinated inside the locale.

The response to a political climate that entailed cuts to public education was a strike of public university teachers from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of April, their first strike of the academic year. It was on this early Saturday morning that I met with members of the UJS (youth branch of the PO) at the café of the CEFyL, to travel Villa Lugano on the outskirts of the city to conduct an exercise that was part of what they called “*Prácticas*” (Practices).

As the participants I was attending with had earlier explained to me, the *prácticas* aimed at providing an opportunity to conduct a partly theoretical partly practical exercise which would attend to the problems of a particular community while also serving as a form of training for their university degrees. So we journeyed about an hour and a half, exiting the landscape of urban Buenos Aires into the self-made establishments bordering the city on train, bus, and on foot to reach Villa Lugano. Here we gathered with a larger group of student militants of the UJS-PO from various faculties of the UBA who had also travelled there, as well as with local residents who were members of the *Polo Obrero* (the worker’s branch of the PO) at the local base of the PO, in order to coordinate with everyone attending (a group of about 30 students and workers), divide the tasks, and start the exercise.

On this occasion, students on degrees such as sociology, anthropology, history and philosophy took up the self-assigned task of carrying out a semi-structured survey, which they had prepared a few days in advance, among the residents of the area. This was meant to facilitate a series of conversations centred around local residents’ views regarding the main problems affecting them and their area, and whether there had been any measures by the State or local authorities to attend to these issues. If the issues had not been attended to, conversation generally turned to why local residents believed this might be the case. The main issues raised by residents were gang violence, lack of medical facilities, and a high level of water pollution, partly owing to a car disposal site nearby, as well as the poor drainage facilities and unpaved roads and dirt walkways. Whilst these students went from house to house talking to neighbours along the walkways, the veterinary students were carrying out free vaccinations for pets in the area, attending to a large number of animals brought in to the small

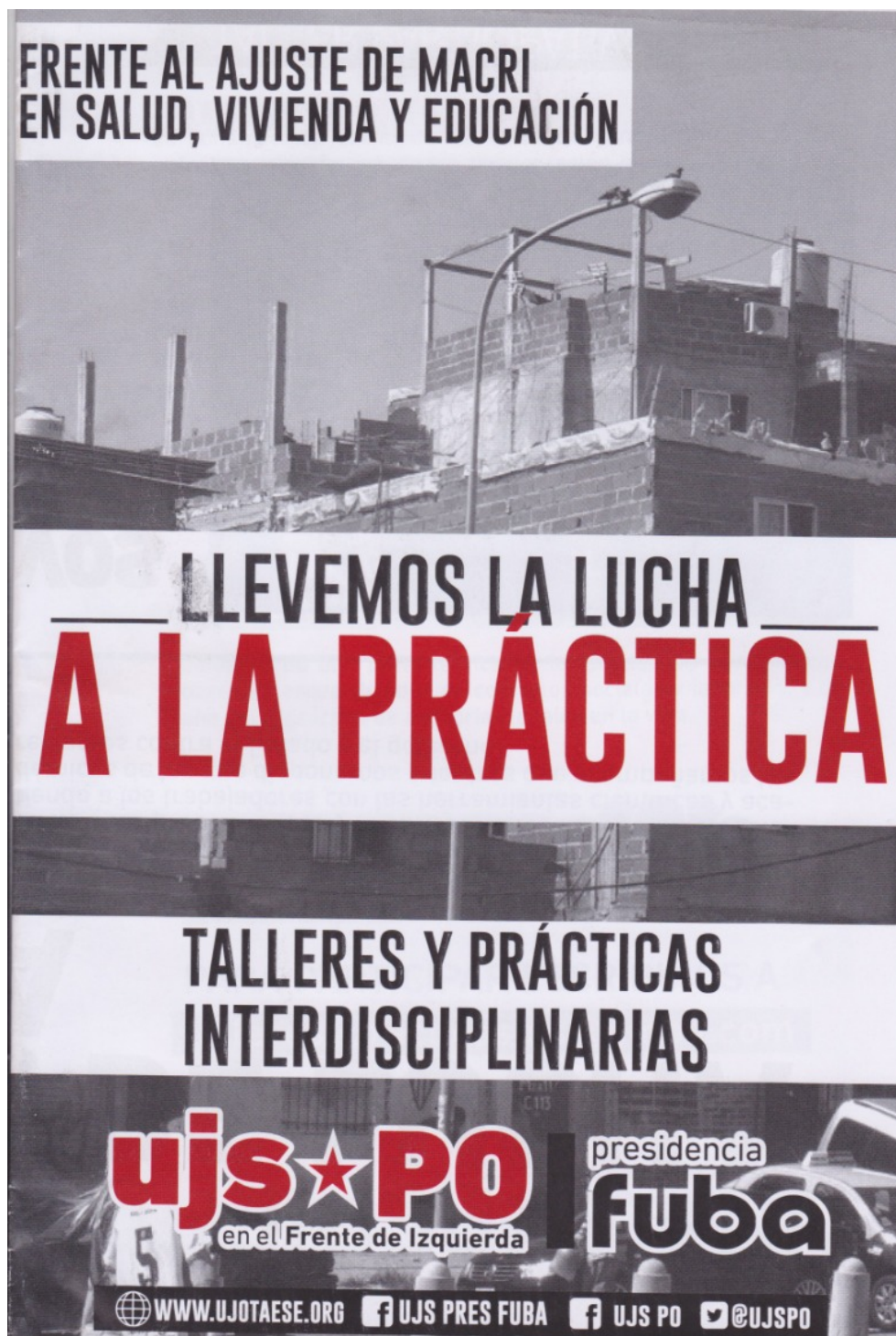


Image 48. “In the face of Macri’s adjustment plans for health, housing, and education: let’s put the struggle into practice. Interdisciplinary workshops and practices.” A flyer by the UJS-PO announces its campaign of *prácticas* in 2016.

PO base throughout the early evening. The occasion gave students from the group I participated in with a chance to develop skills such as planning, designing and applying a survey, as well as carrying out the analysis of the data throughout the following weeks. For the veterinary students the practice developed their skills in vaccinating a variety of animals and giving them a general check-up. In future sessions at Villa Lugano, for example, philosophy students would also be carrying out workshops on sex education and gender violence with female local residents. The information gathered from this visit as well as subsequent ones was to be compiled in the form of multi-disciplinary reports that would be presented to the local authorities as an attempt to bring attention to the pressing problems faced by the residents of Villa Lugano.

Villa Lugano is one of the most economically marginalised neighbourhoods which conform the southern limits of the City of Buenos Aires, characterised by “a high concentration of population in a situation of social vulnerability, with extensive parts of territory that are not integrated to the urban grid and networks of basic services.” (Ministerio de Hacienda, 2016). Yet remotely removed as I spatially felt from the settings of the student movement at the UBA, the group of UJS-PO students that I was participating with was not the only one present in the area. On that same day, another group of students from the *Kirchnerismo* party *La C mpora* was also conducting an activity on the same site. Indeed, the very group of UJS students that I was working was mistakenly thought to belong to *La C mpora* by a group of around four men who were standing in conversation outside of their homes when they exclaimed “*Dale, aguante La C mpora!*” (Come on, let’s go *La C mpora!*) as we walked by knocking on the doors of local residents. After each group from the UJS-PO *pr ctica* finished their respective activities, everyone assembled for a debriefing meeting inside the PO base. There, sitting in a circle on the concrete floor, experiences of the day were exchanged, the students reflected on the main issues that had arisen from their interactions with local residents, they discussed how they might take the lessons learned that day into consideration to better plan the next visit, and the activities of the following session (to take place two weeks later) were discussed in advance. At around 4:00pm our group of students finalised the preparatory exchanges for the next visit and we began the journey back home into the city.

# EN LOS BARRIOS

**PORCENTAJE DE HOGARES BAJO LA LÍNEA DE POBREZA EN CABA**



0.0 - 3.9  
 4.0 - 7.9  
 8.0 - 11.9  
 12.0 y más

**Villa 20 (Lugano) y Villa Soldati**  
**Villa 11-11-14 (Bajo Flores)**  
**Villa 31 (Retiro), La Boca Y Barracas**

Las prácticas se realizarán en los barrios más carenciados de la Capital Federal, en un contexto nacional dramático: según un informe de la UCA en los últimos tres meses la pobreza creció un 34%.

Tomada de conjunto la cantidad de habitantes de los últimos años en la ciudad se mantiene estática, sin embargo las villas se duplicaron y la supuesta urbanización prometida por los gobiernos del PRO y del FPV resultó una farsa.

Los niveles de pobreza e indigencia en el sur de la ciudad son alarmantes y las condiciones de vida en las villas indignan. Las viviendas precariamente construidas (generalmente sobre terrenos contaminados con plomo, aguas servidas o basurales), no cuentan con los servicios públicos básicos: agua, luz, gas ni cloacas.

Semejantes condiciones de vida exponen a quienes viven en las villas a enfermedades y plagas. ¡Solo en la villa 20 hay 178 casos comprobados de dengue! Los casos de tuberculosis, desnutrición, malformaciones y las muertes por enfermedades prevenibles y curables baten records año tras año. Sin embargo el gobierno nacional y de la ciudad vacía las salitas sanitarias y aunque el hospital de Lugano fue inaugurado varias veces, su puesta en funcionamiento como tal sigue haciéndose esperar.

Todo este territorio es una gran zona liberada por la policía para el accionar de las mafias y el delito organizado. Por eso las fuerzas de seguridad, adaptadas e integradas a las bandas de narcotraficantes, persiguen y asesinan a los pibes pero dejan el camino libre a los narcos. En la villa el delito y el gatillo fácil crecen de la mano.

**Sumate a los talleres y prácticas de la UJS para colaborar con los vecinos que se organizan y luchan contra todos estos flagelos.**

**PARA PARTICIPAR ESCRIBINOS A [talleresypracticasujs@gmail.com](mailto:talleresypracticasujs@gmail.com)**

Image 49. The interior of a UJS-PO flyer (from Image 48) describes the need for *prácticas* to be carried out in terms of local services, economic, health, and safety issues in marginalised *villas*.

### Scene B, “¿Marx Antropólogo?”

It was Tuesday the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, 2016. The second half of the 2016 academic year had begun in late August. In the larger context of the city, the *Marcha Federal* (Federal March) had taken place early in September in protest at the adjustment policies of the Macri administration, with the participation of an estimated 200,000 people, many of whom travelled from across the country to Buenos Aires for the occasion. In terms of the FUBA, elections for the student centres of the 13 faculties of the UBA had started three weeks earlier on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September. Elections are normally held over the months of September and October across the faculties (lasting one week in each faculty), which meant that student militants from practically all organisations were busy travelling across the city to the different faculties in order to support their *agrupaciones* with campaigning, wherever elections were being held at the moment. And in a similar fashion to the way that the first half of the academic year had begun, teachers of the UBA were calling a strike to demand a pay rise in order to keep up with rising inflation. Furthermore, to help us picture intersecting story lines around the university space, a series of events called “*Semana por Ayotzinapa*” (Week for Ayotzinapa) was organised by the *Asamblea de Mexicanxs en Argentina* (Assembly of Mexicans in Argentina), in order to commemorate two years since the forced disappearance of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa in Mexico. Various *agrupaciones* within the FUBA were participating in the commemorative week, with some activities taking place on UBA premises. For example, a panel at the Faculty of Philosophy had taken place the day before (on the 26<sup>th</sup>) in order to discuss and theorise on the issue of past and present forced disappearances in Mexico and Argentina. In this panel, figures such as Cristina Bautista (mother of disappeared Ayotzinapa student Benjamin Ascencio Baustista), Vanesa Orieta (sister of Luciano Arruga, disappeared by the Bonaerense Police), and a survivor of forced disappearance and torture by the last military dictatorship in Argentina were present, sharing their experiences with the audience that gathered at the FFyL as a mode of recognition, conversation, and protest.

On this Tuesday afternoon, surrounded by such events, I was walking out of a seminar on Human Rights and Collective Memory (for which I had enrolled as a student) when I ran into a couple of members from the UJS-PO (who were



*Image 50.* A panel on forced disappearance takes place at the Faculty of Philosophy as part of the *Semana por Ayotzinapa*, which members of the FUBA helped organise.

involved as participants in my research) on the staircase of the Faculty of Philosophy. As we chatted briefly, they let me know they had decided to organise a series of talks on Anthropology and Marxism and encouraged me to stay for the afternoon to attend the first session. This series of talks, as countless others that are organised by the different *agrupaciones*, had been self-organised by student militants of the UJS-PO, who on this occasion were students of Anthropology, with support from other UJS-PO militants at the Faculty of Philosophy. For the series of five sessions, they had informally invited an anthropology teacher from the faculty, who was also a member of the PO, to give the talks. The subject of the first session: *¿Marx Antropólogo?* (Marx, Anthropologist?).

This series of talks, as all of the theoretical-political activities that I witnessed organised by students across other faculties, degrees, and *agrupaciones*, was free and open for anyone to attend. And for this purpose, it had been staged in the “Hall of the Third Floor” of the Faculty of Philosophy, a centrally located open space on the top floor of the faculty that is used for most of the independent theoretical-political activities organised by students, as well as being the meeting point for the assemblies of the CEFyL (when these are not held directly on the street of *Puán*, in front of the faculty building). The first talk of the series was attended by a group of about ten students, from Anthropology and other degrees, and lasted about an hour. During the talk, the topic of whether Marx could be considered an anthropologist was explored, together with the need for contemporary anthropologists to approach capitalist (and social) relations through a Marxist gaze. At the end of the talk a brief discussion followed with a round of questions, after which we dismantled the set-up and returned the chairs that had been taken from the teaching rooms of the faculty back to their respective places. Some of those attending the lecture remained chatting briefly with the student organisers, scattered around the hall. Eventually, as the evening went on, the group disbanded with attendees dispersing back into the circulation around the faculty and the militants going back to their activities at the *mesa* of the UJS-PO, on the second floor of the faculty, surrounded by students passing by on their way to their formal evening lectures.





Image 51. "Open class: Anthropology and Marxism. Hall of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 18:00. *Partido Obrero – El salvaje activista*." Anthropology students of the UJS-PO (internally named "The Activist Savage") make an invitation to attend the sessions they have organised, at the entrance of the Faculty of Philosophy.

I would later learn that the last three talks of the series on Anthropology and Marxism had to be rescheduled for a later date due to the fact that the organising students were tasked by their peers with campaigning in other faculties of the UBA across the city through the student elections process. I was informed of this change in plans at a later encounter with the two participants who had first invited me to attend the lectures. Although these particular talks were postponed and I was unable to attend them in their rescheduled times, it is fair to say that every week during my fieldwork (at times more than once a week) I witnessed similar activities being carried out in the “Hall of the Third Floor” by the many *agrupaciones* present in the FFyL.

### **Scene C, “Capitalismo Zombi”**

It was Tuesday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016, approaching the end of the first half of the 2016 academic year. Over the course of the academic term (beginning in late March) student campaigning and mobilisation which demanded an increase in the public education budget, the *Boleto educativo* (Education transport ticket), and stood in support for the demands of academic and non-academic university staff, while also demanding an end to massive employment cuts, among others issues, had meant that on the 12<sup>th</sup> of May (just over three weeks earlier) around 70,000 people had participated in the education march demanding: *Defendamos la Educación Pública* (Let’s Defend Public Education). It was a particular occasion since participants included students from the main public universities in the area, such as the UBA, UNLP, UNA, as well students from various *secundarios* (high schools), and also academic and non-academic staff from these schools and universities, as members of the six largest unions of teachers. Furthermore, just four days prior, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, the second yearly march of the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign, demanding an end to femicide and gender violence, had taken place in the city. This was a massive demonstration in which countless members of the FUBA’s student movement, as well as *agrupaciones* within it, had participated through the campaigning of their gender and sexual diversity sectors.

To add to the occasion, the yearly Congress of the FUBA - on this occasion titled *Defendamos la Educación Pública* - was due to be held from the 8<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> of

**CONGRESO  
DE LA fuba  
EN DEFENSA DE LA  
EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA**

**MARCHA**  
POR EL PRESUPUESTO Y  
CONTRA LA CORRUPCIÓN  
EN LA UBA  
Miércoles 8/6 10hs  
en el Consejo Superior  
(Viamonte 444)

**PANELES**  
JUEVES 9/6  
Mov. Estudiantil - Psicología  
Salud, mujer y géneros - Medicina  
Vivienda y urbanización- FADU  
Ciencia e investigación - Exactas  
Mov. Obrero - Filosofía y L.  
Democratización - Colegio Nacional Bs As

**VIERNES 10/6**  
Situación política nacional - Económicas  
America Latina - Sociales  
Mujer, géneros y violencia - CBC Ramos  
Ambiente - Veterinaria

**COMISIONES**  
LUNES 13/6  
Situación política - Filosofía  
Mov. Estudiantil - Derecho  
Mujer y géneros - Psicología  
America Latina - CBC Montes  
Democratización - Pellegrini

**PLENARIO**  
MARTES 14/6 17hs  
en Plaza Houssay

**JORNADA  
NACIONAL**  
POR LA  
EDUCACIÓN PÚBLICA  
MIÉRCOLES 15/6

**fuba**  
Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires

Image 52. "Congress of the FUBA: In defence of public education". A poster outlines the dates and activities of the yearly FUBA congress, including a demonstration, a series of panels and commissions, a closing plenary, and a national rally for public education, in June of 2016.

June across the faculties of the UBA<sup>27</sup>. Yet on this occasion, with the advent of the Macri administration, divisions within the student movement posed a scenario of particular risk for the Independent Left and *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, in which the block of *Macrismo* (headed in this case by *Franja Morada*), might win the presidency of the FUBA. Such a scenario encouraged the intensification of campaigning by all the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA in the build-up to the Congress.

In the midst of this commotion, a History class took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June, in the Faculty of Philosophy, in a lecture room next to the café of the CEFyL. The classroom (as could be expected) was covered throughout with the *carteles* of the many political organisations, and at the front was a hand painted graffiti which read: “*Aqui debería estar el comedor*” (“The refectory should be here”). It was to be the last *teórico* (lecture) of this particular History course for the term. But it was not only a class, it was also intended to be the presentation of a book titled: “*Capitalismo Zombi*” (Zombie Capitalism) by Pablo Heller. Indeed, it had been promoted as an event on the political agenda of the UJS-PO, whose History student militants (internally named *La Comuna: The Commune*) had promoted the event throughout the faculty. Consequently, outside of the classroom were a few UJS-PO students with a book stand selling copies of the aforementioned book. Inside, a long table with microphones for the the author and commentators of the book had been set up at the front of the classroom, which became filled with students. Among the speakers was Jorge Altamira, a founding member of the *Partido Obrero*. The History teacher introduced the presentation, and afterwards commentators and author spoke heatedly about the subject of a decaying zombie capitalism, which they argued, ought to be dead already, yet still lingered on; therefore, the need to “aim at its head, just as with zombies”. At times the author raised his voice loudly and excitedly, waving hands in the air, as if addressing the crowd of a political rally, yet this was a classroom in the UBA.

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<sup>27</sup> The yearly congress consists of a series of panels, workshops, and plenaries on matters concerning the student movement, as well as political demonstrations, and also serves to elect the *conducción* of the FUBA at the end of the Congress. Since 2014, however, a quorum had not been reached in order for the Congress to deliberate and elect the presidency of the FUBA, owing to differences in the political agendas of the three largest sectors of the FUBA: the Independent Left, *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, and the the *Franja Morada* (in coalition with *Macrismo*).



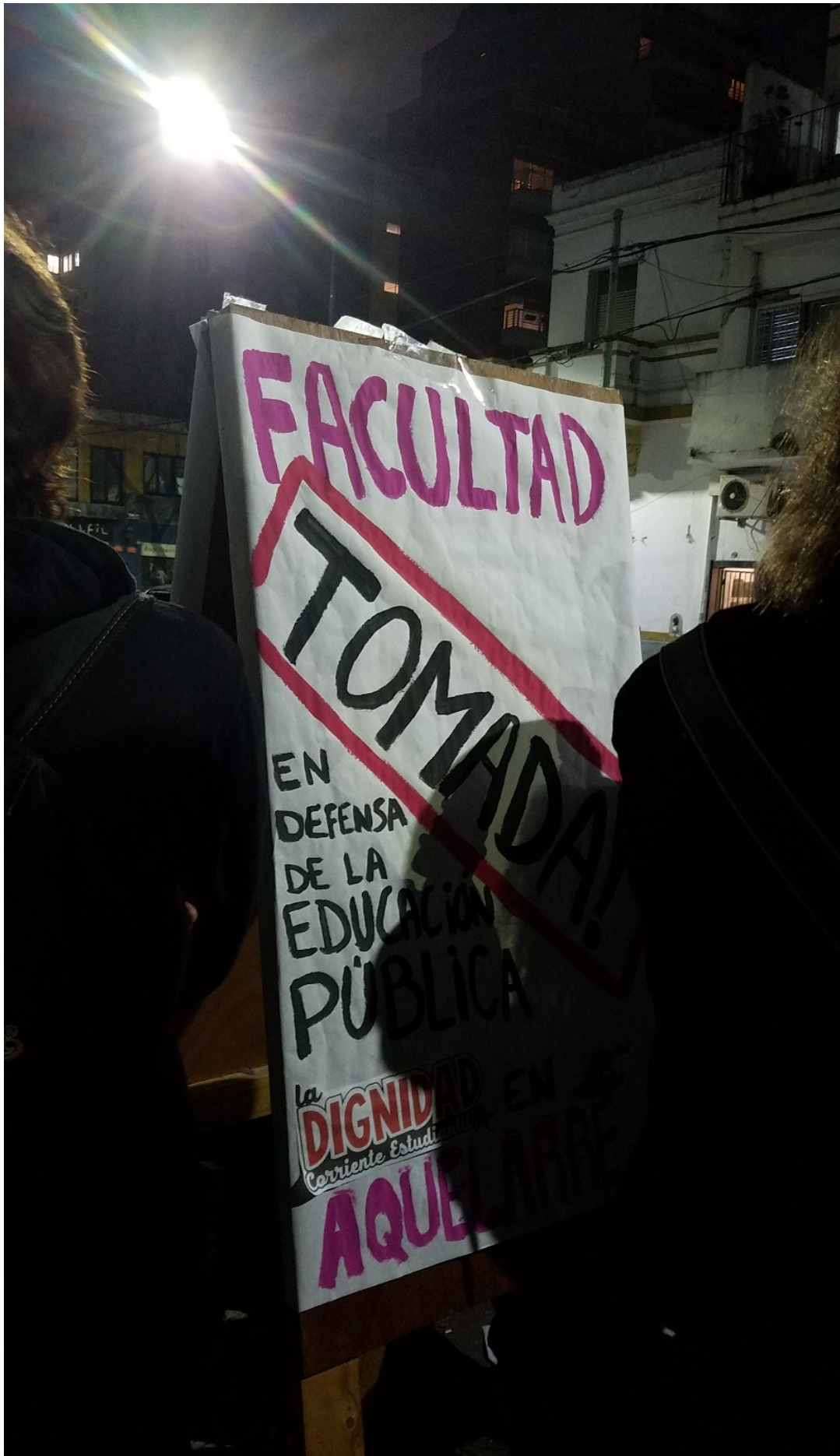
Image 53. The setting of the *Capitalismo Zombi* scene, previously filled with students, after the history class/book presentation/political event took place.

And for the students enrolled in this subject, this was only another lecture in their course which they would have simply encountered, although it was also a book presentation, open for anyone to attend, and clearly had elements of a political demonstration - all of it followed by a series of questions in the form of a debate. Was this a theoretical lecture, a book presentation, an act of student militancy, or a political demonstration? Or, was it possibly, all of them at the same time?

### **Meaning and Function of Theory as Political Practice**

So far, I have attempted to describe three different episodes which refer to a common point: The organisation of theoretical-political activities that do not presuppose a division between theoretical exercise and political intervention, but rather attempt to generate knowledge and facilitate political intervention through an intertwined process, whereby both theoretical reflection and applied political practice re-inform and shape each other. So how do these activities intervene in the aesthetico-political field as counter-hegemonic practices according to members of the FUBA's student movement? And what are the tensions, possibly even contradictions, that the staging of these activities inside and outside of a public university entail? In order to explore these questions, I turn to the voices of participants who were active in the attendance and organisation of such activities. This way, we may shed light on the ways that students understand theoretical-political activities to be conceived, the meaning that these may hold for them, the tensions that their application imply, and the function that they may play in the reproduction of the student movement.

Closely resembling Freire's concern on the necessity for transformative knowledge deriving from processes of social struggle, whereby it is necessary to create a new unity of theory and praxis (Freire 2000), Alba recounted: "I think these activities, and the student movement as such, exist in the measure that there is conflict around the University", "the student movement emerges or grows when conflict occurs." She explained this to me after taking a deep breath as we sat over coffee and she recounted her involvement with theoretical-political initiatives. Alba had helped organise many of these throughout her years as a militant, student and teacher, ranging from debates about film with media students, for example discussing the films of Jean Luc Godard in the context of



*Image 54.* “Faculty taken in defence of public education”. Students discuss mobilisation plans during a night assembly in *Puán* street, outside of the Faculty of Philosophy. Several faculties of the UBA were taken for days in the context of teachers’ strikes in September of 2018.

the Vietnam War, to lectures on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Marx's Capital with Economics students, and debates on the legalisation of abortion in the Faculty of Medicine or Law, among others. She stressed the starting point for theory as political practice as deriving from the necessity to contend hegemonic struggle, be it against the institutional State government, university authorities, or within the student movement.

Alba continued to describe that in the life of students of the UBA, the practice of theoretical-political activities can constitute an elementary part of the "two legs" of personal and academic formation: on the one hand, "the more institutional leg, if you will, of the university degree", and on the other, these extra-curricular activities which "richly enhance" students' knowledge and skills in order to "problematize what they learn on a day-to-day basis." This co-constitutive character the production of knowledge as stemming from both the public university and the student movement is echoed by Zibeche, who reflects on the shared dynamic of many Latin American social movements, whereby these have taken the education and training of participants into their own hands by employing criteria derived from or inspired by public education (Zibeche 2012).

Theoretical activities entwined with political practice are also attributed the function of "grounding theoretical debates in a present situation" according to Alba, since they serve to "locate the more abstract thought within a specific conjuncture" and "they are proposed as activities within a campaign; activities to follow up with subsequent actions."

In this sense, these activities seem to address Freire's concern of objectively verifying established relationships of oppression through the resolution of clear and evident contradictions, to open the possibility for transformation (Freire 2000). As such, these activities constitute an opportunity to deliberate on the characterisation that may be developed regarding a problematic that permeates the student movement; in order to find a way out. It is important to bear in mind that these "characterisations" and readings of social problems faced by the students - and how to confront these social problems - are themselves frequently the battleground of the agonistic (Mouffe 2013) relations among the competing *agrupaciones* in the student movement.



indiferentes ante esta situación. La conquista de una recomposición del salario docente es una lucha de primer orden para el movimiento estudiantil. En todo el país, apoyemos la lucha de nuestros docentes y sumémonos activamente con todos nuestros reclamos

IMPULSEMOS CLASES PÚBLICAS, CORTES Y MOVILIZACIONES JUNTO A LOS DOCENTES CONTRA EL AJUSTE DE MACRI Y LAS AUTORIDADES

**45% DE AUMENTO SALARIAL**


**BOLETO EDUCATIVO GRATUITO**

**AUMENTO DEL PRESUPUESTO EDUCATIVO**

**APOYEMOS  
LA LUCHA  
DE NUESTROS  
DOCENTES!**



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 @ujspo

*Image 55.* A FUBA flyer calls on students to support strikes for education in 2016, demanding an increase of 45% in teachers' salaries, a free education transport ticket, and an increase in the public education budget.

Yet most importantly when thinking of the functions that theory as political practice serves within the FUBA is its role in the “generation of consciousness” among students, be they militants, non-militants, or independent. As Alba considered this aspect: “the most valuable part about these activities is not only that they complement you from the theoretical side as a professional, or that they help you problematize the production of knowledge, but that they push you to do something about it”. This was a shared feeling among the participants of my research, the relevance of the role of “visibilization” and “consciousness” in rendering clear and sensible the challenges being faced by the student population and society at large. In turn, offering this recognition as an active step in the possibility to confront inequality by way of political intervention on behalf of students themselves. It is fittingly illustrative that Alba, as well as other participants in my research such as Mora, Manu and Jorge, all agreed on the words “consciousness” and “visibility” when referring to the effects of theoretical-political activities on themselves and other students, given that this is precisely the term that Freire proposes as the outcome of the pedagogy of the oppressed; *conscientização* or critical consciousness. Critical consciousness supposes opening the door to transformation according to Freire, who insists that the through reflection on their concrete situation, people are interpellated not only to contemplate, but on the contrary, the reflective process invariably entails action (Freire 2000). As Rancière proposes, there lies an importance in one intelligence not attempting to teach another, but rather facilitating its setting-in-motion, encouraging it to look for answers through contemplation, comparison and action (Rancière 1991).

This brings us to the role that political-theoretical activities have within the FUBA’s student movement as as a means to attract students into mobilisation; to involve non-militant members of the student body in its activities; and possibly to recruit independent students into a particular *agrupación* within the FUBA. According to Alba, many times, “these activities serve as triggers of an interest on behalf of students”, and they “facilitate the approach of students towards militancy”.

**DEL 28 DE MARZO AL 8 DE ABRIL**

# **VOTÁ EN EL PLEBISCITO DE LA FUBA**

**ABAJO EL ACUERDO CON LOS FONDOS BUITRE**

La Federación Universitaria de Buenos Aires realizará entre el 28 de marzo y el 8 de abril un plebiscito, para que los estudiantes y docentes podamos expresarnos sobre el acuerdo con los fondos buitres.

La UJS-Partido Obrero, como presidencia de la FUBA llevará la iniciativa a universidades, colegios e institutos terciarios de todo el país. Convocamos a los estudiantes y a sus organizaciones a sumarse a organizar el plebiscito en cada establecimiento.

Acércate a las mesas de la UJS y el Partido Obrero y anotate para ayudar en la organización del plebiscito!



**ujs** ★ **PARTIDO OBRERO** | presidencia **fuba**

Facebook icon / UJS PO    Twitter icon @ujspo

*Image 56.* “Vote in the plebiscite of the FUBA. Down with the agreement of the vulture funds”. A flyer encourages students to participate in the FUBA’s symbolic plebiscite, condemning payment to the vulture funds in 2016.

From her own experience, Alba recounted that these activities and encounters can lead to further interactions, with invitations such as: “*Che*, I’m interested in what you described... I’d like to know more about it’ or ‘hey, pass me your *prensa* or your book’, or ‘let’s get together and chat about this sometime’”. And in the midst of the state of occupation and production of space by the student movement, this “cumulus” of theoretical-political activities may play an important part in attuning students towards the discourse of the student movement and the other political and aesthetic practices of its participants. Granted, it would be hard to say that a single activity by itself would make a militant out of a student who has not previously been involved in the student movement. As Alba pointed out: “someone who’s probably seen you campaigning around the faculty, or addressing an assembly, may not decide to become a *militante* with you from one day to the next... but maybe one day he or she sits down for a debate in one of these activities and then he or she may tell you ‘Hey, I liked this!’”. “For example: people studying Image and Sound Design at FADU may see an intervention dealing with the conflict of cuts to the INCAA (National Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Arts) around the faculty. And it turns out that a guy there is super interested in film and wants to be a filmmaker. So he may come say to you: ‘Hey, I liked your action regarding this conflict. I want to organise with you to defend the INCAA.’”.

Alba’s experiences with other students, throughout the course of her time as a member of the FUBA and a teacher of the UBA, very closely resemble the dynamic that Freire considers possible when students are posed with problems relating to themselves or their surroundings; the feeling of being increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Through the abandoning of a banking concept of learning and its replacement by a series of theoretically reflective and politically practical activities organised by the student movement, students throughout the UBA, and members of the communities they interact with, can be presented with problems that relate to their surroundings. And through this dialogical process, students and others become no longer docile listeners, but critical co-investigators. Such a process of activation, encouraged by a critical spirit, entails a creative process. It implies creativity and commitment whereby students can name the world according to their terms and can act upon their world by intervening politically in it (Freire 2000).

**JORNADAS**

# **DERECHOS HUMANOS SIGLO XXI**

**GRUPOS DE LECTURA**

**Primer Taller: Lunes 25/04, 19hs**  
**Segundo Taller: Lunes 02/05, 19hs**

**AULA A CONFIRMAR / ANOTATE EN LA MESITA**

**JUVENTUD SOCIALISTA** | **MST** | **Secretaría de Derechos Humanos del CEFyL**  
**NUEVA IZQUIERDA**  
Movimiento Socialista de los Trabajadores

Image 57. Members of *Juventud Socialista* and the MST announce reading groups on Human Rights in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as part of their tasks in a CEFyL commission, in April and May of 2016.

Encounters among students such as those described by Alba may well occur by chance or they may be specifically aimed at certain students by the different political organisations in the FUBA. For example, one evening I was invited to attend a *círculo* of the UJS-PO in the Faculty of Philosophy, and there I recall that participants drew up a list of specific students that they wanted to invite for a series of debates the following week. Each participant suggested one new student. And on that occasion, they specifically discussed the probability of success in persuading each particular student suggested to attend. The suggested students had previously had some form of contact with the UJS-PO in the way that Alba described in the examples above. And the calculations on the probability of their attendance given these past experiences were taken light-heartedly and humorously by the UJS-PO militants over some *mates* as they recalled previous interactions with them. These are variations that speak of the scales on which organisation of these activities and attraction of students may happen; from a very specific invitation addressed to a single student, to the encounter of such a theoretical-political activity, as the one described in Scene C, “*Capitalismo Zombi*”, in the form of an almost unavoidable situation in the course of a student’s academic degree.

Going back to Alba’s reflection on the points of emergence of the student movement, it seems clear that conflict is generated by the social conditions that its members experience, by a generalised situation of struggle in which the student movement is embedded, and as a consequence of the social, political and economic environment it inhabits. These problems serve as catalysts for the activation and amplification of the student movement. And within this activity, agonistic relations (Mouffe2013) are enacted among the *agrupaciones* of the FUBA as to how to characterise and confront the situations being faced. The agonistic relations within the student movement in turn, serve to develop practices such as theoretical-political activities - organised by the various *agrupaciones* within the FUBA, in order to facilitate a critical consciousness among students of the problems being faced - to disseminate their characterisations and readings of these conflicts as possible solutions, which in turn, attract students to participate in the concerns of the student movement - possibly even to join a particular *agrupación*. Theoretical-political activities then become tools for deliberation, debate and protest regarding the challenges being

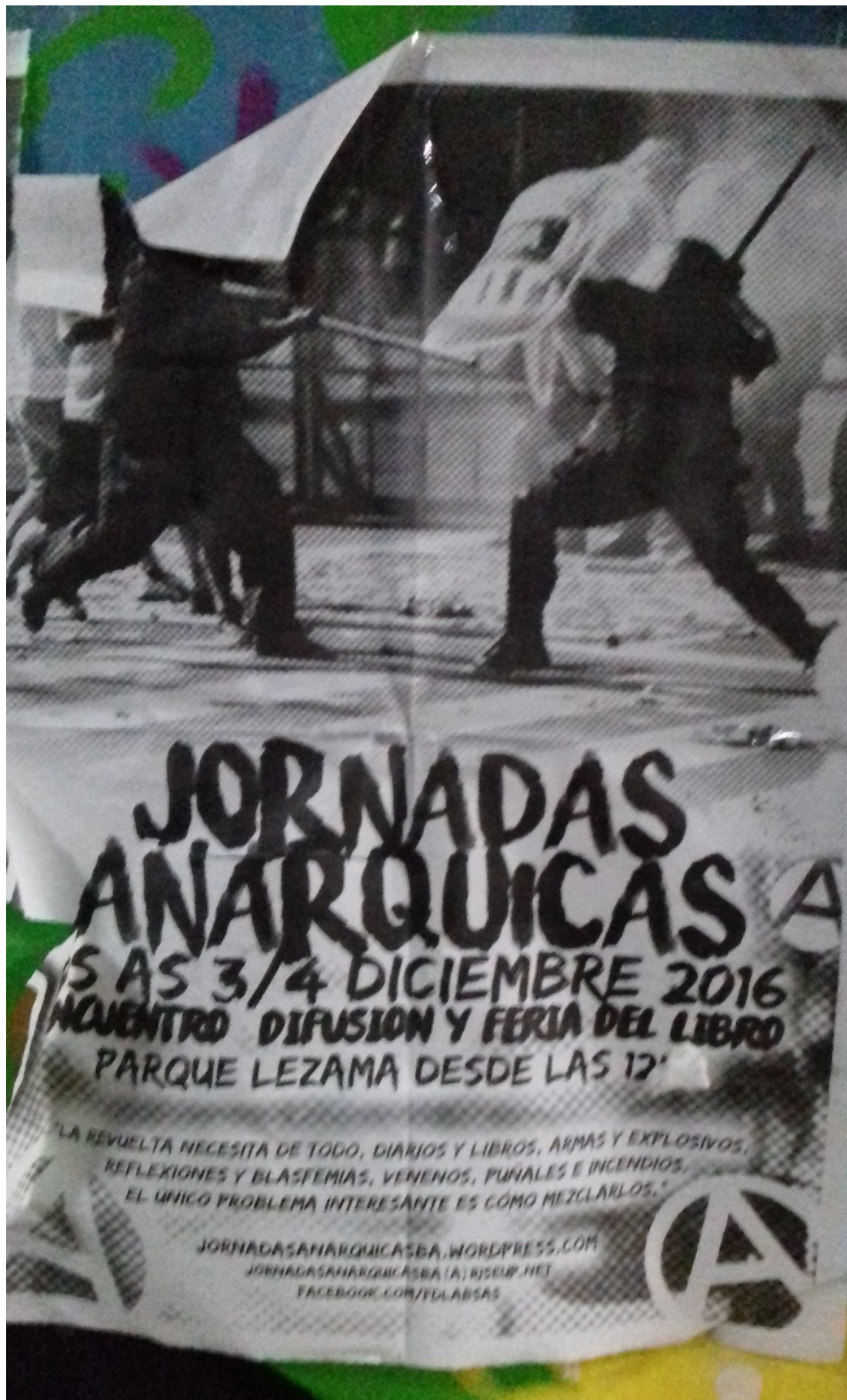


Image 58. A flyer at the UBA announces a series of events on anarchism, including meetings and a book fair at a public park, in December of 2016.

faced by the student movement; a key part in the repertoires of the student movement, in the contest for hegemony inside and outside of the FUBA. And resulting from this process of political theorisation and practical intervention - among other practices of the student movement - activity within the student movement is further triggered and facilitated, in an ongoing process that we might compare to the workings of a chain reaction.

### **Organisation of Theory as Political Practice**

Having considered the meaning and function that theory as political practice may have within the FUBA, it is useful to turn our attention to how these theoretical-political activities are organised and performed. A more detailed look at the intricacies of the organisation of theoretical-political activities may be revealing in terms of the conditions of possibility that allow such a practice to exist. Taking into account the material, logistical, and political dimensions that come into play throughout the process from their conception to execution, how are these initiatives actually organised?

Here, as Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón, and Milstein suggest, it will be vital to take into account the notion of concern regarding amount of work and effort it takes to assemble and sustain social movements or activist formations as entities (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón, and Milstein 2018). As Zibchi recognises, constructing a climate of emancipation within the spaces of public education (against the logic of the State), presents the huge challenge of subverting these institutions and maintaining them in that subverted state. As we will see, through these efforts that seek to re-articulate the production of knowledge, education ceases to be the responsibility of a select handful of people, and all spaces and actions, including people, become pedagogical subjects (Zibechi 2012).

A key element of the theoretical-political activities I have discussed is that they are organised independently by students of the various *agrupaciones* within the FUBA. That is to say, although some of them may take place in the space (campus sites) of the UBA, they may use certain resources from the university, and they are in their majority activities informally addressed to students of the university, they are not organised by the UBA as an institution. They are initiatives



**BARRIO  
ADENTRO**

*Las cosas no son así,  
están así,  
y vamos a cambiarlas*

- ★ ESI
- ★ FEMINIZACIÓN DE LA POBREZA
- ★ RECREACIÓN CON NIÑES
- ★ HISTORIA BARRIAL Y DE LOS MOVIMIENTOS SOCIALES
- ★ LITERATURA POPULAR

**BARRIOS  
DE PIE**

**SUR**

**FILO**

Image 59. “Barrio Adentro: feminisation of poverty; recreational activities with children; community and social movement history; popular literature. This is not the way things are, things are like this now, and we will change them.”. An online flyer by SUR announces a series of community activities similar to the ones mentioned in the *Prácticas* scene, in economically marginalised neighbourhoods, in 2018.

proposed by the *agrupaciones* and organised by the students themselves, often in collaboration with non-student participants (such as fellow militants who may be teachers, trade union members, members of worker-run companies, members of Human Rights organisations, etc.). From conception to execution these are planned as interventions by the student movement as integral aspects of daily life in the university.

Typically then, theoretical-political activities are organised in line with the political orientation of a certain *agrupación* regarding a matter that is of interest or concern to the student movement, such as in the examples described above. Therefore, student militants organise these activities as attempts to generate a critical consciousness on behalf of fellow students, to disseminate their characterisation of a certain problematic in the contest for hegemony within the FUBA and the student movement, and as an attempt to attract adept students to their political reading and action.

In this sense, it is usually the *militantes* of a particular *agrupación* within a faculty who are tasked with the organisation and staging of theoretical-political activities. As I described in Scene B, these *militantes* will take on the job of squaring out a particular activity (usually relating to the academic degree which they are undertaking), and inviting other students around the faculty to participate. This is usually done by going around classes (*pasando cursos*, as this is normally called) personally presenting the activity and handing out flyers to students in the classrooms, as well as by painting and putting up *carteles* (posters) around the faculty spaces in order to publicly announce that an activity will take place. Digital or online promotion will also usually take place in the online platforms of the individual *agrupaciones* across various forms of social media, whose *militantes* will then usually share on their personal profiles. Then, the *militantes* will be present at the actual execution of the activity, whether it be as participants of a campaign (as in Scene A), as presenters and attendees of an event (as in Scene B), or as facilitators and promoters of a presentation (as in Scene C), among many other roles which they may play depending on the characteristics of the activity in question. They will usually attend the activity, most of the times with a t-shirt emblazoned with the name of their *agrupación*, and will be at hand and willing to engage in debate or conversation with any student who

las represiones. En principio, el presupuesto educativo se vio deteriorado de inmediato con la inflación y devaluación.

Asimismo, el nuevo Ministro de Educación, Esteban Bullrich, es conocido por el ejercicio del mismo cargo en el gobierno porteño: sobrepagos en el Plan Sarmiento (netbooks), cierre de cursos y déficit de vacantes, el 0800 para denunciar actividades políticas o gremiales de los estudiantes en los colegios, disminución de subsidios a la escuela pública y aumento para las privadas, implementación de la NES, "aulas container" y tanto más.

Lo mismo corre para el único Ministro K-PRO: Lino Barañao, de Ciencia y Técnica. Su principal logro es el modelo científico servil a

multinacionales y monopolios como Monsanto, Barrick Gold y Chevron, que puso a las universidades públicas al servicio del mercado. La solución de los problemas históricos de la universidad, como la docencia adhonorem, la falta de becas, el deterioro de la formación de grado y los convenios con el sector privado, estarán lejos de revertirse.

Mientras los centros de estudiantes en manos del radicalismo y el kirchnerismo esperan sentados o hacen alguna que otra declaración contra Macri, los estudiantes debemos reorganizarnos para pelear contra la continuidad y la profundización del ajuste educativo, levantando nuestras banderas como parte de la lucha de los sectores populares contra el macrismo.

## **Asamblea de Estudiantes Despedidos (FUBA)**

Jueves 18-2 a las 19:00 hs en Sociales (UBA), Santiago del Estero 1029.

## **Charla-debate**

*"La unidad obrero-estudiantil contra Macri"*

Martes 23-2 a las 18:30 hs en Sociales (UBA)

## **Paro Nacional ATE**

Miércoles 24/2, con movilización

**Tendencia Universitaria Nacional**

**29 de M★YO**

**f TUN29deMAYO**

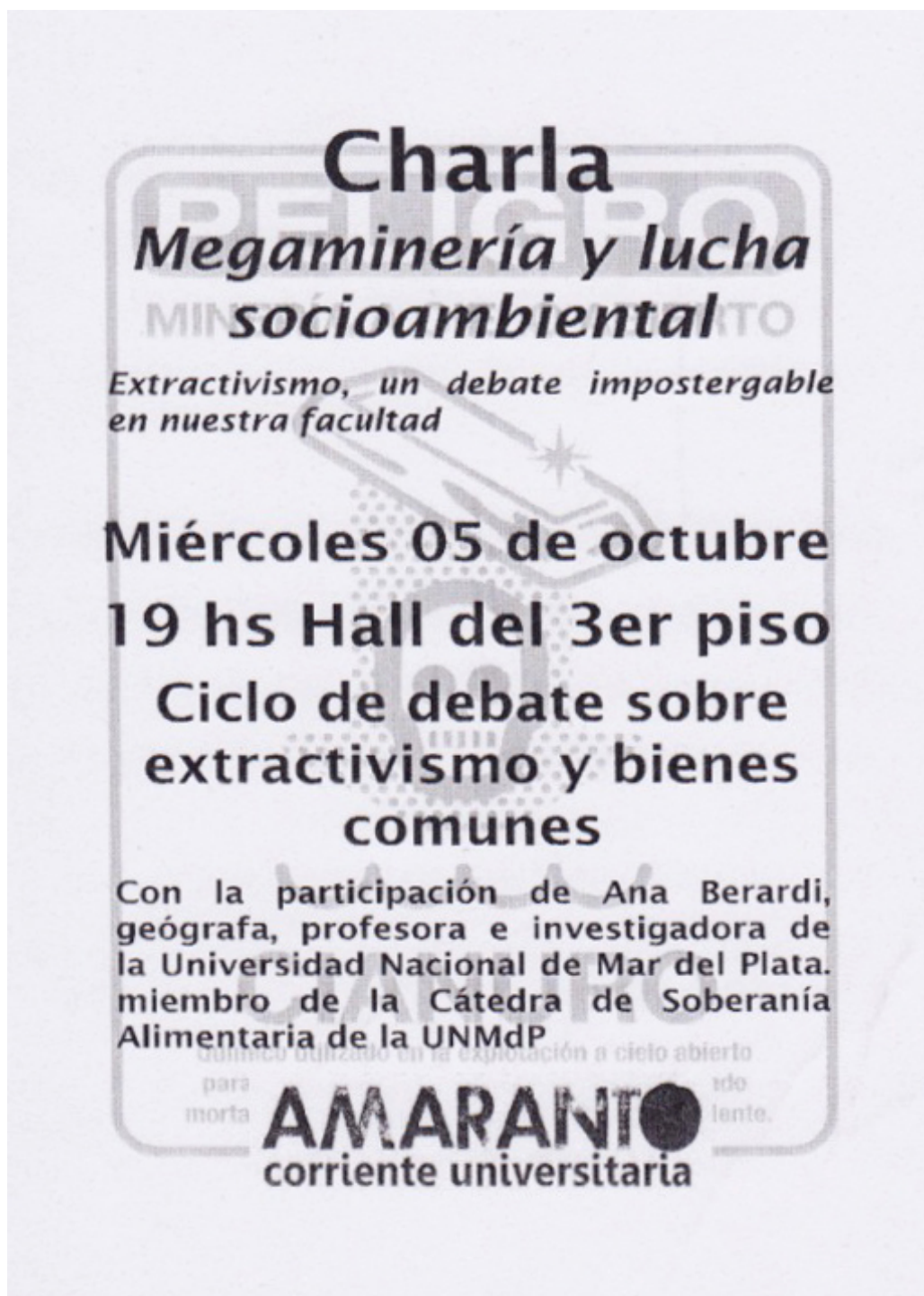


Image 60. A flyer of the 29 de Mayo agrupación invites students to attend a series of events: the FUBA assembly for sacked students, a talk and debate on student-worker unity against the Macri Administration, and a national strike by the ATE union, in February of 2016.

may be participating in the activity, interested in it, or simply passing by. Their *prensa*, flyers, or other printed materials will also usually be close at hand in case participants of the activity may wish to take any of these with them. Finally, if the activity has involved using any of the material resources of the University, such as desks, chairs, etc. (as exemplified in scene B), the *militantes* will usually ensure that such resources are put back in place, or that any materials left at the site of the activity are cleaned up. Similarly, *carteles* or flyers that have been placed around the faculty for the promotion of the activity will be collected by the *militantes*, eventually to be replaced by new posters announcing future events or concerns.

Regarding the resources that the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA may have at their disposal for the organisation and staging of theoretical-political activities, it is useful for us to consider these in two categories: the material and the personal. The *militantes* of a particular *agrupación* usually have access to a range of material resources that may include physical resources such as those needed for the production of promotional materials for their activities (posters, flyers, etc.), as well as digital resources across the online platforms of their *agrupaciones*. These would be provided through their particular *agrupación*, be it through the work of the *militantes* organising the theoretical-political activity, or support in the form of the time and labour of their peers, who would carry out these tasks as part of their student militancy. Monetary costs, if these arise, would usually be met by the monetary resources of the particular *agrupación* that is organising the theoretical-political activity. Usually, the various *agrupaciones* hold fundraising campaigns throughout the year in order to meet their financial needs. Also, since many *agrupaciones* are part of political parties, these may or may not have access to party funding in varying degrees.

However, when considering the material resources that *militantes* of an *agrupación* have at their disposal, we should not limit these to the resources provided by the *agrupación* itself, as it is usually the case that in some shape or form, university resources will also be used in the organisation and staging of theoretical-political activities. Most commonly, these activities are organised within the university space itself, in the halls or classrooms of the faculties. And even if they are not staged specifically at the university, as I mentioned earlier



*Image 61.* A flyer by the student organisation *Amaranto* promotes a talk on mining and environmental struggles, as part of a series on extractivism and common goods, at the Faculty of Philosophy, in October of 2016.

the university space will still be used in some form, as a planning space, a dissemination forum, or a meeting place at one point or another (as exemplified in Scene A). The university resources used can range from the faculty café as a meeting space (as exemplified in Scene A), to a faculty hall together with some desks and chairs (as exemplified in Scene B), to the time of a whole class itself turned book launch (as exemplified in Scene C). Also to highlight is how the FUBA's student movement makes use of the personal resources that the UBA provides it with, (i.e. in terms of faculty staff and the university's academic position), since by occupying the university in the theoretical and social sense - with activities in which staff members or external scholars participate as solidary peers, yet which do not belong to the university as an institution, but to the students as part of a social movement – the student movement is provided with certain theoretical means that aid its reproduction. Here lies a key point in understanding how the occupation of University space (detailed in Chapter 5, on occupation) in the material and symbolic sense, plays a key role in defining the university as the student movement's territoriality; together with its physical and intellectual resources.

Continuing with the personal resources deployed by organisers of political-theoretical activities, it is important to consider the support of fellow students who are also *militantes* within a particular *agrupación*. Although not all of the *militantes* of the *agrupación* at a particular faculty would necessarily be “organisers” of an event, they would generally help out in the staging of such an activity, for example: inviting students, handing out flyers, painting *carteles*, posting on social media, etc. Furthermore, as mentioned before, we should consider the support of University faculty staff who may offer their support outside of working hours to the members of a particular *agrupación*, who may sympathise with an *agrupación* politically, or may even be members of that political organisation themselves and friends with the students, and thus may assist in the realisation of activities in their role as militant academics, as Alba recognised doing, and as we saw in the example of Scene B, “¿Marx Antropólogo?”, where the young teacher responsible for giving the talks on Anthropology and Marxism was a member of staff at the Faculty of Philosophy, a member of the Partido Obrero, and a friend of the student organisers. Lastly, we should consider the support of scholars, workers, union leaders, politicians, or public figures outside of the UBA, who may

**F. Filosofía y Letras**  
**09/06 - 19 hs.** **Panel de debate sobre Siria**

**¡PAREMOS EL GENOCIDIO Y EXTERMINIO DE  
 OBAMA, PUTIN, AL ASSAD AL PUEBLO SIRIO!  
 ¡Solidaridad con todos los refugiados!**

En la última asamblea del CEFyL, se resolvió realizar un panel de debate sobre la masacre y el genocidio a los trabajadores y el pueblo sirio por parte de Bashar Al Assad, Putin, Obama y todas las potencias imperialistas que ya se cobró la vida de 400 mil personas y ha provocado 10 millones de refugiados que por millones son encerrados en verdaderos campos de concentración en las fronteras europeas.

El panel se realizará el próximo jueves 9 de junio. Invitamos a todos los estudiantes a participar de este debate, como así también a todas las organizaciones obreras, estudiantiles y de derechos humanos solidarias con el pueblo sirio frente a semejante masacre.



**9/06 - 19 hs. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras - Púan 480**

**Organizan: Comuna Socialista y Democracia Obrera**  
**Participan: Movimiento argentino-arabe en apoyo al pueblo sirio por la libertad y la democracia**  
**Convoca e invita: CEFyL (Centro de Estudiantes de Filosofía y Letras)**

*Image 62.* “Debate panel on Syria: Let’s stop the genocide of Obama, Putin, and Al Assad on the Syrian people. Solidarity with all refugees!”. *Comuna socialista* and *Democracia obrera* organise the event with the participation of the Argentine-Arab movement in support of Syrian people, and the invitation of the CEFyL, at the Faculty of Philosophy, in June of 2016.

also support the activities of a particular *agrupación*; which supposes a difference in the resources that the different *agrupaciones* may have: perhaps *agrupaciones* aligned with *Macrismo* enjoy greater financial resources, yet those from *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* and the Independent Left may have more contacts throughout social organisations, unions, etc. This is exemplified in the case of Scene C, “*Capitalismo Zombi*” where we have seen that Jorge Altamira, a politician and public figure renowned as a luminary of the Independent Left, participated in the book presentation and History class being promoted by the members of the UJS-PO. In all of these cases that I documented during my fieldwork, the participation of students, faculty staff, and public figures was voluntary (unpaid), and in most cases it was seen as an act of theoretical discussion and political militancy by the various invitees themselves. This is a key dynamic to highlight as it resembles Freire’s dialogical approach, in which relationships that seek to produce knowledge through intertwined forms of theory and practice have their transformative potential in presupposing a dialogue among equals, who seek each other out through the learning process, rather than enacting a “banking” imposition from above (Freire 2000).

This, in turn, leads us to the question of who would usually participate in the such activities. Who would be invited by the students? First, those invited by the *agrupaciones* generally agree to collaborate with students given that they sympathise with the political position being expressed. And second, in the struggle for hegemony occurring among the *agrupaciones* of the student movement, these participants, peers, and interlocutors serve as vehicles for the transmission and validation of the political orientation which a particular *agrupación* may want to encourage; a validation of how they may characterise a particular problematic and suggest to intervene in it. For example, throughout my fieldwork, students of the Independent Left UJS-PO invited Alejandro Crespo, the general secretary of the trade union of tyre manufacturers (SUTNA), several times to speak at panels across the UBA, given that they proposed for students to take similar actions to the ones the tyre manufacturers had taken; while students of the Guevarist *La Dignidad*, invited author Juan Martín Guevara to present his book “*Mi hermano, el Che*” (Che, My Brother), to reflect on the legacy of *Che* Guevara as the way forward.



**DERECHOS HUMANOS**

De la pelea de Abuelas a la liberación de Milagro Sala

*40 años de lucha*

Charla - debate

**Estela de Carlotto**  
Presidenta de la Asociación Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo

**Eduardo Tavani**  
Miembro del comité por la liberación de Milagro

**Miércoles 26/04 - 19 hrs**  
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras UBA - Puan 480

**EL COLECTIVO**  
Filo avanza en unidad

f /NEEstudiantilCARA

Image 63. "Human Rights: From the struggle of the Grandmothers to the liberation of Milagro Sala, 40 years of struggle. Talk and debate." Students of *El Colectivo* draw a direct line between past and present events with the participation of Estela de Carlotto; president of the *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, at the Faculty of Philosophy in April of 2017. This event was postponed for a day, due to the recovery of grandchild number 122 by the Grandmothers of *Plaza de Mayo* being publicly announced a day earlier.

Finally, we are left to consider the temporality with which theoretical-political activities may be planned and organised. That is to say, with how much anticipation or how far ahead do the *agrupaciones* typically organise their various events? To what degree are they inscribed in a wider long-term calendar? Indeed, as Alba pointed out, theoretical-political activities are usually inscribed within larger political campaigns carried out by the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA. So these activities are to a certain degree planned across different faculties as part of the university-wide agendas proposed by the different *agrupaciones*, according to the professional profile that each faculty may have.

As Manu once explained to me in terms of how student militants organised the calendars of their campaigns: “Yes, as an *agrupación* you may have an idea of something like: This academic term we will focus on campaigning around the issue of gender violence”. Yet as he went on in that conversation, while handing out flyers at the front entrance of the Faculty of Philosophy, “... but then you also have to respond to the needs of the student movement, which may come up suddenly and unexpectedly. So in that sense, you may need to adjust your agenda and make some changes.”. We can see this dynamic exemplified in Scene B, “*¿Marx Antropólogo?*”, where the series of talks on Anthropology and Marxism had to be postponed due to the requirements of election campaigning. Similar situations may occur for example, if teachers need to carry out strike action, and therefore the attention of the student movement shifts to organising *clases públicas* (public classes) in solidarity; or if an act of repression by the State happens, in which case the student movement must mobilise in its denouncement. So there seems to be a need on behalf of the *agrupaciones*, and the FUBA as a whole, to organise the unexpected, in the face of constant episodes of “attritional time” (Lazar 2014), which in a political panorama as turbulent and defined by emergences as the one that the FUBA inhabits, is perhaps not the exception but the norm.

**SEMANA POR EL ABORTO LEGAL**  
*del 22 al 25 de agosto*

**ANEL** **EL ABORTO EN LA**  
**UNIVERSIDAD: UN DEBATE PENDIENTE**

Panelistas invitadas

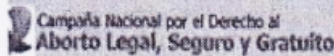

**MÓNICA TARDUCCI**  
 Dra. en Ciencias Antropológicas (UBA). Docente e investigadora UBA/UNSAM. Miembro de la Colectiva de Antropólogas Feministas y La Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito.

**DIANA MAFFIA**  
 Dra. en Filosofía (UBA). Docente en la materia "Filosofía Feminista" (FyLL-UBA). Directora del Observatorio de Justicia y Género en el Consejo de la Magistratura de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires.

**ANDREA PEREZ**  
 Médica generalista UBA. Coordinadora del Programa de Salud Sexual del municipio de San Martín.

**VICTORIA TESOREIRO**  
 Socióloga Feminista. Miembro de Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir y La Campaña Nacional por el Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito

**Martes 23 17hs en el hall de Filo (Puan 480)**

 Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito 

**SEAMOS LIBRES** CORRIENTE UNIVERSITARIA

Image 64. "Week for the legalisation of abortion. Panel: Abortion in university, a pending debate.". Students of *Seamos Libres* make an invitation to attend a discussion with the participation of women doctors in anthropology, philosophy, medicine, and sociology, at the Faculty of Philosophy, in August of 2016.

## **In-between the Knowledge and Tensions of Theory as Political Practice**

I have so far reflected on the meaning and function of theory as political practice throughout the FUBA's student movement and on the organisational sense of how these activities are planned and performed. Now it is useful to reflect on the type of knowledge that may be transmitted and reproduced through the student movement through the performative process of theory as political practice. Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge the tensions among which theory as political practice is performed; with the intention of facilitating processes of emancipation for students, while at the same time trying to further the political agendas of the particular *agrupaciones* within the FUBA, many times in an institutional space itself. To unravel these questions, we may ask: What is peculiar about knowledge produced and transmitted through theory as political practice? How does it reflect the social characteristics in which the student movement is situated, and the relations that occur within it? What kind of politics is expressed in and through theoretical-political activities? How do these activities facilitate the articulation of an emancipatory climate throughout the university and beyond?

From the passages described earlier in this chapter, we can see that theory as political practice produces a distinctive type of knowledge. Taking on board the reflections made by the members of the FUBA, we should consider the resulting knowledge to be complementary vis-a-vis the (formal) academic knowledge produced through the pedagogical and other initiatives of the UBA as an institution, yet also singular in its characteristics and possibilities. It appears to be a knowledge that presupposes equality and looks to facilitate "politics" as a means of intervention (Rancière 2010). Knowledge thus produced is particularly situated in the emerging concerns of the student movement and in its condition of struggle; it is produced in the midst of antagonist relations (Laclau and Mouffe 2014) projected towards "the police" (Rancière 2010) outside of the student movement, and also of agonistic relations (Mouffe 2013) enacted among the *agrupaciones* of the FUBA as they strive for the hegemony of the student movement.



*Image 65.* "Debate series: Social movements and women in situations of prostitution." Students of *La Dignidad* make an invitation to attend the series of events they have organised on popular feminism, at the Faculty of Philosophy, in August of 2016.

Knowledge deriving from theory as political practice also seems to be flexible and adaptive to the heterogeneous needs and concerns of the student movement. As Freire argues, through the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity joined in producing knowledge in solidarity, thought committed to liberation does not become preoccupied with a circle of certainty, but rather seeks reality in order to transform it (Freire 2000). In this sense, theory as political practice appears to be a practice (among others developed by the student movement) that enables a response to the multiple challenges which the FUBA and its members confront. Such a practice may take the form of an array of political readings and characterisations particular to each *agrupación*, yet it appears to have the purpose of utilising theoretical reflection as a flexible and adaptive element in the intervention of the daily lives of students. From articulating knowledge that may allow students to perceive the effects of adjustment policies while exercising their academic skills, or theorising how to counter State violence through the sharing of trans-national experiences, to female students breaking the culture of silence by informing women how they may administer a self-induced abortion through the use of medication as a means to prevent deaths resulting from procedures in clandestine facilities - in the face of the negative answer of government policies to the campaign for the legalisation of abortion, in which virtually all of the *agrupaciones* within the FUBA are involved, and which they describe as part of the wider *#NiUnaMenos* movement - the knowledge derived from using theory as a political practice seems to be wide-ranging across disciplines, yet particular in its suitability and transformative possibilities. Theory as political practice appears to facilitate the production of a knowledge that is close at hand for students to become involved in addressing the concerns of the student movement, by blurring the division of roles between those who think and those who act (Rancière 1991); for example, inviting teachers to collaborate with fellow students in the role of equal peers, learning from engaged practice with residents of a particular area, dialoguing in panels with trade union workers to reflect on solutions to the challenges presented by *Macrismo*, etc. Through these activities students actively intervene with self-led initiatives in the political sphere.

However, we must acknowledge that the field in which the FUBA's student movement enacts theory as political practice is not a clear-cut landscape inhabited only by students. There are, as we have seen, a multiplicity of actors

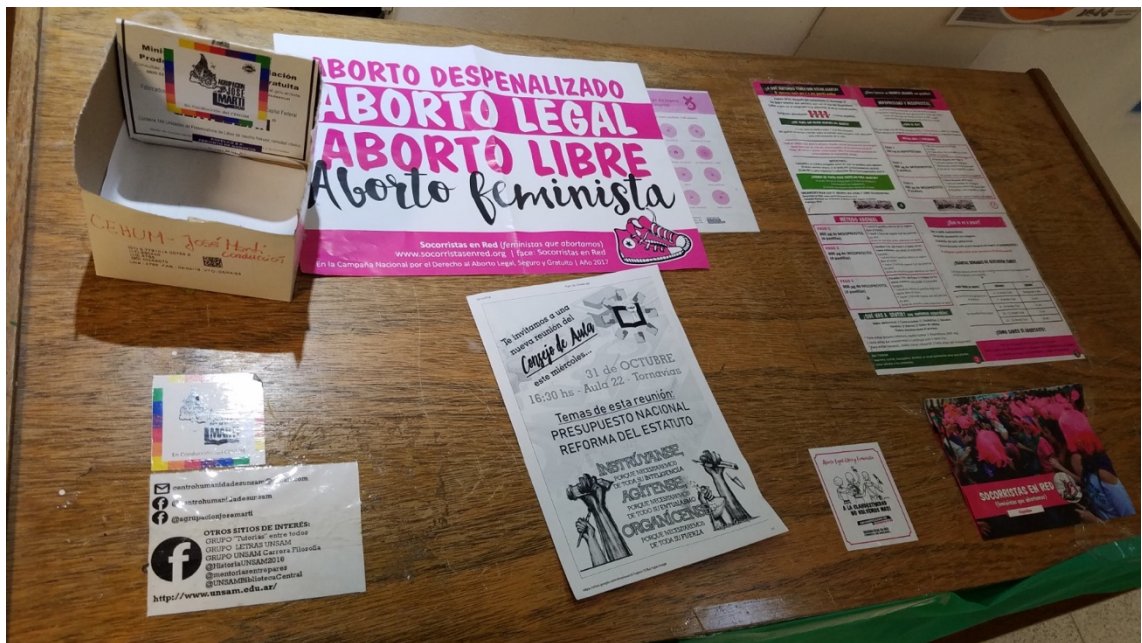
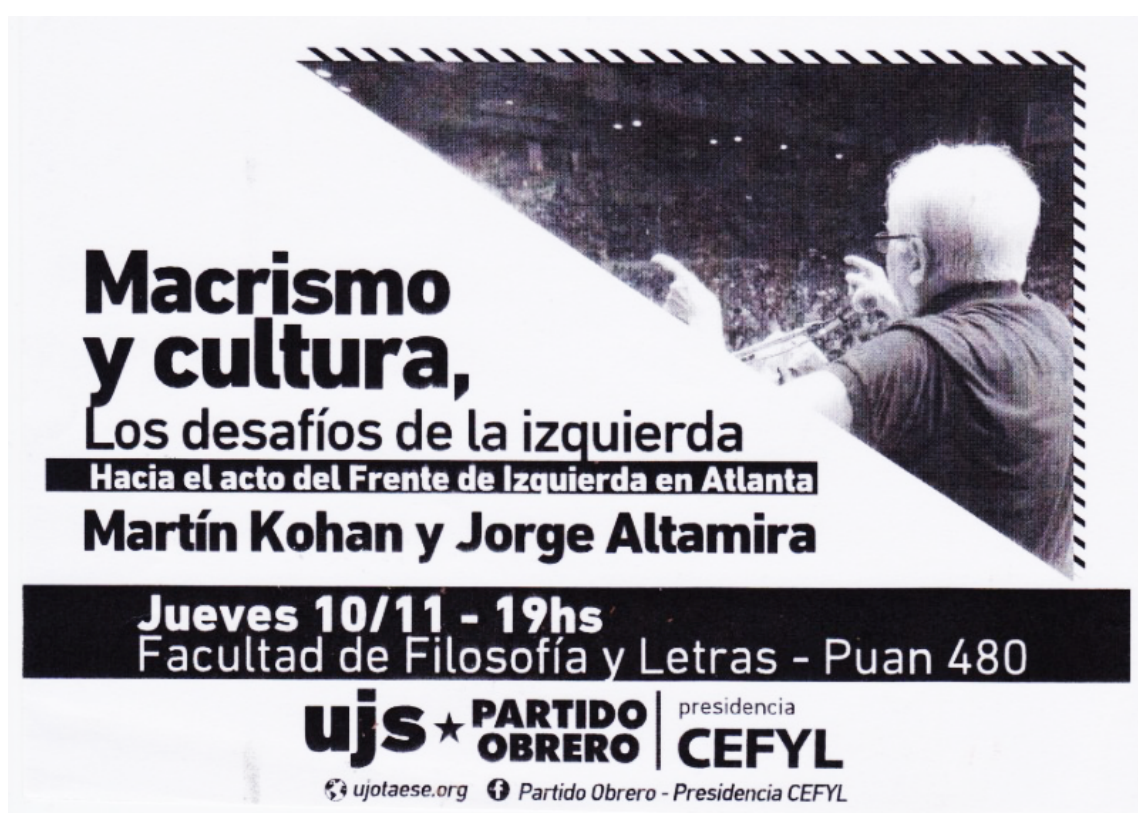


Image 66. A mesa of the agrupación José Martí offers informational flyers on abortion for students, in March of 2019.

and political agendas in this social sphere that result in a series of nuanced tensions as to what - other than the student movement itself - theory as political practice may reproduce; for example, the fundamental logic of educational institutions themselves. This is important to recognise, for as I briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter, many educational practices of Latin American social movements trace back their origin to what were originally State-led forms of public education (Zibechi 2012). In Argentina, particularly, there has been a complex relation between State and civil society, whereby schools have been significant nodes of tension. On one hand, during periods of dictatorship, public education that was perceived to be subversive was forcibly and violently prohibited; and on the other, in moments of economic collapse such as the *Argentinazo* of 2001, schools served as focal points for the organisation of neighbourhood assemblies and for self-managed social organisations to gather around (Svampa and Corral 2006). Clearly, in the case of Argentina, we see a complex articulation between social movements and public education as a base upon which to build alternative social organisations with mixed results.

This dynamic inevitably brings the question of whether theoretical frameworks that consider the the FUBA's student movement to intervene in the political field, rearticulating social relationships through equality with theory as political practice, may be adequate - or if what we are witnessing may be, at least in some way, a reproduction of the logic of institutional education; which leaves relationships of inequality largely untouched. As we can see, in all of the scenes I presented (A, B, C), certain elements of institutional education are apparently put into action. At the surface level of interactions teachers appear to give lectures to students; interactions happen in university space; students and local residents of economically marginalised areas each inhabit distinct territorialities. Furthermore, tension exists between looking to facilitate critical consciousness among students while at the same time pursuing the political agenda of a particular *agrupación*. However, focusing on the relational level, as Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón, and Milstein argue, the theoretical action employed by social movements is never fully transparent or opaque; it is invariably entangled and mediated by a multiplicity of actors and networks. And through this categorical uncertainty, controversies and contradictions shed light on the necessity to abandon naturalised concepts, obliging us to engage with the





**Macrismo  
y cultura,**  
Los desafíos de la izquierda  
**Hacia el acto del Frente de Izquierda en Atlanta**  
**Martín Kohan y Jorge Altamira**

**Jueves 10/11 - 19hs**  
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras - Puan 480

**ujs** ★ **PARTIDO OBRERO** | presidencia **CEFYL**  
 🌐 [ujtaese.org](http://ujtaese.org) 📱 Partido Obrero - Presidencia CEFYL

Image 67. "Macrismo and culture: The challenges of the left." A flyer by the UJS-PO invites students to a debate at the faculty of Philosophy; in the lead-up up to a large-scale event of the *Partido Obrero* at *Atlanta* football stadium in November of 2016.

unpredictability of encounters and associations. For, we must acknowledge that social movements are “more than conceptual machines: they enact and exist within entanglements of collective affect, organizational modes, personal commitments, tactical operations, strategic goals, etc.” (Rodríguez-Giralt, Marrero-Guillamón and Milstein 2018: 262).

Here again, lies the importance in recognising the the relational aspect of the construction of knowledge since ultimately, it seems, the type of relations through which knowledge is articulated and set in motion carries a greater relevance than the topical formal aspects through which it takes place. As Zibechi argues of the intellectual labour of social movements, what matters is not so much the pedagogy that is used or even the actual methods for its implementation and the mode of schooling, but rather the “climate” and “human relations” in which the education in social movements happen; for “education is no more and no less than a social climate embedded in social relations”. Therefore, the result of these practices depends on the climate of the social relations they take place in. “If the climate is competitive and the relations hierarchical”, the same mode of closed hierarchical relation is likely to be reproduced. But if there is a different conception, aiming to transform; “to transform oneself by transforming”, the outcome might not be certain, but it is likely that horizontal relations will be encouraged - in turn, they will broaden and strengthen the movement; perhaps they will not, but it opens the possibility, as well as the lesson of living in the face of uncertainty that these movements inhabit (Zibechi 2012: 24).

Therefore, In the sensorial aspect of where the FUBA’s theoretical-political activities take place, in the materiality surrounding them and in the relational capacity of who participates in them and why, may lie their radical potential for the re-distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2010); in the “emancipatory climate” these interactions take place in, and to which they contribute (Zibechi 2012: 26). While the student movement may draw on certain institutional elements - inviting a variety of teachers, union leaders, politicians even - to participate in their events; and while there remain differences in territorialities with communities that the student movement operates with, there is a key element in noticing that it is students themselves who in all of these cases take up the task to self-organise and lead theoretical-political activities; either by inviting others to address them

**MUJERES  
Y ECONOMÍA POPULAR**

**PANELISTAS:**

**VIERNES  
23/9 - 19 hs.  
Hall del 3er piso**

-Jaqueline Flores:  
Movimiento de Trabajadores Excluidos

-Janett Ramos Martinez:  
Militante del MP La Dignidad y de CTEP

-Veronica Gago:  
Dra. en Cs Sociales, miembro de Tinta Limón Ediciones

*Viajá con nosótras al  
encuentro nacional de mujeres*

 /LA DIGNIDAD FILO UBA

**La  
DIGNIDAD**  
Corriente Estudiantil

Image 68. "Women and the Popular Economy.". A flyer by *La Dignidad* invites students to attend the series of panels on popular feminism which they organised at the Faculty of Philosophy, in September of 2016.

or by addressing other students themselves. Thus, by happening in a dialogical process where students and their interlocutors occupy an equal place (Freire 2000), the construction of knowledge through theory as political practice is situated as distinct from that of institutional teaching practices at the UBA as a public university, and fundamentally distinct from institutional teaching practices of private institutions where students occupy the position of customers. Members of the FUBA's student movement thus, in practice, blur the division of roles between those who organise, those who theorise and those who act *in the course* of their theory as political practice itself.

As Zibechi argues, emancipation does not allow for prescriptions or models; it is a process which is always un-finished. In this sense, one can only be emancipated by one's self (Rancière 1991). But if there can be the articulation of a sensible climate in space-time conducive to the logic of emancipation, instead of the "logic of the first-class", such a climate is necessarily constructed by social movements and their participants - it cannot simply occur, but must be constructed through struggle (Zibechi 2012: 26).

Furthermore, to close this chapter by introducing the next, we should be aware of the value that theory as political practice has for the student movement in the production of a type of knowledge that was once prohibited and violently taken away, and which has now been reclaimed. Since (as I briefly pointed out above) during episodes of dictatorship, particularly during the last military dictatorship, activities relating to the production of theoretical knowledge that was perceived to have a politically militant character were severely repressed and persecuted; many students kidnapped and disappeared by the *Junta* were themselves carrying out activities similar to those described in Scene A, "*Prácticas*". And in the case of the UBA itself, student organisations and their activities were banned and student centres dismantled, which left the FUBA in a semi-clandestine state, only able to address strict university matters (UBA 2015). In this sense, theory as political practice also produces a type of knowledge that is considered by members of the FUBA to be a conquest; a reclaimed space for the reproduction of the student movement that is endowed with the notion of Collective Memory (elaborated upon in Chapter 7, The Role of Collective Memory in the Student Movement), entangled in a transmission across generations that



*Image 69.* “To migrate is a Human Right: Facing the criminalisation of migration and a backwards turn in integral public policies, we as anthropologists debate.” Anthropology students of *MANA* announce a panel on migration, having invited a legislator, an anthropologist, and a community radio host to participate.

supposes the performance of theory as political practice to be embedded in the larger history of struggle of the student movement.

## Conclusion

In order to conclude this chapter, I propose to reflect on the following question: How does theory as political practice, and the knowledge thus produced, help sustain the FUBA's student movement as an ongoing process, facilitating its intervention in the political, through a struggle for hegemony occurring within the FUBA and beyond?

As I have attempted to argue, the development of theory as political practice on behalf of the student movement seems to be a creative response to the agitated and adverse political climate that its community has experienced throughout the past, and which today continues to situate FUBA in a context of emergences that constitute a ground on which hegemony is under constant contention. It appears to be the outcome of sedimented practices that have allowed for the propagation of theoretical-political activities across the student movement as a fundamental element of political militancy.

Stemming from such a struggle for hegemony, today this practice seems to constitute a pillar that is vital for the reproduction of the student movement. It facilitates its continuation through the dynamics of attraction and activation of students into the initiatives of the student movement, the political formation of student militants, and through the transmission of a knowledge that is produced by the student movement that adapts to its shifting needs. Knowledge thus produced stems from a variety of political understandings and characterisations. These characterisations themselves become battlegrounds for deliberation and debate, contested by the different *agrupaciones* within the FUBA; an agonistic process that has the by-effect of constantly triggering activity within the FUBA. The resulting dynamic contributes to the reproduction of the student movement as an ongoing process which is always under construction owing to its heterogeneity.

I suggest to see theory as political practice not as an isolated invention of the FUBA, but as an ever-evolving outcome of processes of political contestation,

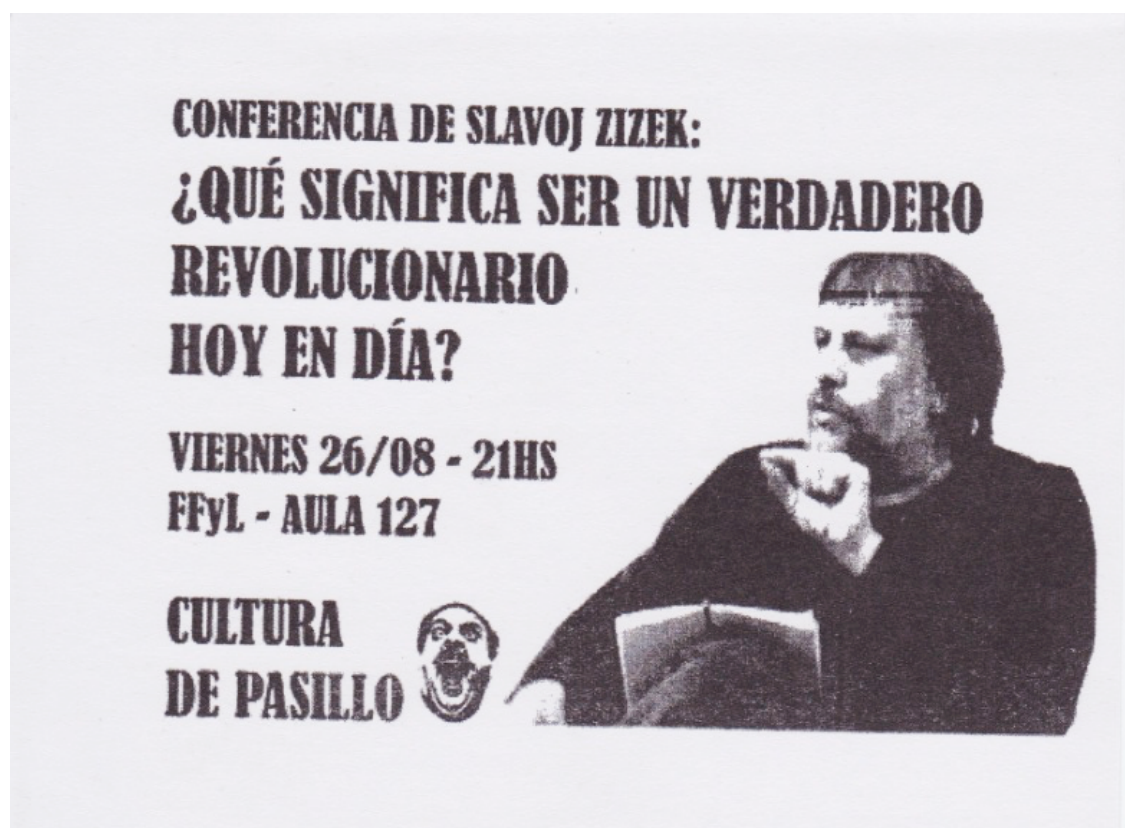
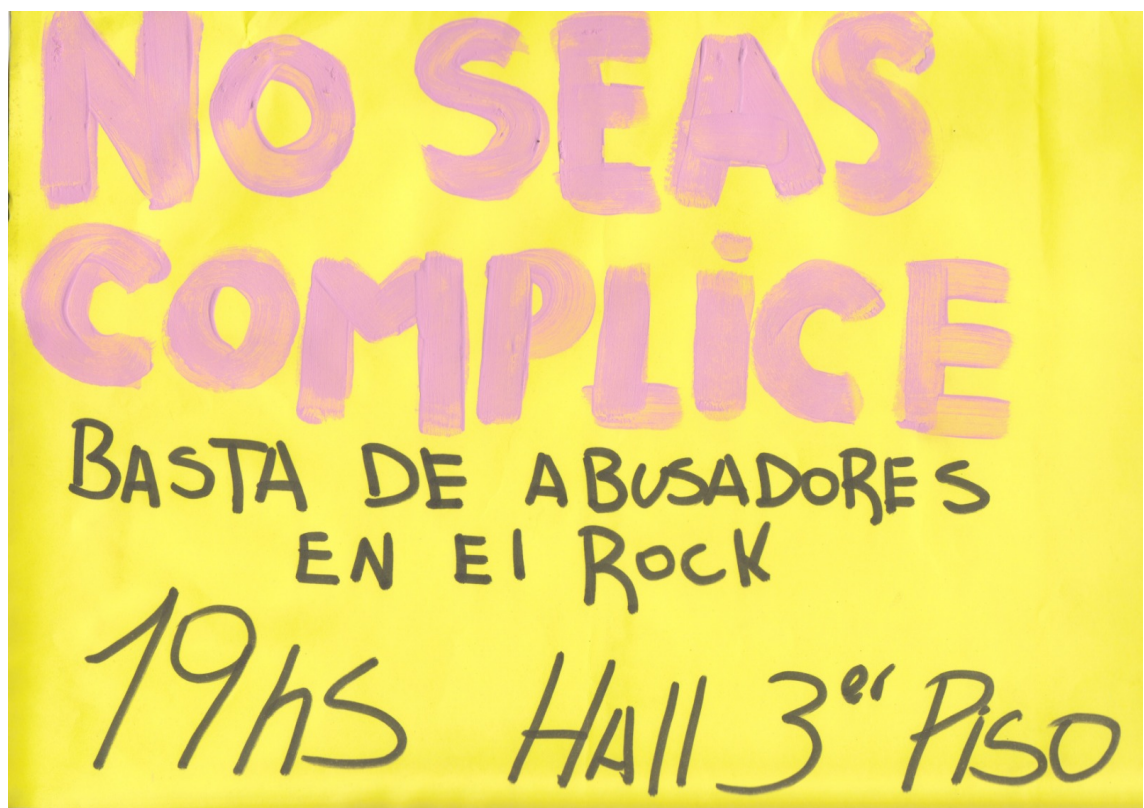


Image 70. A flyer by the student group *Cultura de Pasillo* announces the screening of a conference by Slavoj Žižek: "What does it mean to be a true revolutionary today?", at the Faculty of Philosophy, in August of 2016.

which finds itself under constant renewal as different demands and conflicts facing the student movement enter its political agenda. As such, I invite us think of theory as political practice as a sphere that allows for the experimentation with, and visualisation of different social imaginaries, for the FUBA and beyond; where the dilution of boundaries between categories of theory and practice may represent as Osterweil argues, an extended or theoretical experiment in which the object itself may be to test out or make visible the possibilities of new arrangements or imaginaries of the social; to think within and against current formations (Osterweil 2013). This experiment in the production of knowledge - beyond institutional effects or consequences that the student movement may or may not have - allows us to see social relations as members of the student movement would like them to be; it describes their own sensible idea of how a shared production of knowledge can exist among members of a community.

Through such an approach to theory as theoretical practice - which I argue is one of various political and aesthetic practices carried out by the FUBA's student movement – members of the student movement intervene politically in their environment. By blurring the roles of those who think and those who act - producing their own knowledge in collaboration with various interlocutors - they enact a reconfiguration of the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2010). They intervene as active subjects who transform their environment through active collaboration with each other (Freire 1994), all the while facilitating the reproduction of the student movement as a process which is constantly under construction; an objective in itself (Zibechi 2012).





*Image 71.* "Don't be an accomplice. Enough of abusers in rock." A *cartel* denounces abuse in the music industry, by inviting students to an evening conversation at the hall of the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, in the Faculty of Philosophy, in 2016.

## VII. The Role of Collective Memory in the Student Movement

### Setting the Context

This chapter makes reference to events of collective memory regarding episodes of political violence in Argentina, mainly from 1946 (the first presidency of Juan Domingo Perón) until the time of my fieldwork. This is so since the many shifts in the Federal Government between periods of democracy and dictatorship throughout these years, inevitably impacted the FUBA as the student organisation of the largest public university in the country, and further impacted the private lives of both, its past and current members, either through directly lived personal experiences or through the transmission of these from earlier generations.

It is therefore key to understand that throughout these years the FUBA suffered important transformations, many of which form events that are memorialised today, as the UBA experienced intervention and its autonomy from the State was lost in periods of dictatorship, whilst militants of the FUBA belonging to different political sectors have been targeted through different methods and to a greater or lesser extent in periods of dictatorship and democracy. Furthermore, as memorial practices for those who had been victims of State violence gained a place in Argentine society - such as those spearheaded by the *Abuelas* (Grandmothers), and the *Madres (Mothers) de Plaza de Mayo*, as well as the *H.I.J.O.S.* - these also became reflected in the life of the FUBA and its members. Even episodes from the financial crisis of 2001, the *Argentinazo*, onwards, have come to be inscribed and commonly referred to in the everyday language, imaginary, and demands of the student movement.

To better illustrate the events referred to in this chapter, I provide a short timeline of defining moments for both the history of Argentina and the UBA, since the first presidency of Juan Domingo Perón, a useful point of departure, since a large sector of the FUBA identifies as belonging to the political current of

*Peronismo*. Although I by no means suppose this as a definite list of accounts, I name these events so that they may be illustrative in navigating this text<sup>28</sup>.

- 1946. Juan Domingo Perón takes office in his first term as President of Argentina.
- 1947. The UBA is officially aligned with the executive power during the first presidency of Perón, with a law that allows the president to appoint the rector of the UBA.
- 1955. Juan Domingo Perón is ousted from power and becomes exiled following a military coup against him.
- 1955. Having previously opposed Perón, student organisations in the UBA are once again allowed to elect the governing bodies of the UBA. However, ensuing government policies lead to discontent and protest on behalf of the students, who are once again perceived by the government as a threat to be neutralised.
- 1966. General Juan Carlos Onganía enters power following a military coup.

The military regime of General Onganía suppresses the autonomy of the UBA, and dissolves its governing bodies. The events lead to a reaction of protest where students and faculty occupy the University of Buenos Aires and are violently repressed by the military forces in an episode that came to be called *La Noche de los Bastones Largos* (Night of the Long Batons).

- 1966-1969. In spite of attempts by the military regime to suppress protests, student organisations throughout Argentina, together with workers' movements, continue to have a central role in the process that eventually led the military regime to lose power. Students groups participate in the *Rosariazo* and *Cordobazo* of 1969.
- 1973. Upon returning from exile, Juan Domingo Perón returns to power for his third term as President.

The UBA undergoes a process of reform once again, with a greater student intake and students of certain faculties offering programs for marginalised sectors of society.

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<sup>28</sup> A more comprehensive account of the trajectory of the FUBA through these events is found in Chapter 4, Historical Background and Structure of the FUBA.

- 1974. Juan Domingo Perón dies and is succeeded by his third wife, Isabel Martínez de Perón.

Tensions escalate between different factions within the government, and the extreme right-wing sector intervenes extensively in the university system. The process brings violence upon members of the university community, with attacks by groups such as *La Triple A* (the Argentine Anti-communist Association, a paramilitary death-squad targeting left-wing sympathizers). Additionally, prohibition of political activity within the university takes place, as well as police surveillance of students' activities and associations.

- 1976-1983. The last military dictatorship takes power following the military coup of March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1976.

State Terrorism ensues, accompanied by neoliberal reforms, in the context of the US-backed *Plan Condor*, instituting dictatorships to govern throughout South America.

It is estimated that over 30,000 people were disappeared or assassinated by the Military Dictatorship.

Communities such as student organisations become a central target for military repression. The activities of student groups are prohibited and their centres dismantled. Violence against those perceived as subversives reaches the highest point in the UBA's history. Student groups and organisations such as the FUBA are forced to operate in a precarious and semi-clandestine state. They are only permitted to address a narrow range of university related issues.

The profound difficulty and bereavement experienced by the communities of the student movement during the military regime bring to the forefront the demand for justice and Human Rights.

- 1982. Student groups are once again permitted to participate in the election of student representatives in the University of Buenos Aires. The episode sees the student organisation *Franja Morada*, associated with the *Union Civica Radical* (UCR) party, win the *conducción* of the FUBA (the *Franja Morada* would continue to preside over the FUBA's *conducción* until 2001).
- 1983. The last military dictatorship comes to an end, with Raul Alfonsín, of the UCR party elected as President of Argentina.

- 1985. *El juicio a las Juntas* (The trial of the *Juntas*) takes place to hold accountable the top military officers responsible for crimes committed during the last military dictatorship.
- 1986-1987. The *Ley de punto final* (Full stop law) and the *Ley de obediencia debida* (Due obedience law) are passed, limiting the responsibility of the crimes committed during the last military dictatorship to high commands of the military.
- 1989-1999. Carlos Menem assumes the Presidency of Argentina. During Menem's administration there is a deepening of neoliberal reforms, and pardons are granted to some responsible for committing crimes against humanity during the last military dictatorship, such as Dictator, Jorge Rafael Videla. The situation leads members of the student movement to perceive the neoliberal governments following the last military dictatorship as a continuation of the Dictatorship's policy.
- 2001. The economic and political crisis in Argentina, the result of the successive neoliberal governments following the last military dictatorship, leads to the events known as the *Argentinazo*.  
In the context of the economic and political collapse of the *Argentinazo*, a coalition of Independent Left/Trotskyist organisations wins the *conducción* of the FUBA for the first time.
- 2003-2015. Néstor and Cristina Kirchner, respectively, assume the Presidency of Argentina, in the political period known as *Kirchnerismo*. There is an approach by the Kirchner administrations towards Human Rights organisations such as the *Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo*. The laws of *Obediencia Debida* and *Punto Final* are repealed, and the facilities which functioned as clandestine centres for detention and torture during the last military dictatorship are re-purposed as memorial sites. The policies on memory and Human Rights implemented by the Kirchner administrations give way to a process of State institutionalisation of collective memory.
- 2015-. Mauricio Macri assumes the Presidency of Argentina. The Macri administration shifts the National Government's public discourse in relation to the last military dictatorship, openly referring to the events as a "dirty war" instead of the recognised form of State Terrorism, and questioning the number of victims who were disappeared and

assassinated, stating that they were possibly only 9,000 instead of the recognised number of 30,000. Furthermore, attempts at passing legislation which would reduce the prison sentences of those responsible for crimes against humanity during the last military dictatorship, are made in the shape of *2x1*.

It is under the light of these episodes of political contestation, and possibly many others, that we can begin to pose ourselves the question of the role that collective memory plays in the student movement today. The troubled social, political, and economic history of Argentina is relevant in the sense that it has allowed social movements to become and to recognise themselves as historical agents; who identify themselves with those who came before them, and those who may come after, through a timeline that is traversed by collective memory. As such, social movements have been part of the turbulent political history of Argentina that has been closely interwoven among personal and public narratives; as Goddard states, a constant interlocutor revealing itself in regular irruptions in the lives of men and women (Goddard 2006).

From such a recognition, we can begin to reflect on the importance that the issue of collective memory holds for members of the FUBA. Collective memory is an aspect that becomes materially and affectively evident as soon as one enters the social space of the student movement, and therefore conforms an elemental line of inquiry in order to better understand this community. This line of inquiry, when further explored, becomes telling of inner contestation among the FUBA, of competing appropriations or understandings regarding collective memory that lead to agonistic positions (Mouffe 2013) on behalf of political organisations within the FUBA. In the process, the contestation over collective memory serves to trigger debate and activity within the student movement - as each side strives to promote its understanding of collective memory as the correct way in claiming the past and setting forth an agenda for the present and future.

As we will see throughout this chapter, when exploring the FUBA and its social space, we are confronted with a scenario where the past and present are not closed off and separated from each other, but rather, where the past is constantly re-emerging, re-claimed, and re-activated according to shifts occurring in the present situation. Be it through the notion of a return to the neoliberal

economic policies that were first implemented by the Military *Junta*, or through the dismissal of the recognition of State Terrorism by the current Federal Government, among many other possibilities. It is a space of inter-generational transmissions regarding notions and practices of memory, where the past and present are always entangled, and thus, where the category of collective memory and its function are always, an open-ended process in construction.

### **The Role of Collective Memory in the Student Movement**

*“Llega la FUBA piquetera,  
la FUBA del puente pueyrredon  
la FUBA de Mariano Ferreyra  
contra el gobierno represor  
Hoy tenemos que enfrentar  
el ajuste de los K  
vamo’ todos a la huelga general”*

(The *FUBA Piquetera* is arriving  
the FUBA of Puente Pueyrredon  
The FUBA of Mariano Ferreyra  
Facing the repressive government  
Today we have to fight  
The adjustment of the K  
Let’s all go to the general strike.)  
Song by the UJS-PO.

*Somos de la gloriosa Juventud Peronista  
Somos los herederos de Perón y de Evita  
A pesar de las bombas, de los fusilamientos  
Los compañeros muertos, los desaparecidos  
¡No nos han vencido!”*

(We belong to the glorious Peronist Youth  
We are the heirs of Perón and Evita  
Despite the bombs and the executions  
The dead comrades and the disappeared  
They have not beaten us!)  
Song by the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations.



*Image 72.* Students of the CEADIG march into the *Plaza de Mayo* with the FUBA on the *Día de la Memoria* on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016. They hold pictures of students from the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism who fell victims to the 1976-1983 dictatorship.



With these verses, often chanted in the midst of an *agite* (agitation), throwing hands in the air, waving banners, jumping around circles, or marching down a street, these different *agrupaciones* announce their arrival or presence. As if they were introductions, they both present themselves through the claim to a distinctive past. Each of them quotes characteristic episodes embedded in their collective memory, and through their vindication their identity is made known, filling the atmosphere with voices.

In the case of the *FUBA Piquetera* song by the UJS-PO (youth branch of the *Partido Obrero*) the first line refers to the FUBA adding the adjective “*Piquetera*”. This term refers to the *Piquetero* movement around the time of the 2001 economic crisis, where organisations of unemployed rural workers would block the highway accesses to the City of Buenos Aires as their mode of protest. They called these roadblocks “*piquetes*”, and since 2001 - the year in which the *conducción* of the FUBA was won by a coalition of Independent Left/Trotskyist organisations for the first time - the adjective “*Piquetera*” was adopted by the UJS to signal its combative character, distinguishing the FUBA from the time when it had been presided over by the *Franja Morada* (1982-2001). The second line makes reference to the 2002 events of the *Puente Pueyrredon* (Pueyrredon Bridge), when, in the context of the economic crisis, organisations of unemployed workers attempted to block Pueyrredon Bridge (an access to the City of Buenos Aires). The events resulted in an act of repression by the police, where young activists Maximiliano Kosteki and Darío Santillán were shot dead. The third line makes reference to Mariano Ferreyra, a UBA student and UJS-PO militant who was shot dead in 2010 by members of the Railways Union while supporting a protest by a combative sector of railroad workers. The next section of the song cites the *FUBA Piquetera*’s arrival against the repressive government, calling on its members to confront the economic adjustment policies of the “K”, shorthand for the Kirchner administrations. And it ends by making an invitation to wage a general strike<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> The *FUBA Piquetera* song is chanted to the tune of a football chant that became popular to support Argentina in the Brasil 2014 World Cup, which itself took the melody of Credence Clearwater Revival’s “Bad Moon Rising”.



*Image 73.* Students of the *Nuevo MAS* chant and jump around a fire in the form of an *agite*, with burning figures of Mauricio Macri and Barack Obama, on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016; condemning Obama's visit to Argentina on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military coup of 1976.

The *Gloriosa Juventud Peronista* song starts by stating that its members belong to the “Glorious Peronist Youth”. In the second line its members state a claim to being direct heirs of President Juan Domingo Perón and his second wife Eva Perón. The rest of the events quoted are references to political violence aimed at Peronist supporters. Starting with the bombs that were dropped on a crowd in the Plaza de Mayo in 1955 as part of an attempted coup against Perón; following with the “executions” of 1956, against 12 civilian Peronist supporters after Perón had been overthrown and exiled by a coup. The “dead comrades” and “the disappeared” refer to those killed and forcibly disappeared by the last military dictatorship (1967-1983), after the military coup which overthrew Perón’s third wife, President Isabel Martínez. The song ends by exclaiming that in spite of all these violent events, the Glorious Peronist Youth has not been defeated<sup>30</sup>.

All of the events cited in these songs make a reference to episodes of political violence that happened in the past. In both cases, student members of the FUBA state their identity in relation to events that belong to collective memory. Yet there is a difference between them. While all of the events cited by the *Gloriosa Juventud Peronista* song have been officially recognised as being related to episodes of dictatorship, all of the events in the *FUBA Piquetera* song have taken place since the return of democracy (1983), and more accurately since the *Argentinazo* of 2001.

## Introduction

This chapter explores the central role that “collective memory”: a process of common experiences, and at the same time, of the homogenisation of the diversity of personal memories (Guglielmucci 2011), mainly relating to State political violence, plays in the student movement today; its apparent omnipresence in the FUBA’s discourse and distribution of the sensible, borrowing Rancière’s term: its system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously disclose the existence of something in common and the

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<sup>30</sup> The *Gloriosa Juventud Peronista* song is chanted to the tune of Argentine singer-songwriter Victor Heredia’s song “*Todavía Cantamos*” which pays homage to the victims of the 1976-1983 Military Dictatorship.



*Image 74.* Stylised figures of Nora Cortiñas, of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora*, and Hebe de Bonafini, president of the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo*, appear on the streets of Buenos Aires in the context of the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, 2019. The images, by the feminist collective *CortalaBrocha*, place both women - regarded as international Human Rights icons - together, despite political differences between the two groups of Mothers of *Plaza de Mayo*.

delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it (Rancière 2004).

In a first instance, I consider collective memory in Argentina, and the practices of memorialisation relating to it, as the outcome of a heterogeneous process of construction. A dynamic process which had a variety of Human Rights and political militant organisations as its main actors, from whom the notion of collective memory was inherited by contemporary members of the FUBA, and inscribed in the life of its political organisations. This is in order to reflect on how the category of collective memory has undergone a long process of vindication, contention, and also institutionalisation throughout generations, and to highlight how it is still under constant debate and construction today. Situating its importance as an argument that seems to distinguish political organisations within the FUBA along two positions, and serves to amplify debate and activity throughout the student movement.

From there, the text poses questions regarding the possible functions that collective memory currently plays for members of the FUBA and its organisations. I focus on ideas of identification among the student movement through the sharing of a collective past as well as the legitimisation of demands arising from the student movement through the category of collective memory, tied to the notion of a continuity in the demands of the past and the demands of the present. I give an ethnographic example in the case of the demand for the *Boleto educativo* (Education transport ticket) to illustrate this dynamic in which explicit reference is made to the notion of collective memory in order to highlight the meaning of a present demand of the FUBA. Further consideration is also made of the function of collective memory for the internal legitimisation and distinction among organisations within the FUBA, as well as for outward legitimisation, towards the government and the general public.

Subsequently, the chapter goes on to explore how different and overlapping identities which members of the FUBA may have, can be expressed through their participation in memorial rituals. I highlight that memorialisation of past events within the FUBA cannot be taken as a homogeneous acknowledgement, but rather should be looked at as an active process, in which



Image 75. Posters and graphic interventions remain on the *Avenida de Mayo* as traces, following the massive demonstration of the *Día de la Memoria* in 2016. “30,000 reasons to fill the streets”, read the posters pasted onto rubbish bins by *Patria Grande*.

members of different political sectors may subscribe to particular versions of collective memory, and participate in different forms of memorialisation. Thus, collective memory is situated as a relevant point of action which can be illustrative of how members of the FUBA may negotiate layering memberships and political identities when these come into conflict with one another. Two ethnographic examples are given here to compare and contrast the dynamics of participation in distinct memorial rituals – the 2000<sup>th</sup> march of the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo*, and the music festival held to commemorate the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Mariano Ferreyra – while picturing collective memory in the agitated political climate in which it is usually encountered and expressed.

Finally, I consider the particular role that collective memory seems to play in the trans-nationalisation of efforts of solidarity and protest in which the FUBA takes part. I propose that it is through the local recognition of State violence in Argentina which has been achieved along the constructive process of collective memory, that a readiness exists for members of the FUBA to signal out cases of political violence occurring in other countries. In visibly denouncing these, the FUBA forms extended networks of solidarity and support with other social movements across national boundaries in the process. Specifically, cases of political violence in Latin America, and the trans-nationalisation of the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign are discussed to illustrate how collective memory seems to inform the participation of FUBA members in both cases.

Throughout the chapter I argue that, although the events encompassed by collective memory may be situated in the past, the practices and rituals of its commemoration address very present concerns in the everyday life of the FUBA. Thus, collective memory takes prominence as a category placed between the shifting tensions of the past and the present, which allow it to be revived and transformed in an ongoing process of re-articulation and contestation through agonistic and antagonistic relations (Mouffe 2013) that serve as an operating trigger for the activation of the student movement. Collective memory can be understood to be an elemental component of the spatial code (Lefebvre 1991), that the FUBA's student movement has developed. It is a flag inherited and wielded by the FUBA, a code for living and navigating its symbolic imaginary and



Image 76. *Secundario* students march on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Noche de los lápices*, on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016. “September is a struggle, the future will be ours”, “40 years on, students, united, continue the struggle”, “United for public education”, read the banners they carry. According to members of the FUBA, some students become politically active, and engage with collective memory, during their secondary school years.

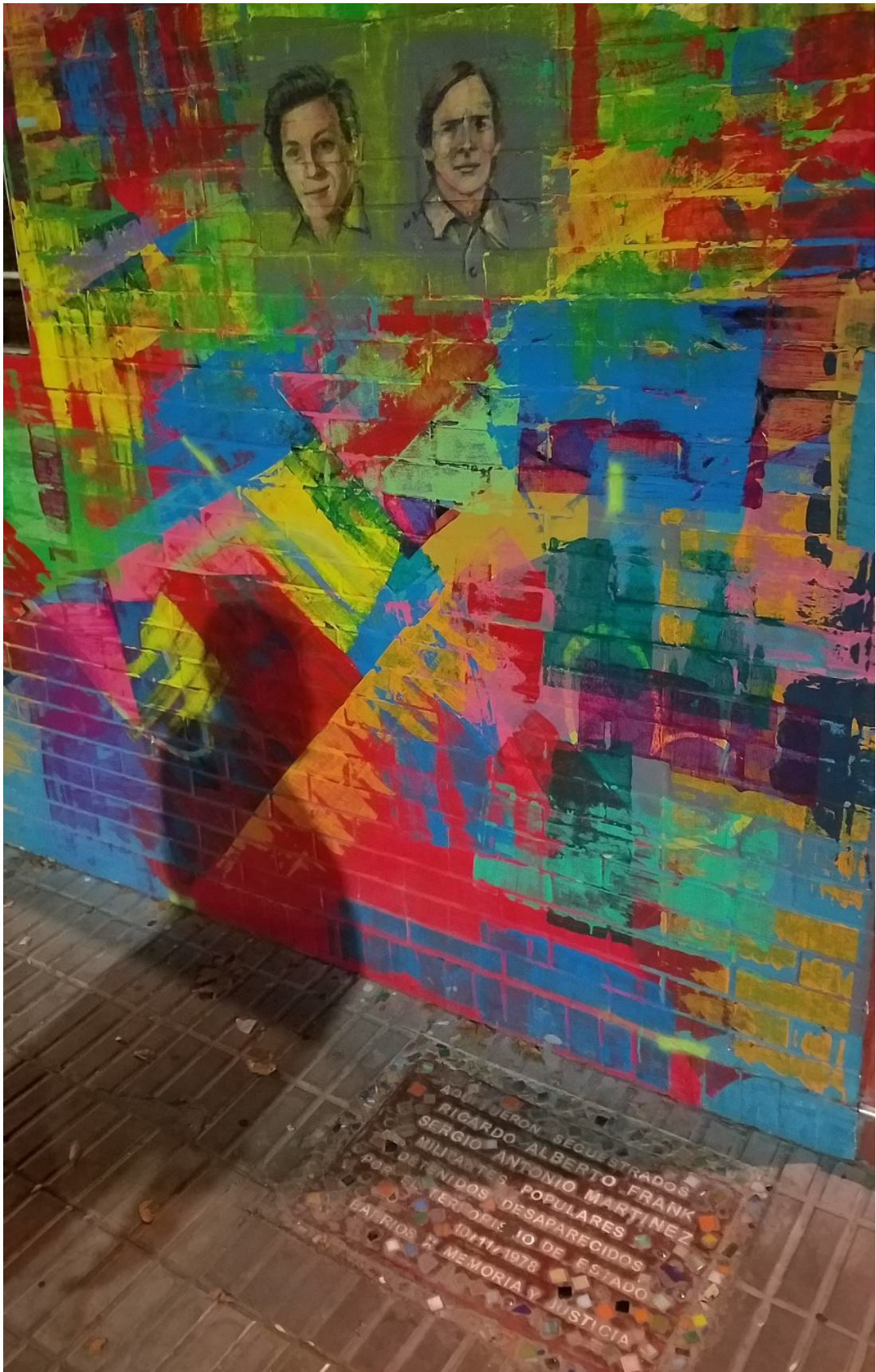


situating oneself along the lines of its discourse, an expression of public and private political notions of belonging, and also a site of contention, which at all times seems to be inscribed in the social space and background of life within the FUBA and the student movement.

### **Construction and Transmission of Collective Memory**

Walking along the halls in the campus sites of the University of Buenos Aires, sitting inside the classrooms, listening to the political statements being made by the members of the *agrupaciones*; experiencing the state of occupation that inhabits the university space as I have previously described, one subject appears to be recurring above others. Echoing across all faculties and taking on a revered importance is a subject that appears to be so deeply inscribed inside this distribution of the sensible that some students admittedly take it as a natural element of university life. As a form of prayer or a religious figure sits unquestioned in its environment within a temple, so one can find “collective memory”, its language, symbols, and objects in the UBA; in the social space (Lefebvre 1991) of the FUBA and the student movement.

To picture the prevalence of this phenomenon we may understand that it occurs in a city where walking along the sidewalks, irrespectively of the neighbourhood in which one decides to take a stroll, in every site or street corner where it has been possible to document that a clandestine kidnapping or an assassination occurred during the last military dictatorship, lies a mosaic plaque on the ground documenting the event; a mark and a witness encouraging all who pass by to remember the trauma that was experienced. And as one approaches the site of practically any faculty of the UBA, the marks of graffiti, paintings on the sidewalk, or directly in the form of murals on the walls (*pintadas* as they are locally referred to), legends will come up in reference to the memory of the 30,000 people disappeared by the military *Junta* and those who have been assassinated or disappeared in periods of democracy. Many of them echoing a reminder of the powerful demand: *Memoria Verdad y Justicia* (Memory, Truth and Justice) *30,000 Compañeros detenidos-desaparecidos, ¡presentes!* (30,000 comrades kidnapped and disappeared, present!).



*Image 77.* “Ricardo Alberto Frank and Sergio Antonio Martínez, popular militants, detained and disappeared by State Terrorism, were kidnapped here on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1978. *Barrios por Memoria y Justicia* (Neighbourhoods for Memory and Justice).” A sidewalk plaque documents the disappearance of political militants. Plaques like this one are a common sight in Buenos Aires.

In order to understand such a prevalent presence of collective memory, it is useful to ask how all of this discourse, together with its objects, came to present itself in the day-to-day of student life. For, as Adriana, a teaching assistant who once addressed a seminar on Human Rights and Collective Memory that I was attending at the Faculty of Philosophy, said: “All of this language of collective memory and Human Rights was not here on a given day. Everything... the symbol of the scarf of the *Madres* (the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo) that we can immediately identify today, the concept of the disappeared and the ideas we have related to them, of political militancy and struggle. It was all constructed through a huge effort of many organisations that took up the task to do it.” It was a revealing statement for me as I sat in the classroom, trying to imagine the amount of people and the energy that such an effort would demand, and the countless social interactions that would have taken place through such a process, shaping both the demands and the people making them along the path. It was evident to such a degree that, as a result of this process, students sitting in the classroom with me admitted to having a very peculiar understanding of the concept of Human Rights, being directly related to collective memory. As a classmate said, “If you mention Human Rights to me, I immediately picture the idea of the disappeared” and went on, “so I think that gives us a very militant and political understanding of Human Rights that may be local of us in Argentina”. After this, I was asked by the teaching assistant what I thought of when Human Rights came up. And I admitted that through my upbringing and academic education, I had a very different understanding of Human Rights, which had practically nothing to do with political militancy, mobilisation, and struggle, but possibly quite the contrary (I had mostly heard Human Rights discourses in relation to “development” narratives). It was a contrast that drew my attention to the readiness with which students could understand the field of collective memory being expressed around the UBA and navigate through its codes and symbols. This line of thought highlighted the importance of thinking through the actors and mechanisms that had put such a state of collective memory into play, and transmitted it to the generation of students in the FUBA today, to hold as a flag of their own.

Traumatic and violent events by themselves do not generate bodies of



Image 78. A permanent display at the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism, hanging above the central foyer, remembers the students of that faculty who fell victims to the the 1976-1983 dictatorship. “Students of FADU, detained-disappeared and assassinated during State Terrorism, always present.”.

narrative or political discourse; these interpretations must necessarily be constructed by people around them, as Adriana highlighted. Indeed, as Mouffe acknowledges, every social order that at a given moment is perceived as natural, together with the “common sense” that accompanies it, is in fact “the result of sedimented hegemonic practices”; it is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity exterior to the practices that bring it into being (Mouffe 2013: 2). And here were traumatic events around which whole narratives and discursive categories had been set up, which although situated in the past, could be deeply informative about relationships in the FUBA’s present. Taking on board the notion of critical events proposed by Veena Das, the brutal violence exerted by the last military dictatorship could be considered as a case which has become inscribed in the public discourse, appropriated into collective memory, and are therefore recycled and transformed for a certain purpose or recognition; and whose memory may be contested by sectors of society (Das 1995) in Argentina.

To unravel the idea of a collective memory and study the role that it holds today for the student movement, we must first refine the concept of memory with ideas that have been developed by those who have theorised this subject extensively, remaining aware that efforts to theorise the notion of collective memory in Argentina have also been the product of the memory process itself (Jelin 2002). Through such an approach we can consider that although current members of the FUBA regard the notion of collective memory of students and others who were disappeared or assassinated during periods of dictatorship and democracy as their own, they did not necessarily experience these episodes themselves. Indeed, as Jelin and Sempol suggest, they are more likely to have inherited memories of recent historical periods such as the military dictatorships and forced disappearances, not through personally lived experiences, but through the transmission of these from an earlier generation, perhaps incorporating them as their own, thus raising questions over how they may remember, and how these memorialised events may influence their alliances with other social movements (Jelin and Sempol 2006).

This brings us to a point of discussion which should be explained before proceeding, as from now on it will be useful to distinguish between two categories of memory. One is the memory of those who were disappeared or assassinated during periods of dictatorship, mainly during the last military dictatorship (1976-

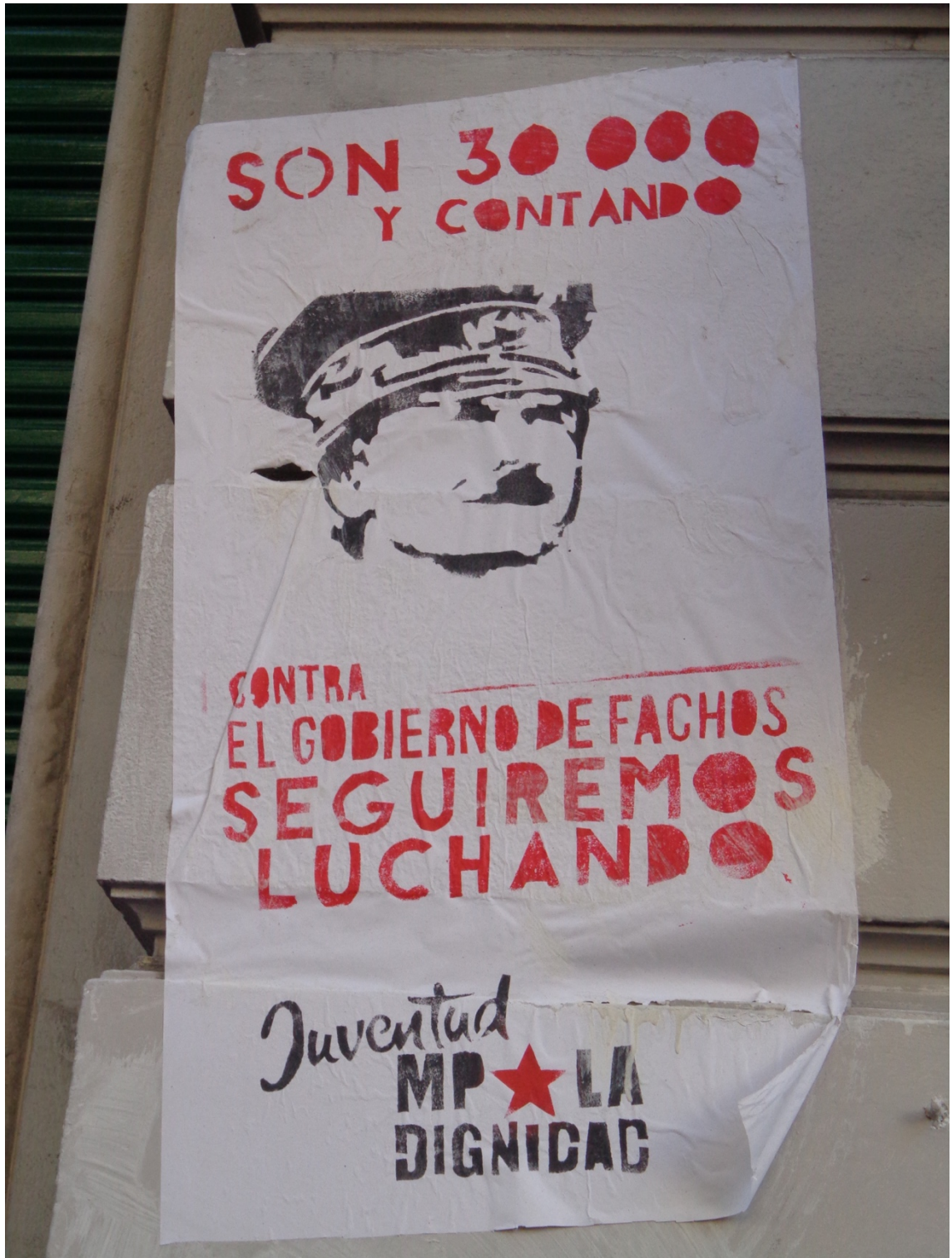


Image 79. They are 30,000, and counting. Against the government of *fachos* (fascists) we will continue to fight.”. A cartel by *La Dignidad*, found alongside *Avenida de Mayo* on the *Día de la Memoria* in 2016, equates Macri’s government to the last military dictatorship.

1983), in what has been officially recognized as State Terrorism. And the other is the memory of those who have been disappeared or assassinated since the return of democracy from 1983 onwards; deaths and disappearances not officially recognised as State responsibility, but considered as such by members of certain political organisations within the FUBA and beyond (primarily the Independent Left). In the dynamics of the FUBA, this represents a division between militants of organisations, mainly among the Independent Left and the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo agrupaciones*. The argument being that while all recognise and condemn State responsibility in the first case, not all of them necessarily acknowledge it in the second, something of which the Independent Left organisations frequently accuse *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations in what they regard as overlooking. Furthermore, contention on this point is heightened as many cases of disappearances or assassinations which the independent Left organisations condemn as State responsibility, occurred during the Federal Administrations of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner (2003-2015). As Mora, who I have mentioned before, characterised this issue: “There is a very clear debate happening within the popular movement of Human Rights, not to even mention the student movement or the FUBA. Whether you place yourself on one side regarding memory or you place yourself on the other.”

We should then keep in mind that, while memory regarding periods of dictatorship has been passed on to current members of the FUBA by previous generations, memory involving those killed or disappeared during the rule of democracy may come from first-hand experiences in the lifetime of the FUBA's members. As an example we may recall the case of Manu (detailed in the chapter on occupation), who personally recalled the case of the assassination of Mariano Ferreyra (a fellow student) as a trigger for his own involvement in the student movement.

Having made this consideration, we should acknowledge that although there may be different delimitations of memory, of “those who died or were disappeared during periods of State Terrorism”, and “those who died or were disappeared during periods of both State Terrorism and democracy”, both concern the issue of collective memory. Both concern the appropriation and hailing of past events for a certain purpose in the present (Jelin 2002) . Further



*Image 80.* “30,000 in memory. And in democracy?”. Students of the FUBA hold a *cartel* questioning the number of victims of State violence in times of democracy, during the demonstration of the *Día de la Memoria*, in 2016.



worth noting, is that a variety of Human Rights, civil society, and political organisations outside of the FUBA, who took on a centre-stage role in the construction and shaping of collective memory regarding episodes of dictatorship which were later labelled as State Terrorism, have continued to campaign in the name of memory and recognition of what they term as State violence in periods of democracy. A noteworthy example is the umbrella organization *Encuentro Memoria Verdad y Justicia* (Encounter for Memory Truth and Justice), which includes among others, members of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo Línea Fundadora* (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo Founding Line), *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo* (Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo), *H.I.J.O.S.* (Children for Identity and Justice against Forgetfulness and Silence), and whose motto is *Contra la impunidad de ayer y hoy* (Against the Impunity of Yesterday and Today). So there is overlapping territory which concerns the actors and organisations who have campaigned in the name of collective memory in the past, and those who, alongside the FUBA, continue to do so today.

Bearing in mind this interlaced relationship of the memory of “yesterday” and “today”, it is useful to define collective memory to better understand its meaning. Jelin reflects on collective memory as the political and symbolic meaning that the past is endowed with in relation to the present (Jelin 2002). As Guglielmucci describes it, collective memory involves a process of common experiences, and at the same time, of the homogenization of the diversity of personal memories. For collective memory does not exist in itself, but rather it is part of a social process traversed by power relations (Guglielmucci 2011). As such, she describes three operating fields through which collective memory in Argentina has been worked on during its construction: the academic, the political-militant, and the professional. Given the nature of this paper, I intend to focus briefly on the transmission of the political-militant notion of memory to the members of the FUBA today, with its possible implications.

This social process of transmission, as Guglielmucci states, had different organisations of activists, such as the ones mentioned previously belonging to the *Encuentro Memoria Verdad y Justicia* (EMVyJ), as the main protagonists, who through their work and articulation, mediated the construction of the concept of collective memory establishing ways of remembering and forgetting. Certain



*Image 81.* A child is taken by her mother to be embraced by the *Madres* at the *Marcha de la resistencia* (a 24 hour-long March of Resistance). The *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo* organised the march once again in August of 2016, to protest the Macri Administration.

rituals, ceremonies, and their norms were put in place over time, favouring a notion of “living memory” in order to preserve and encourage the practice of collective memory through passing generations. These are practices of remembrance in which the FUBA regularly participates today, through which the live expression of its history in the form of ritual (Hirsch and Stewart 2005) may be seen.

Yet we should bear in mind that, as Guglielmucci argues, there has also been a complex process of institutionalisation regarding collective memory. This was particularly so in the period from 2000 to 2015 - specially under the governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner (2003-2015), since the Macri Federal Administration shifted its public discourse on what is considered State Terrorism from 2016 onwards - when the struggle of Human Rights, civil society, and political organisations regarding the remembrance of the victims of the last military dictatorship, was also transformed into an institutional memory of the Argentine State. This process entailed a variety of Human Rights militants and organisations being incorporated into the bureaucratic structure of the State in various degrees, which in turn produced a particular State interpretation of these events. And it is important for us to recognise this interplay with the institutionalisation of collective memory so that we may consider the impact that this process had on the representation of militant and political activity regarding victims of State violence; until then, generally associated as being contrary to the state (Guglielmucci 2011), and now paradoxically, being appropriated by it.

This shift in the official recognition of State Terrorism and the eventual institutionalisation of collective memory, came to represent a point of dispute for the FUBA that has previously been mentioned, specially among the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* and the Independent Left organisations. To illustrate this point, I refer to the account of Ale.

Ale was born in exile during the last military dictatorship, having had relatives kidnapped and disappeared by the military rule. Yet after the return of democracy in 1983 her family was able to return to Argentina, where she became a student in the UBA and a militant of the FUBA during the 1990s. In our conversations held throughout the course of my fieldwork, Ale stated that from



Image 82. “March of Resistance. Friday 26<sup>th</sup> - Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> of August (2016), Plaza de Mayo. For the right to work, resist without rest: Cristina conducción.” The march organised by the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo* places Cristina Fernández de Kirchner at the *conducción*. The approach of the Kirchner governments towards Human Rights organisations remains a contentious issue among social movements and organisations.

the return of democracy (1983) until 2001, one of the most pressing issues which organisations in the FUBA campaigned for was the issue of Human Rights, with the demand of “*Juicio y castigo*” (Trial and Punishment) for those involved in State Terrorism activities during the military rule. She was keen to acknowledge the meaning of her personal political involvement as part of a process in dealing with the recognition of her own identity as an exiled child. Yet as the demand of *juicio y castigo* was, to a certain extent, officially acknowledged by the Argentine State, official collective memory was demarcated to include certain victims of State violence, but not others. Violent accounts of extrajudicial executions and police repression that continued to take place after the last military dictatorship until the present day (Denissen 2008; Svampa 2014), which certain members of the FUBA also considered to be State crimes, did not enter into the category of institutionalised collective memory of the State. Ale, although an UBA graduate now, is still an active militant of an Independent Left organisation. Therefore, to this day she continues to campaign in the demand for the memory and recognition of victims of State violence in periods of dictatorship and democracy.

In this sense, while practically all of the political organisations within the FUBA demanded the recognition of collective memory regarding the officially recognised episodes of State Terrorism, and campaigned to keep this collective memory alive - as many of the judiciary processes are still ongoing, and countless cases remain unsolved - for some, recognition of State crimes had been achieved (although admittedly they may regard this as an ongoing criminal process). Yet for other past and present FUBA members such as Ale, repair and recognition of what they term State crimes in periods of democracy, is still an open question demanding action.

We could say that through such processes, against the State, of the State, and in-between, the category of “collective memory” came to be situated in the in-betweens of “memory” and “history”, as Nora considers these concepts. With what he terms “memory” existing in permanent evolution, unconscious of successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, dormant and periodically revived; a perpetually actual phenomenon. Versus “history” as an always problematic and incomplete reconstruction and representation of what is no longer. Thus, we may consider the “collective memory” presented here as



*Image 83.* Night settles over the *Plaza de Mayo*, adorned with the white scarves and portraits of the *Madres* for the occasion of the 2,000<sup>th</sup> march of the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo*, earlier on Thursday, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

a *Lieux de mémoire* proposed by Nora, caught and disputed between memory and history: “simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration” in the material symbolic and functional form (Nora 1989, 18). Noting however, that locally, members of the FUBA or the general public may refer to the whole memorial and historical process at large simply under the “local” category of *memoria* (literally meaning memory) given the fact that these are still recent episodes spanning perhaps only three generations.

The process of transmission, institutionalisation, and contestation is also reflected in the physical living spaces of the FUBA. Around the city of Buenos Aires, institutionalised memory became embodied, as Guglielmucci argues, having tended to create and establish a politics of monuments, objects, and spaces to preserve and promote memory, which looked to consolidate common conceptions about what is considered as the legitimate form of remembering at the collective level; it became “consecrated” (Guglielmucci 2011). This form of memory which has in fact been expressed and materialised in monuments, cultural centres, commemorative spaces, and particularly so, in previous clandestine detention centres which have today been transformed and re-functionalised as memorial sites. We might liken this notion of memorializing to the construction of Nora’s “history”; one that, as Guglielmucci points out, meant a normative process which allowed certain events of the past, but not others, to be inscribed as consequences of State terrorism through the selection of specific denominations, timeframes, and events.

And it is key to recognise the importance of these memorial sites as spaces that serve for the recognition and reproduction of collective memory within the student movement as they are spaces which students actively visit. During my fieldwork, for example, I witnessed the planning of group visits for students to these sites by certain political organisations in the FUBA, particularly those sympathising with *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, which happened mainly at the start of the academic year; one could imagine, as a form of induction to the history of the student movement, as exercises of identification and initiation. Yet I should also mention that all members of the Independent Left organisations to whom I spoke, acknowledged knowing and having visited the same sites. This brings to

A 42 AÑOS DE LA DICTADURA CÍVICO MILITAR

# VENÍ AL RECORRIDO POR LA EX-ESMA

ESCUELA DE MECANICA DE LA ARMADA

📅 Sábado 14 de Abril - 16.30 hs.

INSCRIBITE EN NUESTRA MESA O POR REDES SOCIALES

📱 /contrapuntoffyl

**CONTRA**  
punto

Image 84. “42 years on from the civic-military dictatorship, come to the visit of the *ex-ESMA*. Saturday, April 14<sup>th</sup> (2018), 16:30. Sign up at our *mesa* or through our social media.”. An online flyer of the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* student organisation *ContraPunto* invites students of the Faculty of Philosophy to a guided visit of the *ex-ESMA* clandestine detention centre, now repurposed as a memorial site.



mind notions of pilgrimage sites, where, as Nora suggests, “one finds the living heart of memory” (Nora 1989, 23). As a reflective point on the process of my own research, I should say that it was only on the last day of conducting fieldwork that I visited the largest and perhaps most renowned of these sites, the ex-ESMA, in an attempt to understand and document the diverse perspectives on collective memory within the FUBA, before experiencing such a narratively charged site first-hand. As Guglielmucci describes it, this site itself is a material expression of the tensions and articulations among Human Rights organisations, political militants, academics, and government institutions, which became manifested in the process of the consecration of memory (Guglielmucci 2011), and which exists in society today.

Within the UBA, the transmission and contrast of collective memory is also made evident. The memory of those disappeared during State Terrorism is reflected in large displays installed around the halls and teaching spaces of the different faculties, depicting the faces of students from those faculties who fell victims to State violence. And on the other hand, the memory of those considered to be victims of State violence during periods of democracy usually takes the shape of murals or banners painted by students themselves. As an example, one can find the mural of Mariano Ferreyra in the CEFyL café at the Faculty of Philosophy, painted by members of the UJS-PO to which he belonged, or the banners alluding to the disappearance of Julio López, and more recently Santiago Maldonado. Images which are echoed across the University space through the practice of occupation.

I outline such an approach to the transmission of collective memory not to attempt a definite line of connections and timelines, nor to limit our field of view to the actors named here, but so that, throughout this text, we can realise and bear in mind that, as Guglielmucci suggests, the construction of a common form of memory has demanded the homogenisation of countless different personal accounts and experiences. We may think of the process of memory, and its passage into a form of cultural heritage or “hostile heritage” (Guglielmucci 2011), which has been deeply inscribed into the imaginary of the FUBA, as a product of multiple actors and debates. The process of collective memory is a dynamic articulation around which many debates continue today, therefore this category



*Image 85.* A permanent display remembers the students of the Faculty of Philosophy who fell victims to State Terrorism during the 1976-1983 dictatorship. It is located in the *Aula Ernesto "Che" Guevara*, one of the largest classrooms in the faculty.

is in a constant state of construction, with its boundaries and subjects existing in the overlaps and tensions of the past and present, of “memory” and “history”. This allows us to realise that those who remember and participate in the commemoration of past events are not a homogeneous unit, but that instead there may be profound differences over what should be remembered and how. Which in turn situates collective memory not as a concern of the past, but of the present. Further triggering activity within the student movement and beyond.

Above all, I argue that we should think of ritual practices involving collective memory as Guglielmucci suggests - as sites where all of those involved strive to impose a sense of the past that operates in relation to their present agendas. Therefore, constantly re-activating or re-arranging the demand of *Memoria verdad y justicia* (Memory, truth, and justice) (Guglielmucci 2011).

This way, we may shed more light on the central role that the conversion of remembrance processes into political practices of visibility have had not only for the FUBA, but also for contemporary Argentina in bringing to visibility a past that was supposedly hidden or invisible. This is particularly poignant at a time when the Federal Government headed by Mauricio Macri has publicly thrown into question certain issues considered as truths by Human Rights, civil society, and political organisations across the whole spectrum - from *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* to the Independent Left. The current government’s questioning of the number of victims during the episodes of State Terrorism and its re-surfacing of the theory of the “*Teoría de los dos demonios*” (Theory of the two demons), which supposes that the militant organisations systematically targeted by the last military dictatorship were as equally responsible as the State for the political violence that occurred (Feierstein 2018), has painted a scenario that has reinvigorated the demand for collective memory to a greater extent than it had been in years, as expressed by the members of the FUBA.

It is from such a recognition of transmissions that we can then ask: What work is collective memory doing in the student movement? Why does the past continue to re-emerge among the FUBA? How is collective memory triggering the continuous production of the student movement?



*Image 86.* A picture of the disappeared Mexican student from Ayotzinapa, Julio César López Patolzin is superimposed onto a larger image (previously there) of Argentine Peronist militant Julio López, twice disappeared – during dictatorship and democracy – as part of a graphic intervention by the *Asamblea de Mexicanxs en Argentina*. The layering of the images reflects on the common issue of disappearance of political activists in Argentina and Mexico.

## Functions of Collective Memory in the Student Movement

Having reflected upon the construction and transmission of collective memory through its many interlaced channels and relationships, it is useful for us to question the functions that collective memory may be serving in the FUBA and the student movement today. As Adriana, who I mentioned above, questioned the seminar group on Human Rights and Collective Memory on another occasion: “Realise this, all around you are *carteles* (posters) of political organisations quoting and making reference to the past.” and pointing her hand to a poster of the *Kirchnerismo* party *La Cámpora* on the wall on her right side she said, “There you have Néstor (Kirchner) saying ‘*¡No aflojamos, ni vamos a aflojar!*’ (meaning: We do not, and we will not back down!).” Then she pointed to a poster of the Independent Left organisation *Juventud Insurgente*, and continued, “And here below you have *El Che* (Che Guevara) saying ‘*Sean los nacidos y los que estan por nacer que nacimos para vencer.*’ (Know, those of you who have been born and those yet to be born, that we were born to be victorious). See? And then we have messages about the disappeared all around! All of these are meaningful statements... What are all of them trying to do? What could be their meaning? Why are they all here?” she asked. Indeed, here was a literal example of the many *agrupaciones* evoking the memory of past figures in order to summon fellow students to their cause. However, this was not all that should be read from such an example. For as Adriana pointed out, there was also the clear implication of sharing a common memory in order to identify as a common group. As she suggested, perhaps shared episodes of memory and forgetting, whether personal or transmitted, represented one of the main bonding forces tying individuals into communities.

Indeed, throughout the symbolic and political process of transmission, incorporation, and appropriation of collective memory, the function of identification comes to prominence. We may consider how current members of the FUBA identify through memory not only with each other but also with those in different points on a timeline. As Jelin and Sempol reflect, the category of collective memory ties today’s generations of students as symbolic collective actors who are not clearly bound entities, separated from previous generations - but instead are embedded within a larger history of struggle. Thus, they share



Image 87. "Let us not lose memory. These are our disappeared comrades. No to impunity. Trial and punishment to those responsible." A permanent memorial displays the name and date of disappearance of students, alumni, and non-academic staff of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences who fell victims to the last military dictatorship. The memorial is situated in the main stairway of the faculty.

subjective feelings of belonging with blurred boundaries, and they define themselves in relation to a temporality, with those who lived before, those who live today, and those who may live afterwards (Jelin and Sempol 2006). As Lazar considers of the subscription of activists to temporalities of historical time, through their embeddedness in a larger narrative of struggle, they situate themselves in relation to a certain past and an imagined future (Lazar 2014). Collective memory as such, interwoven through past, present, and future students acts as an active bonding force.

Furthermore, we can think of the function of legitimization, as the political adhesion or inscription of memorialised episodes into the discourse of the student movement may serve to guarantee its social legitimacy in recognising the past, and also denouncing the present. In such an understanding, as Jelin and Sempol suggest, the purpose of remembering today may be to insert the present into a tradition of social struggle in which these groups recognise themselves and to which they give a meaning (Jelin and Sempol 2006). Consequently, through the political and symbolic appropriation of collective memory, current members may situate themselves as historical agents; side by side as direct heirs of those who they memorialise.

And it is of key importance to state that legitimization of the demands of the student movement through collective memory does not only happen symbolically, but also in a literal sense. This is so because many of the demands that were raised by students who fell victims to State violence continue to be voiced by students to this day. Not only in terms of the demands for Human Rights, but in a wide array of forms that extend to far reaching aspects of social, political, and economic discourse - since the very neoliberal policies being implemented today in Argentina are perceived to be a tangible legacy of the Military Dictatorship, which implemented them in the first place. And members of the FUBA highlight this continuity in repeated occasions. As Mora expressed it, "Today, the student movement is having to fight to reverse a situation which is the responsibility of the Military Dictatorship. For example, the implementation of neoliberal policies, such as destroying the public education budget, is something that obviously had a very important role during the Military Dictatorship, but which was also later maintained by the successive democratic governments.", "So the fact that you



*Image 88.* Students militants of *Nuevo Encuentro* march alongside a van portraying the faces of victims of State Terrorism on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016; the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the military coup of 1976.



walk into the Faculty of Philosophy today, and encounter it in shitty conditions without a budget, is in the end, a continuity of the public education funding scheme that the Military Dictatorship loved to implement.”

To put the notion of legitimation through the continuity of past and present demands in a clear perspective it is useful to provide a meaningful example. This is the case of the demand for the *Boleto educativo* (Education transport ticket, a free public transport ticket which students demand be granted to them by the government, in order to comply with the notion of public education, given that transport costs signify one of the most expensive aspects of student life), and the episode of *La noche de los lápices* (The night of the pencils, one of the most notorious episodes of repression against secondary students during the last military dictatorship, in 1976). These episodes, some of the most prominent in the collective memory of the student movement, happened as secondary students from the city of La Plata (south of Buenos Aires) were mobilising in demand for the *Boleto educativo* in 1976. And as a response to their activism, came act of repression involving a series of kidnappings and assassinations orchestrated by the military government against the students. To this day, six of the students who were targeted in the attack remain in the status of disappeared. This violent episode is commemorated each year with a march on September 16<sup>th</sup>, the day of the attack, in which members from practically all political organisations across *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* to the Independent Left, participate as an act of remembrance.

Yet the demand for the *Boleto educativo* is also one for which students and the FUBA continue to campaign, as it has not yet been granted by the government. This demand has particularly been amplified during the Macri Federal administration, due to rapidly escalating public transport costs, which in certain cases reached an increment of 100% in the first months of 2016. Because of these circumstances, during my fieldwork I witnessed what students called a revival of this campaign throughout the year. To picture this, we may consider how the scale of the demand rapidly shifted in a matter of weeks. During the beginning of the academic year, an event was organized by the CEFyL, calling upon the rest of the student centres from the UBA to march on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2016 from the *Plaza de Mayo* to Congress (along the *Avenida de Mayo*, a highly



*Image 89.* Thousands of students march down *Avenida Corrientes*, voicing the “historic” demand of the *Boleto educativo*, on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016. “Education transport ticket now! In defence of public education...” reads the banner carried at the front by members of the FUBA.

symbolic route for demonstrations). On that evening, a few hundred students attended the demonstration, yet just a couple of weeks later, as news of the march spread across the UBA, students campaigned on the issue, and the demand for the *Boleto educativo* became invigorated, the FUBA called for a second demonstration to be held on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April. On this occasion, several thousand students joined to march from the Ministry of Education to the *Plaza de Mayo*, along a much longer route. As Fer, one of the participants in my research from the Faculty of Philosophy, proudly told me on that occasion: "Remember how many of us were here two weeks ago? And look at this now! This is how, through our student centre, we are directly organising and influencing the student movement." And from that moment on, the demand for the *Boleto educativo* became established and continued to be expressed throughout the rest of the academic year as a basic element of the campaigns for a greater public education budget for universities, as well as for wage increases for academic and non-academic staff. Memory then, as Nora suggests, had been intentionally revived, and once again put into motion, re-emerging in the midst of contemporary circumstances and demands.

It is worth noting that throughout the active campaign for the *Boleto educativo*, students made explicit reference to the *Noche de los lápices* in order to support their demand, with slogans such as *¡Los lápices vuelven a escribir!* (The pencils write again!). And later, on the night of September 16<sup>th</sup>, several thousand students participated in the ritual commemoration of *La noche de los lápices*; not only commemorating the student victims of the past, but also demanding the *Boleto educativo* for themselves. We could say that these acts had at least a twofold dimension then, as memory was commemorated in ritual form, and used actively to legitimise a current student demand outwards towards the government and the general public. These purposes being, in practice, deeply intertwined and perhaps indistinguishable from each other.

Yet we should not only think of legitimation through the use of memory happening outwards, but also occurring inwards among the different political organisations within the FUBA, as collective memory is constantly contested in its internal dynamics, mainly along the lines of the argument presented above, of remembering the victims of State violence during periods of dictatorship, and



*Image 90.* “The pencils continue to write.” A street crossing next to the *Plaza de Mayo* is graphically intervened into the shape of pencils; commemorating the victims of the *Noche de los lápices* and demanding the *Boleto educativo*, on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

remembering the victims of State violence during periods of dictatorship and democracy. This mechanism is expressed in the form of agonistic relations (Mouffe 2013) through which campaigning, debating, and mobilisation throughout the spaces of the student movement is amplified. This is so because political organisations on both lines of the argument strive to determine in which position the FUBA should situate itself, resulting in an overall intensification of activity and occupation by the student movement. This debate is usually expressed in its most manifest form in the student assemblies and preparatory events that punctuate time in the lead-up to the commemorations of the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, the anniversary of the military coup which established the last military dictatorship in 1976, recognised as the official *Día de la Memoria* (Day of Memory) in Argentina. Here again, from 2016 onwards, the entrance of the Macri administration heightened debate on the issue of where the FUBA should stand in relation to the annual march of the *Día de la Memoria*<sup>31</sup>. *Agrupaciones* belonging to *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* sought a unified march to highlight an “anti-Macri” character, yet *agrupaciones* of the Independent Left campaigned for the FUBA to march with a group of independent organisations headed by the EMVyJ. The result for the past three years has been that, after long debates in student centres presided over by both political currents and independents, the representative council stemming from the student centres has voted for the FUBA to march independently alongside the EMVyJ. It should be said that owing to this result, students who are members of *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo agrupaciones*, usually choose to march with their own *agrupación* in separate groups instead of under the FUBA flag.

To picture an example of this internal strife we can refer back to the songs presented at the beginning of this chapter, characteristic of the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations and of the Independent Left. Each of them select specific instances of the past which are distinct from each other. As we may notice, all of the historical references quoted in the *Gloriosa Juventud*

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<sup>31</sup> The annual march of the *Día de la Memoria* on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March is arguably the largest yearly demonstration in Argentina. It is traditionally headed by the Human Rights organisations comprised of family members of the victims of the Last military dictatorship. However, the demonstration is usually sub-divided in groups, whereby social and political organisations from different sectors form their own columns with different routes to march towards the Plaza de Mayo.



Image 91. “40 years on, the pencils continue to write. We mobilise throughout the country in defence of education and public university.”; “40 years from the *Noche de los lápices*: Strike and mobilisation in the UBA.”. Posters by teachers’ unions CONADU Histórica and AGD-UBA, respectively, announce industrial action in the context of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Noche de los lápices*, in 2016.

*Peronista* song refer to episodes which occurred in the different periods of dictatorship. And all of the historical references quoted in the *FUBA Piquetera* song refer to episodes which occurred since the return of democracy and particularly so from the events of 2001 (the *Argentinazo*) onwards. Each of these make a clear demarcation of which form of State violence, and past or present they are denouncing, and which memory they are emphasising, thus enacting a form of selective memory to which they can each subscribe. Yet what they both have in common, is that they all make a direct and literal quote of the past in order to claim it as their own; as Guglielmucci suggests, striving to impose a sense of the past that operates in relation to their current agendas (Guglielmucci 2011), thus constantly reactivating and reshaping the demands of collective memory.

### **Overlapping Identities Expressed Trough Memorial Practice**

Having discussed the transmission of collective memory from past generations, its incorporation into the distribution of the sensible of today's members of the FUBA, and the functions it may play within this community, I move to how different overlapping identities can be illustrated and contrasted by the way in which members of the student movement participate in memorial practices. Commemorative representations occurring in the everyday life of the student movement are telling of the position that students have in respect to the different *agrupaciones* within the FUBA. They can be telling of where they stand in relation to political affiliations and notions of memory, along with their assumed political identities, thus illustrating inner debates occurring throughout the FUBA.

This is an issue of key importance, as it is very often the case that members of the FUBA, particularly militants, do not only subscribe in terms of identity to membership of the FUBA, but possibly to other social or political organisations as well. For example, they may also be members of a political party, a trade union, a neighbourhood association, etc., and these overlapping or layering memberships may contribute to the political identity that they assume for themselves. Fede, a participant in my research once explained this situation to me lightly in sporting terms, "it's as if you play for a particular club, and also for the *Selección* (the national team)". Many times it is through memorial practices



Image 92. Student militants of Independent Left *agrupaciones* in the FUBA, and members of the *Asamblea de Mexicanxs en Argentina*, accompany the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo Linea Fundadora* (independent from political links with governments) for their weekly Thursday march, to denounce State violence against teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico, in June of 2016.



that we can see how layering identities are negotiated by individual members of the FUBA, or how these may come into conflict with each other. The outcome of such an interplay of identity is made visible by which memorial practices or rituals students chose to participate in, and under what membership they do so.

To picture this dynamic of negotiating identities and alliances through memorial practice, I present two different events as examples. One is a commemoration that was held to mark the 2000<sup>th</sup> march of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, organized by the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo*.; and the other is a music festival and march that was held to commemorate the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Mariano Ferreyra, an event organized by the *Partido Obrero*. While they were both memorial rituals and protests, these two events offer us an interesting perspective to compare and contrast, given the different sectors of the FUBA to which they both appealed. The event organized by the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo* (this organisation having formed close ties with the governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner during their respective administrations) attracted mainly students belonging to *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations within the FUBA, while the event organized by the *Partido Obrero* (of an Independent Left/Trotskyist orientation) attracted mainly members of its youth branch, the UJS-PO. Moreover, these events are telling of political positions within the FUBA given that each of the two *agrupaciones* presiding over its general *conducción* (the *Partido Obrero* and *La Mella*) individually called upon their members and the general public to participate in one of the two memorials. Consensus was not agreed to attend any of these events at the representative level of the FUBA, and thus the FUBA as a student organisation did not officially participate in either of them, however, as we will see, this did not mean that members of the student movement refrained from attending, but rather participated under the flag of their particular *agrupación* or as independents.

The first of these events took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August, 2016. A Thursday at 3pm, fittingly so since it was to be a *ronda* (round) of the *Madres*; a live form of ritual which still demands justice for the crimes committed during the last military dictatorship and memory for those assassinated and disappeared, 39 years after its inception. This has also become a fighting banner for the everyday struggle in demand for social, political, and economic rights, and this



Image 93. "Always with the Madres: 2,000 marches. Plaza de Mayo, Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> of August (2016), 15:00." An online flyer by *La Mella* invites students to attend the 2,000<sup>th</sup> march of the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo*.

occasion, marked the milestone of 2,000 marches by the *Madres*; 2,000 weeks of continuous presence at the Plaza de Mayo voicing their demands and remembering their loved ones.

Within the life of the FUBA, it was the start of the second term of the 2016 academic year. The occasion meant that militants from a spectrum of *agrupaciones* identifying as *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, and even some not outspokenly aligned with such political currents, were inviting students of the UBA to attend the 2000<sup>th</sup> *ronda* to accompany the *Madres*. This was the case of *La Mella*, which in the course of the last year, since the start of the Macri Federal Administration (December 2015), had shifted its position towards the discourse of an “Anti-Macri” unity proposed by the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations, now sympathising with their view.

To add to the occasion, political tension had been running high over the past days, since just a week earlier a federal judge had ordered the detention of Hebe de Bonafini, president of the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo*, over supposed corruption in the social housing project *Sueños Compartidos*, organised by the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo* during the Cristina Kirchner administration. The judicial order had been released on the previous Thursday, a day in which *cacerolazos*<sup>32</sup> were taking place across the country to protest the steep *tarifazos* (the rise in utility prices being implemented by the Macri administration). Although the detention order had been dropped in the course of the week, the episode had not stopped President Mauricio Macri from openly insulting Hebe, regarded by many as an icon of Human Rights, on a personal level.

Furthermore, in the course of that week, multitudinous consecutive marches had been held towards the *Plaza de Mayo* on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of August by the centre-left *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*, and Independent Left trade union sectors, political organisations, and students *agrupaciones*, respectively. Both marches demanded an increment in salaries and a stop to the *tarifazos* and

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<sup>32</sup> The *cacerolazo* protests usually involve people coming out of their homes and into the neighbouring streets to make noise by banging pots and pans. *Cacerolazos* typically involve the middle class sector.



*Image 94.* The 2,000<sup>th</sup> *ronda* of the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo* takes place with the attendance of numerous organisations, mainly sympathisers of *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo*. White and *ceste* (light blue) banners are characteristic of these sectors.

massive employment cuts, among other issues. Certainly a dynamic start to the activities of the student movement to kick off the academic term, as this activity meant that within five days, three massive protests were taking place in the *Plaza de Mayo*.

Such was the context in which the 2000<sup>th</sup> *ronda* took place. Tumultuous as the political weather may have been, it was a clear afternoon in which thousands gathered around the Plaza de Mayo to accompany the *Madres*, cheering them on as they made their entrance in their characteristic white van with the emblematic words: “*¡Madres de la plaza, el pueblo las abraza!*” (Mothers of the *plaza*, the people embrace you!). As it may have been expected, attending were members of *La Mella*, as well as various *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* organisations, such as *La C mpora*, *Nuevo Encuentro*, *Evita*, and *Seamos Libres*, among others, wearing t-shirts emblazoned with the names of their *agrupaciones*, and with their distinctive *celeste y blanco* (blue and white) flags and colours waving in the air to the sound of chanting and drums. Yet in terms of FUBA membership, the only visible student centre was that of the Faculty of Social Sciences (CECSO); the one with a clear *Kirchnerismo conducci n* in the UBA. Together with certain Human Rights and *Pueblos Originarios* (Indigenous Rights) organisations, members of trade unions of a *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* direction, as well as individuals and families with children in attendance, they filled the Plaza de Mayo which had been adorned with the characteristic white scarfs of the *Madres* and their pictures which hung down from the *Pir mide de Mayo* (the obelisk standing in the middle of the *Plaza*). There they gathered to listen to the intervention made by the representatives of the attending organisations and a speech made by Hebe, in which she recalled her political involvement and called for those present to retake the famous practice of the *Marcha de la Resistencia* (March of Resistance - a continuous 24 hour march around the *Plaza*), after 13 years of having interrupted them during the Kirchner administrations. Not to be seen was the characteristic black and white flag of the FUBA.

Two months later, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October, the second event that we will consider took place. It was a Sunday evening which presented an ideal picture for a music festival at the park. However, unlike the previous example in the *Plaza*



*Image 95.* A march organised by the #NiUnaMenos campaign to denounce the femicide of Lucía Pérez takes place on a rainy evening, on October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016. The green scarf, symbolic of feminist activists, takes its shape from the white scarfs of the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*.

*de Mayo*, the setting of the *Parque de las Heras* in the fashionable district of Palermo (in northern Buenos Aires) would not have been a suggestive site for a ritual of memory and protest had it not been for the fact that just a few blocks away, Jose Pedraza - the man charged with being the intellectual author of the assassination of Mariano Ferreya - was in house arrest at a luxury apartment in a residential high rise building. It was for this reason that on the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mariano's assassination, his *Partido Obrero* comrades had organized a music festival in the park to commemorate him, as well as a march towards the home of Pedraza at the end of the festival, to signal him out for his criminal responsibility in the form of an *escrache*<sup>33</sup>, and demand that he be returned to prison to carry out his sentence. It was this situation that brought certain members of the student movement out of its more ordinary zones of circulation, with the intention of taking the protest all the way to Pedraza's doorstep, if possible.

Within the life of the FUBA, elections were taking place for the student centres across the 13 faculties of the UBA, and militant students from all *agrupaciones* were working overtime campaigning to promote their vote. In particular, the UJS-PO had the challenge of holding the majority of centres in the first election since the onset of the Macri administration and *La Mella's* move towards a united front with the *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo agrupaciones*. It was a head-to-head electoral confrontation which would likely split the votes down the middle.

Furthermore, only four days before, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October, a vast demonstration had occurred across the city of Buenos Aires to denounce the femicide of Lucía Pérez, a 16 year old teenage girl whose brutal torture and assassination had shaken the country, causing international concern. That march had been mainly convened by women's organisations across the *#NiUnaMenos* movement, and countless others had joined in solidarity, including the FUBA with virtually all its sectors. The occasion echoed the responsibility of the State for

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<sup>33</sup> The *escrache* is a form of protest that consists of the public naming and shaming of an accused person. It was first developed by the H.I.J.O.S Human Rights organisations (sons and daughters of victims of dictatorships) to publicly condemn members of the dictatorship whom the legal system had allowed to live with impunity in spite of their actions.



*Image 96.* The festival commemorating the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of Mariano Ferreyra takes place at the *Parque de las Heras*. The crowd, composed mainly of sympathisers of the *Partido Obrero*, watches on as bands play throughout the evening. “Long live your socialist worker struggle”, reads the banner with Mariano Ferreyra’s image.



such assassinations, even in times of democracy. It had been a day where tens of thousands came out to the streets dressed in black, to march for hours to reach the *Plaza de Mayo*, in spite of the intense rain that fell all day long.

In this context, the commemoration of the 6<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mariano Ferreyra's assassination took place. Despite the exhaustion from the days of campaigning and Lucía's march in the course of that week, the music festival and march was to happen. A stage was set at a border of the park, just in front of a small hill from where attendants could watch, standing or sitting. As a background was a banner which read "*Cárcel comun a Pedraza y a todos los genocidas*" (Common imprisonment for Pedraza and all those who committed genocide). The characteristic red and yellow flags of the *Partido Obrero* and the UJS-PO with a sketch of Mariano's face on them could be seen around the site. In attendance were a few hundred people, militants of the UJS-PO wearing their emblazoned t-shirts, and mostly young people sitting around in groups, some even enjoying a beer or eating a snack as the bands played on into the night. The acts presented all had a connection with the *Partido Obrero*, having usually played at their events. And headlining once again were the famous and characteristic *Las Manos de Filippi*. Announcing the bands was Manu (then president of the CEFyL), with a hoarse and worn-out voice, which as he admitted to the crowd, was the consequence of a severe cold he had caught from marching in the rain four days earlier, as well as shouting out so much. Following the music, a smaller number of people gathered to march towards Pedraza's apartment carrying fire-lit torches as this was to be a *marcha de antorchas* (torch march), and together with the sound of loud drumming and chanting, the march arrived to encounter a police barricade, which had been set up in front of the high rise of Pedraza's apartment. There, an announcement was made condemning Pedraza's responsibility and his involvement with the bureaucratic apparatus of the principal labour unions, which were said to be at the service of the Federal Governments, of both *Kirchnerismo* and *Macrismo*. Just as in the previous example, the FUBA flag was nowhere to be seen.

So what can we take from looking at both examples? How are they telling of the way in which members of the FUBA negotiate their possible layering memberships and political identity through memorial practices? First hand, we



*Image 97.* Members of the UJS-PO prepare to march towards the location of Jose Pedraza's apartment to perform an *escrache*, following the live acts of the music festival.

can notice that although the FUBA as such was not present in either of these memorial events, many of its members still took part in them, in their capacity as militants of their individual political *agrupaciones*; whilst many more possibly participated as independents of any organisation, perhaps even attending both events.

This dynamic comes to highlight a practice that is common throughout the FUBA. Illustrated here along the lines of debate around collective memory, but also evident in other types of political activity. Many times, militant students or independent members of the FUBA may choose to take part in political activity not through the FUBA, but rather across the rest of political organisations aligned with their own *agrupación*, or those belonging to the same political party, social organisation, etc.; thus, for example, taking part in memorial rituals to which their organisation subscribes, participating in industrial action along with the trade unions aligned with their organisation, or taking part in theoretical activities which their organisation may set up. Underlining the fact that, whenever the FUBA may not reach a decision to participate in a certain event, or when there may be a certain conflict of interests between the direction that the FUBA determines to take and that of the particular *agrupación* of militants, these groups will usually decide to side with their own organisation and participate in that measure, away from the FUBA. In the way, the political identity of their own *agrupación* comes to take prominence over that of the FUBA, or in the case of independent students, they may freely choose to participate in diverse initiatives along the lines of their individual political orientation.

Also worth noting from these two examples is the situating of collective memory in the agitated political climate in which it is usually expressed in Argentina. As we can see, both occasions entailed a political dimension to them that surpassed collective memory. Both events appeared to signify a larger underlying agenda in the midst of tense political atmospheres which is key to understanding the active role that collective memory holds today. As a concern of the present it is almost never encountered alone, within a sphere of its own, detached from a larger political agenda, but rather it is in the tensions of everyday political life in which it is constantly re-activated and wielded. In this sense, in the activation of collective memory we see as Lazar suggests, the coexistence of

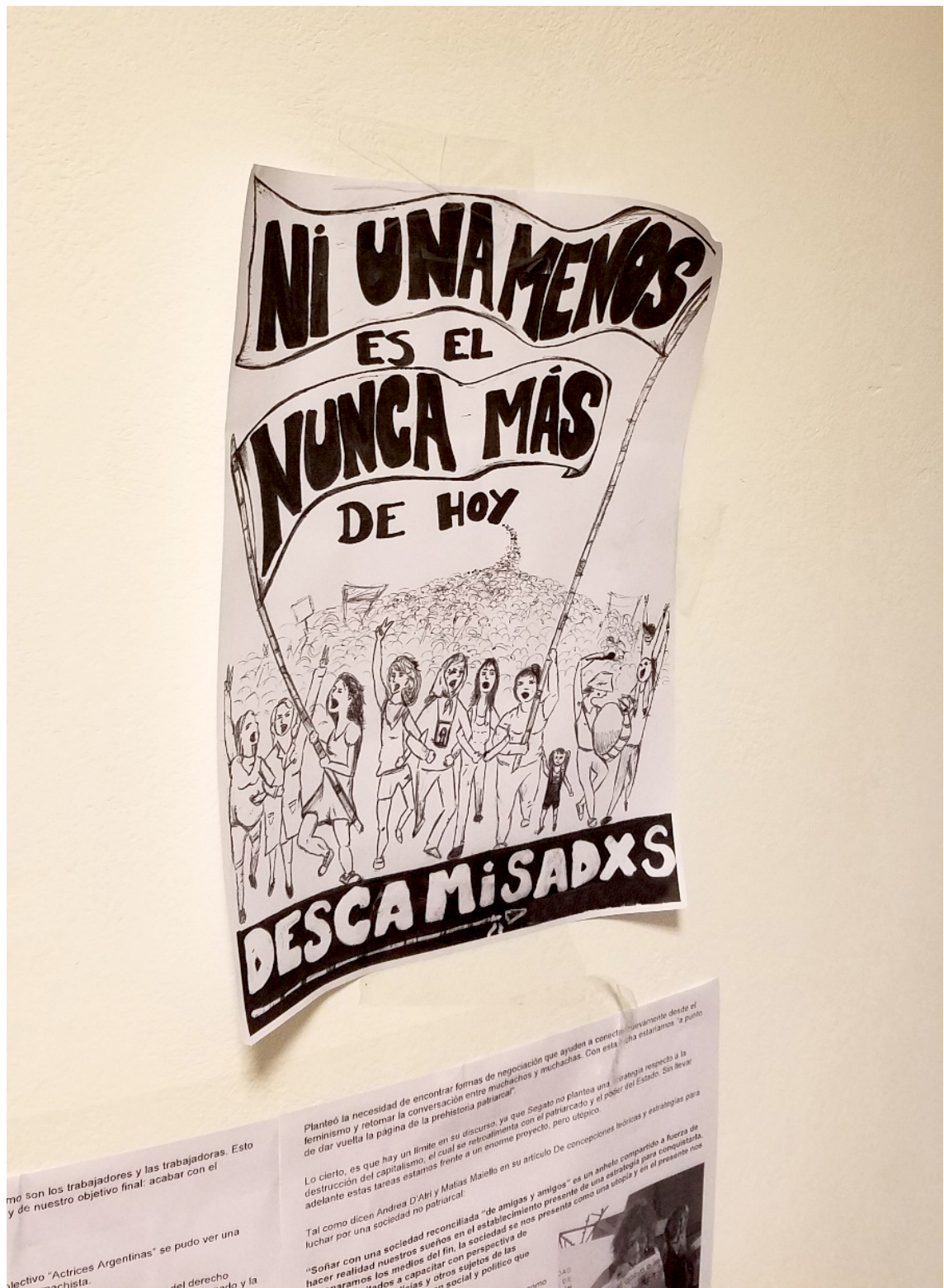


Image 98. “NiUnaMenos is the Nunca Más (Never Again) of today”. This cartel, by the Peronist student organisation Descamisadxs, equates the #NiUnaMenos campaign against gender violence, to the Nunca Más slogan, which relates to the last military dictatorship. State responsibility for violence against women links collective memory with the contemporary women’s movement.

daily struggles of attritional time meet the larger struggles of historical time (Lazar 2014).

Through such an understanding we can see that, as Guglielmucci suggests of collective memory, it is expressed through different commemorative representations, both material and immaterial, which give accounts of the position that people have in respect to different groups and manifestations of remembrance. In the process of thinking of the FUBA and the student movement, it is key to consider the wide array of public rituals regarding memory as central mechanisms that reproduce and impose certain understandings about how social relations are negotiated by their participants; thereby helping us to understand the interplay of identities and alliances happening throughout the FUBA as expressed by the participation of its members in different memorial rituals and also in the competing positions that they make take in regard to the ever active process of collective memory. Thus, participation in acts of collective memory serves as a kind of “colour test” to inquire into the position that a member of the FUBA may identify with, along its political spectrum.

### **Collective Memory and the Trans-nationalisation of Solidarity and Protest**

It is also important to point out the particular role that memory regarding victims of State violence in countries other than Argentina has for the FUBA in the trans-nationalisation of efforts of solidarity and protest. This is particularly relevant since the FUBA tends to emphasise an internationalist discourse in its denouncement of capitalism, and even more so in its vindication of a common struggle occurring across Latin America as a shared entity.

Yet although trans-national efforts of solidarity are common for the FUBA, it is usually the case that the most significant efforts of campaigning and mobilisation are those which occur through the issue of State violence; apparently owing to the local understanding of Human Rights, and the construction of the category of collective memory as illustrated earlier. This means that through the local process of uncovering the mechanisms of State violence during the last military dictatorship, and afterwards, there is a readiness to signal out the



Image 99. “Walls can be cleaned, women cannot re-appear”; “Don’t see sluts where there are free women”. Demands of the #NiUnaMenos campaign and the larger women’s movement are left as traces in the City Hall of Buenos Aires, in front of the Plaza de Mayo, after a march on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017, condemning the femicide of Micaela García; herself a militant of the *Movimiento Evita* student organisation.

responsibility of the State in episodes of violence happening in other countries as well. As Mora explained this, “The uncovering of all the genocidal machinery in Argentina generated a very strong rejection towards the idea that these deaths are something casual or natural, and led to the recognition of the responsibility of State planning.”

Which leads us to two channels through which this trans-national recognition is most visibly expressed in the FUBA today; the denouncing of political violence throughout Latin America, and the denouncing of gender violence through the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign. Both are cases in which the FUBA has actively campaigned and which I will briefly illustrate below.

The first instance can be exemplified with a number of cases; such as the high profile mobilisations of the FUBA following the disappearance of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa in Mexico in 2014, the assassination of environmental activist Berta Cáceres in Honduras in 2016, and more recently the assassination of feminist and Human Rights activist Marielle Franco in Brasil in 2018. All of these examples have involved the FUBA publicly denouncing the responsibility of each State involved, while leading marches to the embassies of each of these countries at the times of the events, and sometimes successively in in other university or public spaces, in order to commemorate the dates of these episodes. In all of these cases, political organisations ranging across *Peronismo/Kirchnerismo* to the Independent Left/Trotskyist, have subscribed to the FUBA’s denouncement.

In the case of the disappearance of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa, such was the involvement of the FUBA, that a special delegation travelled to Mexico to meet with local figures who at the time were active in the vast social movement that ensued in Mexico. In reciprocation, family members of those disappeared have consequently visited Buenos Aires, even organising events such as debates and discussions at the UBA through coordination with certain political organisations in the FUBA.

Collective memory linked to its local understanding of State violence seemed to be triggering efforts of solidarity in this case, since as Mora remarked:



Image 100. Members of the *Asamblea de Mexicanxs en Argentina* march alongside the FUBA during the *Día de la Memoria* on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016. They carry the portraits of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa who were disappeared by the Mexican State in 2014. A close link developed between these two organisations.



“I think that what was most impressive was the level of involvement of the State... And the fact that the State did absolutely nothing to demand the appearance of the students, or for the identification, trial, and imprisonment of those responsible. The State did not even pronounce itself on this so the most outrageous aspect, apart from the fact that those disappeared were student comrades, is the role of the State.”

In the second instance, trans-nationalisation of solidarity through the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign is important to highlight as one of the most active initiatives in which women’s organisations in the FUBA, and the FUBA itself, are involved; participating in the very emergence of this movement in Argentina.

Here again, the role of collective memory seems to be playing an important part in signalling out the State as responsible for the deaths of thousands of women and the perpetration of gender violence towards women as well as sexual minorities. As Mora pointed out: “The State is identified as responsible because the State facilitates prostitution rings. The State facilitates femicide because the police do not intervene, because no one is there to take the testimony of women denouncing violence. Femicides are not avoided because the State does not ensure that restraining orders are implemented. Because a man might have been denounced five times before, and nobody detained him. So when you see the dynamic of the State as facilitator, that is when a very high level of political mobilisation is caused in Argentina.”, “A place where the role of the State as the planner and facilitator of genocide and massacre is always linked directly to a political responsibility in processes of assassinations, massacres, genocide, and forced disappearance.”. As Mora stated: “Women in Argentina are coming to the conclusion that, just as in the past, the State is responsible for them being massacred today. And therefore, that the fight for their rights is a struggle against the State.”.

So in this case, it would seem that through the local construction and understanding of Human Rights and political violence, members of the FUBA also identify with social movements in other countries through the notion of collective memory, thus helping to build networks of solidarity and support across national boundaries in the denouncement of political violence.



*Image 101.* The faces of the 43 disappeared students of Ayotzinapa are put on display by members of the FUBA at the Faculty of Philosophy, in the context of the *Semana por Ayotzinapa* (Week for Ayotzinapa). This week commemorated the 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the students' disappearance with a series of events in which the FUBA was involved, in September of 2016.

## Conclusion

From the first instance, to an outsider the notion of collective memory may not necessarily be suggestive of present preoccupations of the FUBA and the student movement, after all, memorialised events are necessarily located in the past, and therefore gone. It may appear simply as a reminder of events that should never be allowed to repeat themselves. However, as I have argued throughout this chapter, collective memory as a form of combative heritage, a hegemonic battleground, an instrument of identity and legitimation, a symbol of belonging, a common ground for solidarity with those far away, and a site of contending agonisms, is arguably one of the most active concerns in the daily life of the student movement. It informs countless interactions and interpretations of members of the FUBA day in and day out owing perhaps, to the long and arduous constructive process which is still unfolding today.

Gathering from the accounts presented here, we may acknowledge that far from being a homogeneous category, collective memory encompasses countless personal accounts and experiences whose paths are not necessarily oriented towards the same direction. While there may be common ground in its vindication, there are also agonistic (Mouffe 2013) understandings and interpretations of its meaning. It is this dynamic articulation that situates collective memory in a constant state of construction, its boundaries and subjects shifting according to the time in which may be encountered, continuously revived in the overlapping tensions of the past and present.

To close this chapter on the role of collective memory in the student movement, I propose the following reflection which I began to consider during my fieldwork. So heavy seems to be the weight and presence of collective memory in the discourse of the student movement, in its living spaces, in its material and verbal surroundings; in the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004) informing members of the FUBA, that in interacting with its members it seems almost impossible to have a conversation without a reference to the past - be it in the form of an episode of student rebellion, an act of repression, a martyred *militante*, or a break with a political current – emerging to explain a present situation.

So strongly did I feel the omnipresence of collective memory as a



*Image 102.* “For Micaela, for the teachers, for the people and their rights”; “Ni Una Menos (Not One Less)”. *Carteles* at the *Plaza de Mayo* voice the demands of the #NiUnaMenos campaign and the women’s movement, in April of 2017.

preoccupation that I began to wonder if collective memory could even be constituting an obstacle for the creation of new narratives or imaginative horizons for the student movement.

Yet as time passed by I came to consider that precisely the contrary is the case. That the practice of collective memory may continue to be of such importance to the student movement exactly because of its capacity for metamorphosis; because of the endless recycling that its meaning may have, and the unpredictable proliferation of its ramifications. As Nora argues of the *Lieux de mémoire*, collective memory may serve as a thread, linking and weaving together objects and situations that at first sight may appear to be unconnected to an outsider. It connects initiatives ranging from the demand for the *Boleto educativo*, to the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign. In this scenario, collective memory becomes a driving force for the student movement whose meaning is constantly under contestation, construction, and re-articulation, embodied in countless manifestations. Therein, its capacity for contributing to an environment where, as Jelin and Sempol suggest, students have inherited demands for recognition through previous generations, but in which today the innovation of these social movements may lie in the creativity of their forms, on how they are performing as groups and articulating demands, giving them spontaneity, newness, and imagination (Jelin and Sempol 2006). Thus, collective memory is situated not as a concern of the past, but of the present and the future.

Given the contestation over the interpretations of collective memory, at the time of my fieldwork I asked my informants if there was a certain group or organisation which, above others, had a greater legitimacy to speak in the name of collective memory; the answers I obtained all seemed to echo the response of Ale. Perhaps her account serves to encapsulate the meaning that collective memory holds: "I believe that there are different readings of it. There may be different political or ideological positions in regards to it. But none can appropriate the claim of collective memory solely for themselves. Because most, if not all of the political organisations that are active today in Argentina, have comrades who were either assassinated, disappeared, or exiled. So genocide and State violence have traversed us as a society.", "And who has been injured? Absolutely all of the Argentine society. Except civil, corporate and military accomplices, and

transnational capital that have benefitted in the process. But all the rest of us have suffered the consequences”.

## VIII. Spaces of Circulation and Diffusion Outside of University

### Introduction

In previous chapters, particularly when addressing the subject of occupation by the FUBA, I have suggested for us to approach and understand social space, termed by Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1991), as an open process. I have suggested to recognise space, as Massey proposes, as the product of interrelations. Space as the sphere of possibility for the existence of multiplicity, a process which is always under construction; never finished and never closed (Massey 2005).

However, the discussion of the production of space by the FUBA and its student movement has so far focused mainly on sites of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). So in order to broaden our understanding of the social life of the student movement beyond the limits of the UBA, throughout this chapter I consider other sites outside the university, that may also shape the distribution of the sensible that informs members of the student community - which as termed by Rancière, is “based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution” (Rancière 2004, 12) - and in turn facilitate processes of political subjectivization for members of the FUBA.

To help us picture the political possibilities that these other sites of circulation enable, I start by giving two ethnographic examples that I documented during my fieldwork. One is the scene of a concert in a *centro cultural* (cultural centre) which belonged to a political organisation that is active in the FUBA. The other is the setting of an interview in an encampment outside an occupied factory which members of the FUBA attended for several months. Following these examples, I reflect upon the importance that other, external sites of circulation and diffusion may hold for the articulation of informal networks of exchanges that facilitate the reproduction and sustainability of the student movement. I consider the categories of the material and the relational in regards to these spaces, questioning the kind of relations that the material aesthetics of such places may



*Image 103.* Students stay at the *Plaza de Mayo* following the demonstration organised by the *#NiUnaMenos* movement to denounce the femicide of Micaela García, on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017.



enable throughout the student community of the FUBA that actively participates in them. I invite us to question the possibilities that these sites may have to present themselves to sense experience, being immersed in a struggle for hegemony that is manifested across the city of Buenos Aires, and to reflect on how these sites may constitute playing fields on which agonistic and antagonistic relations (Mouffe 2013, Laclau and Mouffe 2014) within the FUBA and beyond are enacted.

If, as Rancière proposes, “politics” revolves around “what is seen and what can be said about it”, and around the “properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Rancière 2004, 13), and if as Massey suggests, “identities/entities, the relations “between” them, and the spatiality which is part of them, are all co-constitutive”, through this understanding, in which spatiality is, from the beginning, integral to the constitution of identities, including political subjectivities (Massey 2005, 10), I make the invitation for us to think of these other sites of circulation and diffusion outside of university as paramount to understanding the FUBA’s student movement, given the range of connections that may stem between the imagination of the spatial and the imagination of the political; how students’ experience of the spatial outside university may shape their experience of the political.

It is also the aim of this chapter to sensorially locate the student movement and its effects within the larger context of the City of Buenos Aires, questioning how the student movement informs the city, and is in turn, informed by it. As the final ethnographic chapter of this thesis, the chapter invites us to reflect on the boundaries and blurring regarding the limits of the student movement, questioning how and where we can consider the student movement and its effects as waves or branches extending into the city, and where it may enter other aspects of daily lifestyle.

### ***Leon Leon Scene:***

It was Saturday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016, and in the life of the FUBA, activity was running at high tide. The return to the academic term after the winter break and the process of student elections, which had started the previous week on the



*Image 104.* Groups of students socialise on the streets surrounding the *Plaza de Mayo* following the demonstration to commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Noche de los lápices*, and demand the *Boleto educativo*, on September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Differently from rallies organised by trade unions, rallies organised independently by the FUBA generally do not end with speakers addressing attendees; and when addresses do occur, these tend to be directed towards members of particular *agrupaciones*.

5<sup>th</sup> of September (as I mentioned in Scene B Chapter 6, Theory as Political Practice), meant that campaigning and the occupation of university space was at its peak. During the course of this particular week, the direction of six of the student centres out of the thirteen faculties of the UBA had been disputed among the contending *agrupaciones* according to the configuration of these in each faculty. Furthermore, the previous night of September 16<sup>th</sup> had marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *La noche de los lápices* (a passage described in Chapter 7, The Role of Collective Memory in the Student Movement), an occasion that is commemorated every year in the form of a march to *Plaza de Mayo* in which thousands of students participate. Yet life outside of the university space was also happening for students of the UBA and participants of the student movement, as exhausted as some of them might have been following the intense week of campaigning, criss-crossing the city travelling to the different faculties throughout Buenos Aires.

This was a Saturday night, and renowned as Buenos Aires is for its nightlife, the city was buzzing with crowds of people on the streets and those preparing to leave their homes later to enjoying their leisure time outside. As is often the case, *porteños* (the local term for Buenos Aires dwellers) prefer to go out late at night, while being open to impromptu plans that may form without much forethought; and it is in this situation that I found myself after a week of documenting the electoral activity and attending classes at the UBA. Sitting at home, this was also what I assumed to be my leisure time, at least judging by the official schedule of strictly university activities. Yet, as always seems to be the case, the student movement does not only happen in the UBA and within the academic calendar; it is also to be found day-to-day or night-to-night throughout the city, in the public, and possibly private, social lives of its participants.

It was in this fashion that while browsing online through social media for cultural and recreational activities that were happening on that evening, I found a concert that would take place: *Valentina Cooke y Lobos* were playing at *Leon Leon*. To name the place more exactly: *Centro Cultural del Frente de Artistas del Partido Obrero, Leon Leon* (Cultural Centre of the Front of Artists of the *Partido Obrero, Leon Leon*). It was the cultural centre run by the *Partido Obrero's* Artists' Front (FDA by its initials in Spanish), the place itself named *Leon Leon* in an



*Image 105.* Students stay for a conversation following the demonstration commemorating the *Noche de los lápices*, in September of 2016. In front of them, stenciled slogans from the 2,000<sup>th</sup> march of the *Asociación Madres Plaza de Mayo*, a few weeks earlier, remain on the street. The layering of traces of protest is a common sight throughout Buenos Aires.

alluding gesture to the political orientation of the Trotskyist organisation it belonged to. And I happened to be familiar with the venue.

Indeed, one of the first activities of the student movement to which I had been invited to, in March of 2016 near the start of the academic year, had taken place there. However, on that past occasion, it was not a concert that I attended at the *Leon Leon* with the members of the UJS who invited me to join them for the evening after having attended an assembly of the FUBA in front of the Ministry of Education where students were supporting teachers on strike demanding a pay rise, while a plebiscite of the FUBA was being held to condemn the pay-out agreed by the Federal Government to the “vulture funds”. That time it had been a debate on the characterisation of the current (at the time) Greek economic crisis, it had been headed by leading member of the Workers Revolutionary Party of Greece, Savas Matsas, and founding member of the *Partido Obrero* of Argentina, Jorge Altamira, and the ground floor of the *Leon Leon* cultural centre had been packed full of young people attending the debate. Until that point, my memories of the place were of sitting on the floor by the entrance, as the chairs which had been set up for the debate were completely full, and having to squeeze in to make room as people who had been attending a dancing lesson on the upper floor of the *Leon Leon* came down the stairs and exited the venue. That curious aspect had also caught my attention: How could a radical international political debate and what I believe was a tango dancing lesson, be occurring at the same place and at the same time, with just one floor dividing the two activities? Needless to say, it had made me curious to return to the *Leon Leon* at another point to take a look at what was happening on the other side of activities there.

So when I saw the *Valentina Cooke y Lobos* event posted online it seemed like an interesting opportunity to experience another kind of activity at the *Leon Leon*, this time a recreational one; after all, since being invited to the *Leon Leon* for the first time in March, I had repeatedly seen the promotion of musical events that were organised there. For example: The protest band *Las Manos de Filippi*, iconic among the student movement (whom the reader will recognise from other passages in the thesis), had staged several public rehearsals at the venue where attendees could openly join the band’s practice sessions, but I had so far been



*Image 106.* Booklet with the monthly agenda of the *Leon Leon* cultural centre for March 2016. Nicaragua street 4432 was the address of *Leon Leon*, in the neighbourhood of Palermo.

unable to go. Admittedly, it was more out of musical interest that I had hoped to attend one of these musical sessions. So at the time, when I decided that I would go to the *Valentina Cooke y Lobos* concert, I did not anticipate the outing as doing “fieldwork”, but rather believed that - while in a way related to the FUBA - I was going there to have fun; to relax and enjoy a concert in the Saturday night. It was only later that a realisation on the importance of such activities for the student movement would dawn on me.

I then headed to the upscale yet trendy *barrio* (neighbourhood) of Palermo Soho, where the *Leon Leon* was located. Its cobbled streets lined with trees, fashionable boutiques and independent clothing and design stores and studios, as well as restaurants and bars which on a weekend night would be filled by a mainly young crowd socialising among groups of friends; and after a short walk through this colourful atmosphere of joyful conversation on the streets I entered the *Leon Leon*. The configuration of the space had now changed from that which I remembered from my previous visit: On the ground level, where we had sat in the floor while listening to Savas Matsas and Jorge Altamira, was now the café/bar, in its “regular” configuration, with a few wooden tables at the front and a bar at the back where food and drinks could be ordered, and in the second floor, where the dancing lesson had occurred and the part that remained a mystery to me, the concert would take place. At the bottom of the stairs was a young man in charge of selling the tickets for about 40 Pesos (at the time just over a Pound Sterling) who told me that the concert would start in around twenty minutes. So while I waited downstairs in the café/bar I greeted one of the bar staff who, herself a student and member of the FUBA, recognised me from the Faculty of Philosophy and offered to sell me a drink.

Upstairs the theatrically lit atmosphere highlighted only the stage, leaving the rest of the space, which became filled with about 50 concert-goers, in darkness when *Valentina Cooke y Lobos* began to play. Fronted by Valentina Cooke - a self-styled mixture of soul, hip-hop, rock, and “machiney things”, her sound described as the “Soul of the working class woman” by the *Prensa Obrera* (the newspaper of the *Partido Obrero*); herself a recently incorporated member of the SADEM (Argentine Union of Musicians) (*Prensa Obrera*, 2016) - the band went on to play for nearly an hour, as the young crowd that had gathered in the

**agenda**

● **MARTES 1 - 19HS**  
**REUNIÓN ABIERTA DEL FRENTE DE ARTISTAS**  
Este encuentro se propone debatir un posicionamiento de los artistas frente al ajuste en marcha y las políticas represivas. Las iniciativas a debatir se enmarcan en una campaña de actividades hacia el 24 de marzo.

● **JUEVES 3**  
**20HS // PROYECCIÓN: ¿QUIÉN MATÓ A MARIANO FERREYRA? + CHARLA DEBATE**  
La realización y proyección de esta película se dio en el marco de la lucha por justicia a Mariano Ferreyra. Cobra ahora una nueva vigencia, debida al reciente fallo que otorgó a José Pedraza el beneficio de la prisión domiciliaria.  
Para la charla debate, se harán presentes los realizadores del film y Christian Rath, dirigente nacional del Partido Obrero.

● **VIERNES 4**  
**19HS // CHARLA: "A 40 AÑOS DEL GOLPE: POR UN 24 DE MARZO MASIVO, INDEPENDIENTE Y DE LUCHA"**  
con **Elia Espen y Jorge Altamira**  
Las cuatro décadas transcurridas desde el golpe militar plantean problemas políticos de enorme actualidad. En conjunto con la impunidad reinante, asistimos a un reforzamiento represivo, orientado a controlar las luchas contra el ajuste en curso. Por su parte,

la forma de enfrentar estos atropellos ya ha abierto debates estratégicos en el movimiento popular.  
Debatirán con el auditorio Elia Espen, de Madres de Plaza de Mayo – Línea Fundadora, y Jorge Altamira, dirigente nacional del Partido Obrero.  
Se podrá ver también la muestra fotográfica de la Asociación de Profesionales en Lucha sobre los militantes desaparecidos del PO.

**23HS // JAM DE JAZZ**  
ENTRADA GRATUITA, CON COLABORACIÓN VOLUNTARIA A LA GORRA.

● **SÁBADO 5**  
**21HS // CICLO DE MUJERES EN LUCHA**  
Participarán de esta nueva fecha del ciclo:  
● La hija de la mucama, de Alejandro Urdapilleta. Monólogo teatral a cargo de la performer Euge Choque.  
● Lecturas de poesía: Ayelén González, Tamara Dawidowicz, Belén Otero, Grau Hertz, Carla Laneri.  
● Grupo Falsa Escuadra (Danza, teatro y circo)  
● El jarrón de Beto (Música)  
● María Soledad Medina y Camila Righes (Puesta teatral)  
● Mora Sánchez (Monólogo)

● **VIERNES 11**  
**19HS // EL PROTOCOLO ANTIPIQUETES Y LA CENSURA AL PERIODISMO**  
[Proyección + Charla debate]  
El protocolo de seguridad, presentado como un intento de controlar el tránsito, tiene en realidad como objetivo reprimir las luchas populares. Entre sus ítems se incluye el cercenamiento de la libertad periodística a la hora de cubrir las mismas.  
Para debatir sobre estas medidas, asistirán Pepe Mateos (fotógrafo) y Alejandro Rath (cineasta), cuyos registros documentales fueron claves para esclarecer el asesinato de Kosteki y Santillán, y Alfonso Villalobos, periodista y miembro del Sindicato de Prensa de Buenos Aires.  
Se proyectará el corto documental *Piqueteros Carajo, del colectivo Ojo Obrero, sobre la masacre del Puente Pueyrredón.*

**22HS // CICLO DE JAZZ**  
Entrada: \$50.

**23HS: JAM DE JAZZ**  
ENTRADA GRATUITA, CON COLABORACIÓN VOLUNTARIA A LA GORRA.

● **SÁBADO 12**  
**22HS // NOCHE A SOLAS (recital)**  
Traen su propuesta creativa un conjunto de bandas y músicos solistas. Con la presencia de Guillermo Bruno, Textitez, Nacho Giardino, Carla Manfredi, Ale Nieto y amigos, Cerrros y Daniel Bruni.  
Entrada: \$50

**23HS // FERNANDO PICADO "PROJECT", en el CICLO DE JAZZ**  
Proyecto musical que busca mezclar, con composiciones propias, sonoridades de diferentes músicas, partiendo las armonizaciones del jazz y abriendo el juego a la improvisación. Con Pablo Dawidowicz (Batería), Cesar Furer (Guitarra), Miguel Romero (Saxo Tenor), Armando Policella (Bajo) y Fernando Picado (Teclado y Composición)  
Para escuchar: [soundcloud.com/ferpicado](https://soundcloud.com/ferpicado)

● **JUEVES 10**  
**19HSS // PRESENTACIÓN DE LA REVISTA EN DEFENSA DEL MARXISMO, con Marcelo Ramal**  
Con más de 23 años en la calle, esta publicación teórico-política ha lanzado recientemente su número 46. Para su presentación asistirá el dirigente nacional y legislador por la Ciudad, coautor del artículo "Argentina ingresa en la crisis mundial". Se busca con este evento involucrar a trabajadores y artistas en los debates que envuelven al Congreso anual del Partido Obrero, a realizarse próximamente.

**22HS // PRESENTACIÓN DEL LIBRO MUTA, DE GABRIELA CLARA PIGNATARO**  
Artista multifacética (actriz, fotógrafa y escritora)  
Pignataro comparte en esta oportunidad su libro de poemas Muta, ilustrado por Andrea Landoni y editado por el prolífico sello independiente Nulú Bonsai.  
Algunas de sus escritas en [www.bicicletas-en-laluna.blogspot.com.ar](http://www.bicicletas-en-laluna.blogspot.com.ar)

Image 107. Part of the monthly programme of the Leon Leon cultural centre in March 2016. Activities include: the screening of a documentary on Mariano Ferreyra's death, a talk in the lead-up to the *Día de la Memoria* on March 24<sup>th</sup>, jazz sessions, a series of artistic presentations by women, the presentation of a Marxist magazine, a book presentation, a screening and debate on journalism censorship, and live presentations of a musical collective. All of these would usually be free to attend, with the exception of certain musical performances, which had a symbolic contribution of about two pounds sterling.



upper floor of the *Leon Leon* moved to the rhythm of her songs, wittily charged with lyrics referencing the struggle of women, workers' exploitation, environmental issues, and the need for social change. And just before playing *Rojo*, one of the songs of her then upcoming album, Valentina stopped to dedicate it to the women who had been part of the past of the physical space of the *Leon Leon* itself. For as she then explained, within that very building, a clandestine prostitution site had previously operated, before the place was confiscated by the government a few years back, and repurposed as a *centro cultural* by the Artists' Front of the *Partido Obrero*.

As the concert drew to a close, the band played a couple of songs for an encore, and after cheering *Valentina Cooke y Lobos* as they exited the stage, the concert-goers began to head downstairs to the bar where they mingled in conversation. The night was still early for the standards of Buenos Aires, where some may not leave home until midnight to venture into the activity of the city. I walked out of the *Leon Leon* as some of the crowd stood on the sidewalk chatting or smoking a cigarette and the whole scene, including myself, seemed to blend into the rest of the *barrio* of Palermo Soho, and the larger night of Buenos Aires.

### **AGR-Clarín Scene**

By Thursday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017, I had returned to Buenos Aires after having concluded my main period of fieldwork with the FUBA in January of that same year. On this occasion I had arrived in the city on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March with the intention of documenting the activity of the FUBA around the events of the *Día de la Memoria* on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, a time of year that as Ale once stated, "always awakens a lot of movement" throughout the student community and beyond for the relation it holds with the ever-present concern of "Collective Memory". Indeed, the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, coinciding closely with the start of the academic year at the UBA just a week before on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, had elicited customary action on behalf of the student movement; yet in the following days, added to the events both surrounding and interweaved with the *Día de la Memoria*, other issues had emerged this year. There was strike action being carried out by teachers who denounced cuts to the public education budget and demanded a pay rise to keep up with the rising inflation, similar to the strike actions that had unfolded the



*Image 108.* “Alive”. Visual traces of the #NiUnaMenos campaign and the larger women’s movement remain as markers in the central areas of Buenos Aires.

previous year. Furthermore, an act of violent repression had been carried out by the police against a group of striking teachers that had set up a *carpa blanca* (a white tent, a symbolic local form of peaceful protest) in front of Congress on the night of April 16<sup>th</sup>. Tragically added to this was the femicide of 21-year old Micaela García in the province of Entre Rios which had garnered national attention in the first week of April; a student militant of the Peronist *agrupación Movimiento Evita*, herself involved in the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign and the wider women's movement. Hers was a case that re-ignited indignation across the whole of the student movement, denouncing the failure of the Argentine State to address gender violence. All of which meant that by April 13<sup>th</sup>, for every single week up to the present sixth week of the academic term, there had been intense mobilisations and public demonstrations in which the FUBA had been thoroughly involved. And in the midst of all this tumult, one further campaigning issue had remained a constant for the FUBA for over four months, spanning the whole duration of the summer break all the way back to when I had last been in Buenos Aires in January 2017: The demand for the restitution of the workers of *AGR-Clarín*. The workers of *Artes Graficas Rioplatense* (AGR) - a printing press company owned by the *Grupo Clarín* media conglomerate, renowned in Argentina as the principal media outlet for right-wing sympathy and operation, its ownership closely aligned with the Macri Administration - who had been left unemployed without previous notice after a lock-out occurred at the printing press facility where they worked on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

In fact, the last activity which I had attended during my main period of fieldwork terminating back in January, was a demonstration that the FUBA had officially convened and attended in support of the *AGR-Clarín* workers on January 19<sup>th</sup>, marching towards the Ministry of Employment in the city centre. On that occasion students protested, chanting on the street outside of the ministry building in the searing heat of the summer as a delegation of *AGR-Clarín* workers sat at an arbitrary commission, demanding the restitution of their jobs. Back then, the campaign was only getting started.

For the same motive, a camp was quickly set up outside of the *AGR-Clarín* printing facility in the days following the lock-out in the working class neighbourhood of Nueva Pompeya on the southern limits of the City of Buenos



*Image 109.* “Let’s build the world that Micaela dreamed of.” Posters by the *Evita* Peronist youth are found throughout the centre of Buenos Aires following the femicide of Micaela García (pictured); a student militant of this organisation, in April of 2017.

Aires, while the group of workers occupied the inside of the plant in the form of a *fabrica ocupada* (occupied factory) to avoid eviction and the closure of their workplace. The encampment had been made possible with the support of the workers' friends and family members, together with the help of various Independent-Left political organisations (belonging to parties such as the PO, PTS, and Izquierda Socialista), to which the direction of these workers' union was subscribed, as well as with the help of numerous militant students of these political organisations, student members of the FUBA, who emphasised this particular struggle as a bellwether for similar action to come from different employment sectors.

Participants of this collective of people that became articulated around the workers' effort to save their workplace were tasked with activities such as preparing food for the camp members, providing security throughout the camp, etc., and both workers and sympathisers participated in fundraising campaigns towards their *fondo de lucha* (strike fund) to financially support the activities of the camp as well as the families of the workers, who were at the time left without a salary. For example: student members of the supporting *agrupaciones* invited workers' representatives to address assemblies across student centres of the UBA, and offered to sell an independent magazine issue titled "VIVA: *Las luchas obreras*" (VIVA: The Workers' Struggles), which the *AGR-Clarín* workers produced themselves in the occupied printing facility, at their *mesas* across the different faculties of the UBA. Furthermore, a variety of artists and intellectuals publicly pronounced their support for the *AGR-Clarín* workers' campaign, and participated in a series of musical festivals that were held directly outside the occupied plant.

By April 13<sup>th</sup>, almost four months into the encampment, familiar names among the student movement such as *Las Manos de Filippi* and Valentina Cooke, among many others had all made their way through and performed at the site of *AGR-Clarín*. In fact, as an illustrative picture to connect the previous scene with this one, Valentina Cooke had even been invited to perform outside of the occupied factory in order to recreate a scene from the animated series *The Simpsons*, in which she played her acoustic guitar as the workers occupying the factory stood by its gates in the background, singing: "the factory is theirs but ours



*Image 110.* Students of the FUBA remain outside of the Ministry of Employment after marching there with members of other trade unions (such as the SUTNA), while workers of AGR-Clarín sit at an arbitrary commission, on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

is the power” (Tiempo Argentino, 2017). And a video of this performance had been made with the help of film students and members of the *Frente de Artistas* (the Artists’ Front who ran the *Leon Leon* cultural centre), and widely shared through the digital and social media platforms of their *agrupaciones*. All of this had happened over the course of four months by the time I was able to visit the camp, and for four months, student members of the FUBA had organised themselves on a rotational basis to have a physical presence at the camp at all times; balancing their presence at the *AGR-Clarín* camp together with their full-time militancy and campaigning throughout the UBA and beyond. A challenge that made interviews with participants in my research hard to organise due to the little free time that they had as a result of their city-wide militancy, made even more intensive by the fact that the following week an Extraordinary Congress of the FUBA was to be held in the form of panels and debates across the UBA faculties over the course of three days (April 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>, 2017) as a measure to support the industrial action of teachers demanding an increase in the public education budget. So for this very reason, I had agreed to meet Manu at the *AGR-Clarín* camp to record an interview with him after an organisational meeting which he had agreed to attend.

It was the early evening when I arrived to Nueva Pompeya having journeyed by bus to the south of the city, and upon exiting the cityscape of taller residential buildings and busy sidewalks, the neighbourhood with its scruffier shorter buildings and desolate roads seemed at first glance remotely removed from the student movement’s spaces of circulation in and around the faculties of the UBA. As I walked on a lonely sidewalk towards the site of the encampment I was for an instant reminded of the *Prácticas* that I had attended about a year back, and the long journey it had taken us to reach the site of Villa Lugano on that occasion (a scene described in Chapter 6, Theory as Political Practice). Yet the moment I got the first glimpse of the camp, the familiarity emerged as if the spatial distance was suddenly compressed. Closely matched with the material and visual production of the FUBA, the camp was surrounded by hand-painted banners and flags of political organisations, announcing the ongoing struggle of the *AGR-Clarín* workers, and the solidarity of sympathising organisations. The campsite itself, with its tents, kitchen, and some plastic chairs and tables scattered around the area, sat between the fence that bordered the printing



*Image 111.* “No to severances at *AGR-Clarín*.” Signs by the FUBA rest on an impromptu stage set up with a trailer bed in front of the Ministry of Employment. Speeches by union members and students, as well as musical performances took place on-stage to support workers of *AGR-Clarín*, at an arbitrary commission inside the building, on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017.



facility and the wide Perito Moreno Avenue on the side, on a considerable space of grass which had by now mostly turned to dirt. As I walked into the premises of the camp I saw that Manu was still sitting at the organisational meeting, he signalled to me to give him a moment, and I took a walk around the camp and peeked through the gate into the inner premises of the printing facility. By now police officers stood guarding the inner part of the facility, as the occupying group workers had been forced to vacate the factory just a week earlier on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April. Due to scale of the police operative, the workers had agreed to peacefully exit the factory and now only their presence in the camp outside remained.

I then greeted Manu as he stepped out of the meeting, and after exchanging brief stories and updating me on the status of the encampment, we sat down in two of the plastic chairs to record our interview as the evening went by. Patient as he was at the time, recounting long stories of his involvement with the student movement with occasional laughter and a smile on his face, in his words and in his body language Manu also let me know of the energy that had been spent by students like him in the process of supporting the *AGR-Clarín* camp. Perhaps it was the evening itself, added to the fact that just a week earlier the group of workers had been forced to evict their occupied workplace, yet that feeling of militant exhaustion, strong as the commitment might have remained, was also made evident through our interaction. Manu went on to describe words that echoed among his militant peers, about the material resources in terms of time, money, and energy that as students and militants they had committed to the *AGR-Clarín* campaign, “we’ve really gone all the way here” he said as night set over the encampment. That night it was not Manu’s turn to sleep at the camp. So, being late after a couple of hours of conversation, we agreed to resume our interview the next week throughout the course of the Extraordinary Congress of the FUBA that would take place, and we said goodbye as each of us headed to catch a bus back home into the night of the city.

### **The Importance of Other Sites of Circulation and Diffusion**

Up until this point I have tried to give two different accounts of other sites of circulation and diffusion, outside of University, of the FUBA and its student



*Image 112.* “Factory occupied by the workers of *AGR-Clarín*.” Part of the *AGR-Clarín* encampment in Nueva Pompeya, in April of 2017. Students of the FUBA, and members of a wider community articulated around the *AGR-Clarín* workers, had transited and inhabited this space for over four months by the time I visited the site.

movement, as well as of the intersecting entanglements of networks through which these articulations occur. For the rest of the chapter, it will be useful to question how these sites facilitate the life and reproduction of the student movement, to explore the political possibilities they enable through their process of spatial production, to inquire into the very possibility for the existence of these sites and the opportunity these have to present themselves to the sense experience of students, as well as to reflect upon how these sites themselves are traversed by a struggle for hegemony and are considered to be battlegrounds for the members of the FUBA. To begin consideration as to how the existence of these sites co-constitutively enriches the student movement and is in turn made possible by its members, we should take into account the following:

### **Networks, reproduction, and sustainability:**

As with previous aesthetic and political practices of the FUBA that we have considered throughout this thesis, there lies an importance in noticing that the articulation and interaction of networks in which members of the FUBA may be involved, and the development of their political identities, do not necessarily happen exclusively within the FUBA itself or within the spaces of the UBA, but also through their participation in a wide-ranging array of other sites and social spheres that deal with a distribution of the sensible, as conceptualised by Rancière; spaces scattered around the city of Buenos Aires such as cultural centres, worker-run factories, art collectives, cafes, music events, cinema circles, reading clubs, independent theatres, fashion groups, etc. All of which are part of “a delimitation of spaces and times of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience” (Rancière 2004, 13). All of these are sites that in some way offer countercultural spaces and opportunities for activities of political intervention and protest, and all of these environments form informal networks of spaces of circulation which inform the FUBA community and its lifestyle, and which can facilitate the articulation of social movements and render such an ecology visible. An ecology of spaces in which members of the FUBA regularly interact that is reminiscent of Massey’s affirmation of space as the sphere of possibility for the existence of multiplicity, integral from the beginning to the constitution of political identities (Massey 2005).



*Image 113.* Evening falls over the *AGR-Clarín* encampment in Nueva Pompeya. Banners demand the reincorporation of *AGR-Clarín* workers, and that of workers sacked from other companies, as part of a wider struggle.

In this capacity, coupled with the militancy of the FUBA occurring within University, these sites of circulation play a vital role in allowing the constant reproduction of the student movement through other aspects of its members' lifestyles. Indeed, as della Porta and Diani indicate, these informal environments can even come to represent cases where the participation in the life of a social movement consists mostly of the involvement in cultural and social activities or spaces, such as concerts, performances, happenings, and other forms of expression with a critical edge and an element of symbolic or political challenge to some kind of authority, or to "the police" as Rancière defines it - as a set of mechanisms which guards the division of spaces and roles to reproduce a logic of inequality (Rancière 2010); as we can see above from the literal police guarding a factory to keep it from its workers, to spaces dedicated to the trafficking of women - rather than of public demonstrations (della Porta and Diani 2006). And although there is clearly an outspoken element of demonstration in the countless protests in which these networks of students assemble under the organisational body of the FUBA, in the cases relating to other sites of circulation, outright demonstrations may not necessarily be the most important activity of members of the student movement, but only exist as visible expressions of affinity groups that join together to pursue a specific goal at a given time and disperse within a short period of time to continue activities in their day-to-day lifestyle and association together with other cultural or political groups or organisations.

Furthermore, as della Porta and Diani observe, these other spaces of circulation and interaction can facilitate the reproduction and sustainability of the student movement through the dense webs of informal exchanges and relations maintained in them, since such exchanges can also help to keep the collective identities of social movements and communities alive even when open challenges to authority may not be taking place; that is to say when movements may be going through a phase of "latency" as proposed by Melucci (Melucci 1989). As the reader may notice from the passages presented in this thesis, it is true that at the time of my fieldwork open challenges to authority were explicitly taking place in a variety of forms inside and outside of University. However, it is also true that in previous years, such open challenges had not necessarily been the case. As Manu himself expressed of the years from 2011 to 2015 (before the Macri Administration entered office), "there wasn't such a big predisposition to



*Image 114.* “Without police there is no trafficking of women.”; “Police are killers.”; “It was the State.”. Graffiti by women of the #NiUnaMenos campaign in the central streets of Buenos Aires denounce the responsibility of the State and its institutions in perpetuating gender violence.

resist as there is now”, and still these other sites of circulation may have played a part in sustaining the presence of the student movement and its latent challenge to authority.

So in thinking of how other sites of circulation and diffusion aid the reproduction of the student movement, we may think of their contribution to conforming an ecology of spaces across Buenos Aires where “the political” exists as an ever-present mode of intervention across genres and discursive forms, where it transcends boundaries between the university and the outside. As Massey suggests, it is useful to think of the political *in* and *through* all of these sites, transcending the divide between “place” and “space” (Massey 2005); where politics informs sensible registers in all aspects of students’ lifestyles. And thus we may consider this ecology as one where participation in the student movements consists of the very lifestyle itself (della Porta and Diani 2006); where as Rancière proposes of the aesthetic regime, there may be no specific characteristic that clearly distinguishes between artistic interventions, political expressions, and the student movement itself, as practices or identifies them from other forms of expression, or ways of doing and making, but where all these exist in their own sensible form of being (Rancière 2004).

### **The Material and the Relational: What do other spaces of circulation and diffusion enable?**

Following on from the discussion on how other sites of circulation and diffusion outside the university aid the reproduction and sustainability of the FUBA’s student movement, I explore two categories which may illustrate in a more concrete way how such spaces may affect the life of the student movement: the material and the relational.

We can ask, how does each of these categories allow for the other? What kind of relations to these material spaces enable? And we can think of these questions in terms of how they are manifested in the lives of members of the FUBA through their leisure time, their socialising activities, and their militancy away from the university. If, as I have argued, an informal network of spaces of circulation is produced through the material existence of these sites and the



*Image 115.* Students linger on the *Avenida de Mayo* at night, following a demonstration of the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign in April of 2017. Behind them graffiti interventions denounce gender violence.



participation of students in them, within this process of production of space, once these encounters between people and entities happen, once these relations are taking place, how does the materiality in which they are immersed in or surrounded by influence them? As Lefebvre would suggest, no space is politically neutral (Lefebvre 1991). So it is a key point to consider the kind of political relations that may stem from this production of space.

This is a point that connects us back to the distribution of the sensible and the sensory aesthetics of what is seen and can be said about politics in these sites; what may present itself to sense experience, and thus influence the encounters and relations that occur throughout these spaces of circulation. In order to reflect on this interplay of materiality and relations, I present here another personal example.

In September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018, I attended *El Quetzal*, another *centro cultural* in the neighbourhood of Palermo Soho, just a few blocks away from the site of the *Leon Leon*. Yet differently to the *Leon Leon*, *El Quetzal* does not belong to the members of a political party or organisation, but is a cooperatively owned cultural space that is also frequented by members of the FUBA. On this occasion, much like the scene that I described previously of seeing *Valentina Cooke y Lobos* play, I did not anticipate this outing as strictly “fieldwork”, but rather had imagined it to be a leisure-time activity on a weekend evening. It was only after stepping inside this cultural centre, that I realised the type of effect that the aesthetics of the place may have on the relations taking place there; its interpellation to the political just as presently manifested as in the inside of the faculties of the UBA that are occupied by the presence of the student movement. On that evening, a concert by the band *MineraL* was taking place, with its all-female line-up playing their interpretation of rock, which combined with dance rhythms and bass lines denounced violence against women and police brutality. And owing to the issue of police brutality being treated on-stage, a performance called “*Danza del gatillo facil*” (Trigger-Happy Dance) took place among the crowd of about 50 people who were present. Throughout the dance, the two female performers enacted the role of victims of police violence while video footage of massively attended



*Image 116. Mineral perform at El Quetzal cultural centre, while the Danza del gatillo fácil performance takes place in front of the band. Behind the band, footage of the CORREPI organisation against police brutality is visible.*

demonstrations against police brutality, with the participation of the CORREPI<sup>34</sup> organisation, was shown on a projection screen that acted as a background behind the band.

Throughout the rest of the venue, an intervention by art collective *G.R.A.S.A. (Grupo de Resistencia Artistica Social Autogestivo, Self-determined Artistic Social Resistance Group)* showed images on the walls of *El Quetzal* which denounced the precarious state of public education, as well as posters that outlined a guide to the rights of citizens upon being detained by the police, and a large mural display in the form of a condor clawing away at a map of South America in reference to the Operation Condor. By the entrance of *El Quetzal* was a framed illustration in black and white of social demonstrations which front and centre showed the face of disappeared and allegedly executed activist Santiago Maldonado, the banner of the CORREPI, and the banner of the CEADIG: the FUBA student centre of the Faculty of Architecture Design and Urbanism.

I should say that although I was familiar with *El Quetzal* cultural centre as a site of circulation where students would go during their leisure time, I did not plan on seeing this event specifically. I did not know that this concert would represent a denunciation of police brutality - which throughout the return of democracy in Argentina has continued to be one of the gravest Human Rights issues (Denissen 2008) - together with an artistic intervention, and I did not go there with the purpose of gathering information on the FUBA's student movement. But in a certain sensibility, just as with the *Leon Leon* scene, it seemed perfectly reasonable to encounter such aesthetic and political symbolism there, as much as within the faculties of the UBA. In my personal life, just as members of the FUBA would have experienced it, this would have seemed like a coherent fit, which looking back made me think of a question that was recurrently on my mind during my fieldwork: What happens when students can go out to socialise, to meet people, to view an artistic exhibition, to attend a concert, to

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<sup>34</sup> CORREPI stands for *Coordinadora contra la Represión Policial e Institucional* (Coordination against Police and Institutional Repression). It is a politically militant Human Rights organisation founded in 1992 which self-identifies as non-aligned with the State. CORREPI campaigns primarily against police brutality and institutional violence. Student members of CORREPI actively participate in the FUBA.

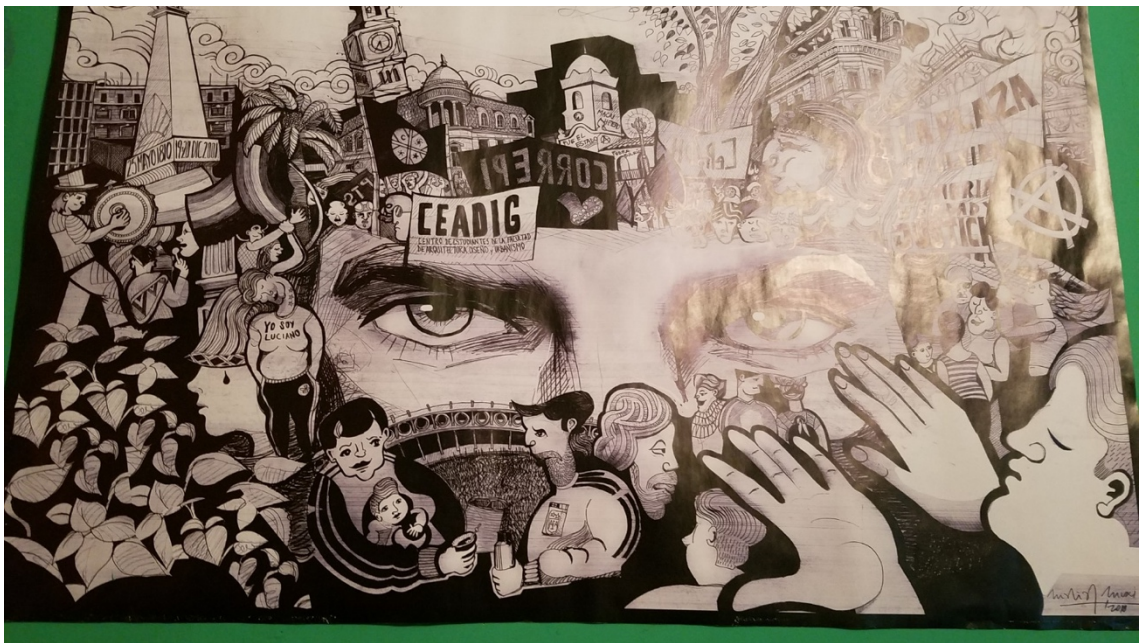


Image 117. Artistic interventions by the collective G.R.A.S.A. appear on the walls of *El Quetzal* cultural centre. It is common practice among the various *centros culturales* to show work by independent artists and collectives with counter-hegemonic political messages.

watch a film, to have drinks with friends, to have fun and relax on a night out, all in an atmosphere of political intervention, of non-aligned knowledge, of counterculture, of politically militant elements, or as it is locally termed, of “*cultura no comercializada*” (“non-commercialized culture”)? I emphasise that these are not commercially motivated places that cater to consumerist niches which supposedly represent “alternative (consumerist) lifestyles”. These are not the gentrified cafes and boutique artisanal markets of “green capitalism” that, Harvey denounces, have proliferated across cities; which “new urbanism” attempts to mask as countercultural or sustainable (Harvey 2012). These are spaces which - although possibly immersed in commercial neighbourhoods - are grounded in radical politics of autonomy and self-management.

What relations may be articulated when upon going out to enjoy time outside of University, as a student you run into a poster that outlines your rights in case you are ever detained by police (most likely in a public demonstration)? When hanging out in trendy Palermo Soho you may attend a venue called *Leon Leon* in reference to Leon Trotsky (self-managed and supported by a group of radical artists)? When you may spend an evening drinking *mate* with your university peers before staying the night at an encampment outside an occupied factory in solidarity with the evicted workers and their families? What relations, encounters and exchanges may be elicited when you seamlessly navigate these sites together with your University faculty? As Harvey reflects on Lefebvre’s heterotopia, it would seem vital that these spaces, where “something different” might happen - not out a conscious plan but out of liminal possibility - through what people see, hear or do on a daily base, exist for a revolutionary politics to have a shot at becoming manifested (Harvey 2012).

Admittedly, these sites may be functionally and geographically different, but through all of them a narrative is interwoven, and the discourse presented in them traverses spatial divides, making a hegemonic struggle evident across all planes of these documented spaces which students may navigate in their daily activities. These sites of circulation reflect hegemonic processes across intersecting spaces of class or function, in which students participate; sites which they inform and where they are informed, which in turn also contribute to their identities and relations as students. And it appears clear that these other sites of



*Image 118.* The face of late activist Santiago Maldonado, the legend “*Yo soy Luciano*” in reference to Luciano Arruga (victim of the Buenos Aires police), the banner of the CORREPI, and the banner of the CEADIG, together with the setting of the *Plaza de Mayo*, appear in an illustration at the entrance of *El Quetzal* cultural centre, in September of 2018.

circulation and diffusion have an importance in permitting a channel for students through which, as Jelin noted of the national rock movement in its time, mutual recognition and solidarity with others can be expressed, contributing to a constructive process of a collective identity (Jelin 1985), where the aesthetic and the political may be syncretized in the same spaces and activities; where relations of political subjectivization may occur and develop. In all of these spaces then, encounters between friends, students, workers, artists, etc. facilitate processes of interpellation to the political; through the stories one might be told, through a debate one may participate in, even through a song that may appeal to one's critical consciousness - through all of these aspects related to aesthetic sensibility - one might decide to become involved in political activism; to gradually take up the invitation and join the FUBA's student movement.

### **Territories in Dispute: Other sites of circulation and diffusion as battlegrounds**

Having reflected on how other sites of circulation and diffusion aid the reproduction and sustainability of the student movement, as well as on the material and relational dimensions that these may enable for members of the FUBA through the sensible aesthetics present in them, one further aspect which has been previously mentioned remains to be elaborated; the struggle for hegemony that traverses all of these sites and the agonistic and antagonistic (Mouffe 2013, Laclau and Mouffe 2014) relations enacted throughout such a struggle. To explore this issue, we may ask: What possibility do these sites have to present themselves to sense experience?

Referring back to Lefebvre's approach to the production of social space, he argues that hegemony leaves no social space untouched, with the State weighting down on society looking to neutralise spaces of resistance, and on the other hand these forces of resistance managing to open up spaces for political intervention, in an on-going process that can never be complete (Lefebvre 1991). And it is precisely such a dynamic that I invite us to consider these other sites in which circulation and diffusion are immersed, situated in a strife that plays out throughout the city of Buenos Aires. In order to uncover the agonistic and antagonistic antagonist relations playing out across such a battlefield of spaces, we will analyse them on two levels: First, the antagonisms (Laclau and Mouffe

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## CASA CULTURAL

### AGENDA MARZO 2019

<b>Ciclo Deseo:</b> Mora Garcia Medici Anna Martinez 18.03   20.00	<b>Cepo - Nadal -</b> Gonzalezj - Kautras 19.03   20.00	<b>Orquesta Valatit</b> Orquesta Espantapajaros 19.03   20.00	<b>quien se</b> 19.03   20.00	<b>VOYAGE</b> 19.03   20.00
<b>Ferisín Raviola</b> Niño Kalimba Clara Gius 19.03   21.00	<b>Hiperkijam</b> 19.03   23.00	<b>Festy Jimmy</b> 19.03   21.00 + 03.00	<b>Festi Alegreín</b> 19.03   21.00	<b>La Milanguera</b> TMR Trio - Laurel Trio 19.03   21.00
<b>Ciclo Impulso:</b> Anita & Gabo Noto N Blues 19.03   21.00	<b>Música x Mujeres</b> 19.03   21.00	<b>Griego + Matvica</b> Paprena + Francisco Baogalupo 19.03   21.00	<b>Mis 15</b> 19.03   23.00	<b>Roda de Samba</b> 19.03   21.00
<b>Impro!</b> Vivero + Mil Familias 19.03   20.00	<b>Dora Morgan</b> Arte Colectivo 19.03   20.00	<b>La Mujer Barbuda</b> Commodore 19.03   21.00	<b>Fil Pix3l</b> Sinonimos 19.03   21.00	<b>Fiesta Tum</b> 19.03   23.00
<b>Pintura Pública</b> 19.03   21.00	<b>Verde Camarón</b> La Runa Mula 19.03   21.00	<b>Mordiente</b> Les presentes 19.03   21.00	<b>Arian</b> housmand trio 19.03   21.00	<b>Hilos</b> 19.03   21.00
<b>Combo Bestial</b> 19.03   23.00	<b>Sofia Aristarain</b> 19.03   21.00	<b>La Caracumbia</b> 19.03   23.00	<b>Día de la memoria</b> 19.03   21.00	<b>Negra Candela</b> 19.03   21.00
<b>La Rumbadera</b> 19.03   21.00	<b>Nacho Laffitto</b> 19.03   21.00	<b>Grausone</b> 19.03   23.00	<b>J.O.D.A</b> 19.03   21.00	<b>La Rosada</b> 19.03   23.00

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Image 119. The programme of *El Quetzal* cultural centre for March 2019, with acts appearing almost on a daily basis. The *Día de la Memoria* is specially marked, on March 24<sup>th</sup>. Drinks are announced for happy hour; at the time a couple of drinks would cost between two and four pounds sterling.



2014) between the student movement and the groups articulated within, who participate in these spaces, as opposed to the government and the local authorities. And second, the agonisms (Mouffe 2013) which play out within the FUBA itself through the participation of its members in these sites.

On the first level, it is true that as a city Buenos Aires offers interesting possibilities and contrasts for the FUBA and its student movement to exist. Indeed, it may have appeared strange or contradictory at first sight to picture how a cultural centre owned by a group of artists and students of a Trotskyist political party could exist and be maintained in the centrally-located upscale neighbourhood of Palermo Soho, side by side with luxury boutiques and design studios. And how the same artists who performed there could also be encountered in the encampment of an occupied factory in the working class neighbourhood of Nueva Pompeya on the edges of the city. Such contrasts would be hard or even impossible to imagine in a different capital. So on this note, it should be said that the emergence of the practice of non-commercialised culture with a politically militant nature, and the sites associated to its performance was in many regards a reaction and a denouncement to the restrictive culture of censorship that forbade such activities in the times of military dictatorship, as Jelin suggests (Jelin 1985). And the practice of occupied factories and worker-run companies is, in a large part, an inheritance of events which occurred around the 2001 crisis of the *Argentinazo*, as Ruggeri has documented (Ruggeri 2014). However, as both of these authors acknowledge, the process of struggle for the existence and subsistence of these sites is far from over today, particularly so as participants in my research stated, with the onset of the Macri Administration from 2016 onwards (at the time of my fieldwork).

Proof of this ongoing struggle is that the *Leon Leon* cultural centre has now (2019) closed down and in the same building today stands a commercial bar called "The Little Bar". Yet this should come as no surprise, for during its operational lifespan there were also attempts at closing down the *Leon Leon*. On one occasion during my fieldwork, a lack of illuminated emergency exit signalling was cited by the local authority as the reason to close down the cultural centre for several weeks. And together with government pressures, we can imagine how the dramatic spike in utility prices facilitated by the Macri Administration might



*Image 120.* The site where the the *Leon Leon* cultural centre previously stood. Nowadays, a commercial bar operates at the site, pictured in September 2018.

have finished-off the job of closing the place down. The *AGR-Clarín* encampment where workers, family members, and students spent entire months living, deliberating, and debating, is now gone. Together with the material closing of the cultural centre and the occupied factory and its encampment, we may imagine the array of encounters, political relations, possibilities and moments that were also foreclosed.

However, as part of this active process, new sites of circulation and diffusion have also emerged in other points of the city. For example: similar efforts of student-worker solidarity to the one in the *AGR-Clarín* campaign have since been carried out by the FUBA's student movement in facilities belonging to food and beverage giant *Pepsico* and packaging company *Interpack* in 2017 and 2018 respectively; whilst countless other *centros culturales*, belonging to political or social organisations, or independent cooperatives as in the case of *El Quetzal*, remain active throughout the city. In fact, to show the strong link which exists between these figures of other sites of circulation, certain worker-run companies even hold their own *centros culturales*. One example of this configuration is the case of the IMPA factory, a metallurgy and plastic factory recovered by its workers in 1998, which to this day runs a cultural centre open to the public that regularly hosts a variety of artistic and cultural workshops, thoroughly involved in the political discussions occurring throughout the city, and in which members of the FUBA actively participate. Another is the case of Zanon Ceramics, which has closely collaborated with the local Mapuche population and has a variety of independent media outlets such as radio show and a newspaper (Zibechi 2006). As Zibechi argues, the heterogeneous collectives that are articulated in such struggles, including, workers, students, artists, and neighbourhood residents, as well as the protest and cultural activities that occur during these campaigns, serve to strengthen bonds between these communities and to articulate particularly grounded political subjectivities; they are key to these struggles becoming successful (Zibechi 2006). Furthermore, there are groups of students and FUBA militants who are permanently articulated to initiatives like worker-run companies through programmes such as *Facultad abierta*<sup>35</sup> (Open faculty). Such social

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<sup>35</sup> Facultad abierta (Open faculty) is a self-led programme composed of academics, students and workers who operate in close consultation with established as well as emerging worker-run companies. Through the participants of this programme,



*Image 121.* A band plays during a music festival for the legalisation of abortion in front of Congress, in June of 2016.

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members of worker-run companies are invited to share their experiences in lectures and seminars at the UBA. During my fieldwork and studies at the UBA I attended a seminar on self-managed companies in which this dynamic was regularly carried out.

bridges between communities and workplaces through the articulation of heterogeneous groups meaningfully demonstrate alternatives to predatory neoliberal urbanism (Harvey 2012). So it is important to realise that although the examples presented here may have their own local situations, or particular conjunctures, they are all representative of a systematic phenomenon and a struggle for hegemony occurring across Buenos Aires and beyond.

Finally, on the note of how other sites of circulation and diffusion may represent a field for agonistic relations (Mouffe 2013) within the FUBA to play out, we may consider how these sites serve to mobilise action within the student movement itself. Through such an approach we can view these as sites of contention in which different *agrupaciones* within the FUBA participate in order to demonstrate which one of them is most thoroughly involved in the struggles happening across the city. The *AGR-Clarín* campaign, for example, was a clear example of this dynamic, as members of the Independent Left sector of the FUBA constantly showcased their involvement in this cause (and their days spent at the encampment) as a banner that demonstrated their compromise with the wider struggles of workers throughout the city and beyond, and reprised those in the student movement who did not become involved with the campaign as being detached from the political interventions that they considered vital in their struggle for hegemony.

It is of key importance then to situate these other sites of circulation and diffusion within the contest for hegemony; in the in-between of the push and pull of the student movement and *the police* as Rancière would term it. In a spatial dispute in which, as Valentina Cooke sang in her song *Rojo* that night in the *Leon Leon*:



Image 122. "To the streets to fight for legal abortion!" A cartel stands beside the equipment of the drumming troupe of *Las Rojas*, the gender sector of the *Nuevo MAS*, during a festival for the legalisation of abortion in front of Congress, on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

<p>“<i>Se vende,</i>  <i>todo se vende,</i>  <i>venden a los niños,</i>  <i>la trata de mujeres,</i>  <i>tu tierra,</i>  <i>tu aire,</i>  <i>tu agua,</i>  <i>todo se vende...</i>”</p>	<p>“For sale,  everything is for sale,  they sell children,  trafficking women,  your land,  your air,  your water,  everything is for sale...”  (Valentina Cooke 2016)</p>
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### **Conclusion: Into the Horizon**

Throughout this chapter I have argued that the existence of other sites of circulation and diffusion is a vital point for us to better understand the FUBA’s student movement. I have invited us to picture the movement of members of the FUBA’s student movement across the city of Buenos Aires in their daily life, not only when studying at the faculties of the university; to step out and follow the personal lives of students as they transit other sites which are just as politically charged as the occupied university, and which may contribute to the development of political identities just as much as their experience within the UBA. In this sense, I have attempted to explore the question of space as Massey suggests it: as the sphere for the existence of political multiplicity, as the place of encounters (Massey 2005), as the environment in which these sites are permitted to exist.

Through the examples of the sites and encounters that I have illustrated here, I have attempted to give the picture of a scenario in which Buenos Aires as a city becomes an active backdrop against which the student movement circulates and develops. A scenario in which the rhythm of the city’s shifting contradictions and tensions, its openings and closures, as well as its living memory, all exert forces that affect the everyday life and experience of student members of the FUBA. The result of which is an ongoing process of production of space that represents an ecology of informal networks of exchanges that play a role in shaping the political identities of the students who participate in these sites.



*Image 123.* Roads are closed around the centre of Buenos Aires for the second yearly *#NiUnaMenos* march against gender violence, on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016. Virtually all the sectors of the FUBA were thoroughly involved in this occasion.



I have attempted to picture the outcome of the interplay that the category of the material in these spaces may have on the political relations that develop within and across this production of space through the encounters that may take place in them. And I have attempted to paint a clear picture of how the sensible aesthetics presented in these sites, as well as the discourse that is performed in them, through a wide array of practices, contribute to the development of processes of political subjectivization for the members of the FUBA who participate within these spaces.

Finally, I have tried to convey a sense of how these other sites of circulation and diffusion outside of University are battlefields through which a struggle for hegemony plays out between the student movement and the State and local authorities, as well as within the FUBA itself. In this measure, we can consider these sites to be traversed by a struggle for hegemony through the enactment of agonistic and antagonistic relations, just as much as the university space itself, and indeed the rest of the city of Buenos Aires and beyond. Such a dynamic paints a living picture of Lefebvre's visualisation in which the struggle for hegemony operates on all planes, from the infinitely small to the largest of scales (Lefebvre 1991), and exposes the porous and co-constitutive relation that Massey argues exists between identities/entities, and their surrounding spatiality, whilst transcending a divide of place and space (Massey 2005).

Leading on from this co-constitutive relation between the FUBA's student movement, and the cityscape surrounding it - just as we examined the co-constitutive relation between the FUBA and the UBA itself as an institution in Chapter 5, on occupation - we are left with the question of the boundaries of the FUBA's student movement: Where does it end and the rest of the city begin? Where does it stop being the student movement and become the private life of its members? As I have proposed, it is precisely these lines which are blurred by such spaces of circulation. So on the horizon we begin to see a picture where the student movement blends in with the rest of the city, with its effects resembling waves or branches extending throughout Buenos Aires, contributing to the formation of the city itself, where the participation in the student movement enters the aspects of daily lifestyle, its aesthetics to be uncovered and encountered possibly in every corner of the city.



*Image 124.* The large banner of the FUBA stands behind the banner of the Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion, next to the National Congress; signalling the presence of the student movement at the music festival in the centre of Buenos Aires.

## IX. Conclusion

To conclude this thesis, I propose to reflect on how, through the form of movement, we may we learn from the FUBA's political and aesthetic practice when facing ever-increasing processes of political and environmental crisis in the cores of financial capitalism - and in many other places. One of the principal concerns that led me to the encounter with the FUBA in the first place, was the notion of a community which in the face of uncertainty and violence as a constant threatening presence, had generated alternative ways of engaging with the political and of conceiving processes of learning and community-making.

I have undertaken this research at a time in which as a society, we are facing a political and environmental emergency of the highest order. Evermore, we are witnessing the acute manifestations of what Graeber suggests, is a machinery bent on the manufacturing of hopelessness as a means to render the catastrophic cycle of capitalism as the only way forward (Graeber 2011). The crises now evident in the cores of capitalism are inherently linked to the extractivism carried out in Latin America and beyond (Zibechi 2019); which has encouraged communities and movements throughout the edges and peripheries to emerge as political agents by generating forms of productive resistance (Goddard 2019).

In the current situation, through broader networks of movements addressing common concerns, it seems adequate to echo the Extinction Rebellion's claim that our survival, and nothing less, is ultimately at stake (Extinction Rebellion 2019). At time like this, engaging with the idea of movement seems not only appropriate but necessary, as a mode of generating possibilities in the midst of a time marked by manufactured uncertainty, precarity, and the erosion of ground - through a weaponized and commodified version of happiness - for the political proper to exist (Žižek 2019). Movement can serve as a mode of re-informing our notions as to what it can mean to do research in anthropology and to engage with academia, as well as to generally rearrange our notions of what it means to do politics and engage with the political; both as researchers and as political subjects. Therefore, we can ask: in what ways does the FUBA's student

movement in Buenos Aires offer lessons for other communities through its generation of alternatives as a forms of dissensus?

Through its generation of space, the FUBA allows us to see how material and symbolic territorialities can be re-appropriated by social movements (Zibechi 2012), to become sites for the emergence of political subjects (Rancière 2010). This student movement allows us to see how politics and the political are inhabited categories that generate social practices. And it allows us to reflect on the porous and fluid character of the political, inside and outside of the university; where students consciously recognise and attempt counter-hegemonic practices to claim these spaces for political intervention and interpellation.

The FUBA's community allows us to see how activist initiatives can be sustained over long-term temporalities. Through its forms of doing and generating knowledge, through the dialectical relation of its theory as political practice - where the visualization of alternatives surges through direct interaction with its communities - it shows a case where formal institutions can be directly subverted through a conscious and constant attempt at doing so. It shows how new territorialities - based on previous ones (Zibechi 2012) - can be introduced and sustained relating to the production of knowledge as a transformative process (Freire 1994).

The student movement also shows us how memory can be involved in the production of political subjectivities. We can reflect on the practice of young members of the FUBA as activists/students/intellectuals, who are consciously involved in generating knowledge through memory; through forms of theorising and acting which in past episodes were violently taken away. We see a case in which self-recognised groups of young people consciously reclaim the past in order to generate present alternatives.

In the FUBA's student movement we can identify similarities in composition and demands with other social movements such as the Chilean student movement, the Spanish *Indignados*, the larger Occupy movement, and indeed the Extinction Rebellion. However, we can also recognise differences in the fact that the FUBA's student movement has a material and symbolic "core" that allows

this movement to be sustained and reproduced. There is a complexity in this core, as stemming from a State institution which has been subverted to serve the heterogeneous needs of the student movement (Zibechi 2012). Furthermore, in certain ways, the FUBA also resembles a trade union. This notion leads us to reflect on how other forms of institutional organisation or association (such as trade unions) can learn from the FUBA's dynamic of having to adapt to evermore common configurations of transitory membership and association - in which participants may inhabit different overlapping memberships/identities.

Certainly, while the contemporary situation of political, social, and environmental crisis affects us on a planetary scale, different geographies have experienced particularly grounded struggles. As such, facing the ever greater stripping of social and economic rights, the flexibilisation of labour, and the overall neoliberalization of education, I propose that we reflect on how the FUBA's student movement has addressed these problems through the generation of alternative "ways of doing and making" (Rancière 2004). In this sense, we can learn from these sites and their productive efforts of resistance without denying the hardship that has driven them to create alternatives (Goddard 2019). For admittedly, while the contemporary problems of our societies may seem more acute today, they are not new, and other movements and communities, through the form of present members and past generations, in Latin America, in Western Europe, and throughout the world, have addressed these questions. And as Graeber recognises, the importance of rendering such alternatives visible, lies in shattering the sense of inevitability that the system must be patched up to continue in the same form (Graeber 2011). With this intention in mind, I invite us to summarise how the FUBA's student movement has emerged to the political stage developing forms of political and aesthetic practice that allow it to generate and to sustain a space for the existence of radical politics.

When considering the relation between politics and aesthetics for social movements, as we saw in chapter 3, we can consider the FUBA's student movement to be embedded within a larger distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2004) within the Latin American region, and in the particular social and political context of Argentina and Buenos Aires; a distribution of the sensible that defines a relationship between aesthetic practices and political possibility. Resulting from

decades of hardship and crisis, we can assimilate this student movement to the form of an aesthetic community (Rancière 2009) - as a set of vibrations in the present, and as a mediator for a people to come; resulting from a particular past, yet existing between the present and the future - together with many other social movements, organisations, and Human Rights groups that, precisely as a response to the (greater or lesser) failures of all forms of State governments in Argentina (through dictatorships and democracy), have subverted relationships of political spectatorship through emancipation, and have taken it upon themselves to construct new systems of community-making and learning, as part of a larger genealogy of protest (Goddard 2015). From such a process of emancipation, which defines the emergence of subjects as political agents, we can understand the FUBA's student movement to enact political and aesthetic practices as forms of dissensus; forms of intervention which aim to suspend the logic of "the police" by implementing equality (Rancière 2010); changing the sensible social fabric of society in the course of intervention, rather than exercising forms of State institutional power. We have reflected upon how the community of this student movement actively navigates through a landscape where past events constantly re-inform the present, and where the memorialisation of past episodes relating to State violence and disappearance are constantly claimed as a site of struggle in the political and symbolic sense (Jelin 2002). And we have considered how, in such a landscape of struggle, the political must exist through the form of agonistic and antagonistic relations of difference (Laclau and Mouffe 2014, Mouffe 2013), which themselves serve to energise and sustain the student movement both internally and externally. All-the-while keeping in mind the material and personal networks of movements and organisations that help to sustain the life of the FUBA's student movement through the form of an ecology of movements.

As discussed in chapter 4, we can learn from how the turbulent historical trajectories of groups such as the FUBA, have followed the unstable processes of politics in Argentina, through violent times of dictatorships and democracy. And we can appreciate how these trajectories have ultimately inscribed a series of meaningful events in the collective imaginary of today's members of the FUBA; some events personally lived and some transmitted through the channel of previous generations to be incorporated as their own (Jelin and Sempol 2006).

Henceforth, we can acknowledge how past struggles of similar movements and organisations, as well as changes in the institutional political landscape of the country, have been mapped onto the contemporary political map of the FUBA - with certain historical episodes and political debates enabling a series of common identifications throughout the student movement, while others draw adversarial lines of internal confrontation, which serve to further mobilisation within the FUBA. We can acknowledge how, through the contested and agitated political history of Argentina, categories of youth and students have emerged as self-recognised political agents (Jelin 1985). And very importantly, we can recognise the relevance of historical trajectories and past events in the measure that they have provided contemporary members of the FUBA with a repertoire of protest and political action in the form of a variety of political and aesthetic practices. In this sense, we can appreciate how, through the contradictions experienced between regimes along the history of the FUBA, the conditions of possibility have emerged for politics to exist through acts of subjectivization, which as Rancière suggests, consist of challenging the natural order of bodies in the name of equality; extricating one's self from the dominant categories and polemically reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible in the process (Rancière 2004).

When asking how we might learn from movement through the FUBA's production of space, we can recognise, as we saw in chapter 5, that, through the practice of occupation as a constant inhabitation of the university space of the UBA, this student movement secretes its physical, mental, and social space (Lefebvre 1991). We can recognise this production of space as the sphere which allows a political multiplicity to exist within the university space and the formation of political identities to be developed through processes of subjectivization, where students are interpellated through a process which is constantly under production (Massey 2005). And we can understand occupation to be a practice through which members of the FUBA have reclaimed the space of public education, and guard this space as a conquest following long and often violent episodes of repression. Occupation therefore becomes an instrument for contesting hegemony against levels of government that have attempted forms of privatisation as well as the systematic dismantling and commercialisation of public education. As members of the FUBA express it, we can understand occupation to be that mechanism which identifies the space of public education

as an inherently political space, a battleground. Furthermore, we have seen how occupation of space then allows for the entry of occupation into the academic knowledge imparted at the UBA; where the occupation of the academic programmes themselves carries with it the understanding that the only way in which a university may serve the transformative needs of its students is by making sure that the university is physically and academically so occupied by students that the university experience itself ends up being a result of the student movement, rather than the student movement being a result of the university. This is a vital point to learn from if we take seriously the claim made by Massey stating that identities, entities, and the relations between them are all co-constitutive, including political identities and therefore, the possibility for the political to exist (Massey 2005). Occupation of space and theory in this sense situates the UBA itself as an entity co-produced by the student movement, which in turn allows the student movement the material and theoretical resources to sustain itself over an extended temporality.

If we ask how we may consider academic theory through the form of movement, as we discussed in chapter 6, we can learn from the need that members of the FUBA have recognised for academic theory to constitute a fundamental part of their political practice. What does it mean to move academic theory into political practice? In the activity of the FUBA, it has become clear that theory as political practice must be a process in which both theoretical reflection and political practice must be deeply intertwined. As we have seen, members of the student movement emphasise the need to literally take the learning processes and exercises into the hallways of the university and out to the streets, to the neighbourhoods, and to the public space, while looking to make a political contribution to the communities with which they engage through various academic disciplines. And we can recognise how through the independent and self-led organisation of a variety of academic activities as interventions, members of the student movement visibilize their political agendas, while interpellating and attracting fellow students into political militancy, and contributing to the political formation of active militants of the FUBA; blurring the divisions of those who think and those who act (Rancière 1991). As we have seen, through these theoretical-political activities the student movement claims academic knowledge as a hegemonic battleground, producing a kind of knowledge that is flexible and



grounded according to the needs of its members, complimentary as they say, to the academic knowledge formulated inside the classrooms. Such a practice seems to effectively shape academic theory into an adaptive political tool. As a result, I argue, the theoretical-political initiatives carried out by the FUBA conform a fundamental pillar for the reproduction and sustainability of the student movement, and a channel for the enactment of agonistic relations therein, which serve to further mobilise theoretical discussion. Furthermore, theory as political practice constitutes a sphere that allows for the experimentation and visualization of new social horizons for the FUBA and beyond; key to understand of a student movement whose aim is frequently the lived experience of radical theoretical experiments themselves.

If we consider the movement of memory and we ask what it can mean to learn from a movement where the events of the past are not cordoned-off from the present, but rather are constantly re-activated to inform the present, we can recognise as we did in chapter 7, the active role of collective memory in the FUBA's student movement. When exploring this question in relation to the FUBA's student movement, and social movements in Argentina generally, we can recognise a landscape where events in time are not necessarily perceived in the form of a linear progression but rather what we may assimilate to a recurring form of time according to political circumstances - where the past may become an active component of the present, and where memory is a space of political struggle (Jelin 2002). Through such a recognition we can understand how events of State violence and disappearance in times of dictatorship and of democracy, have been weaved through a long, contentious, and heterogeneous process, into the local category of collective memory; a category with a combative and militant social character that current members of the FUBA have received through way of transmissions from earlier generations, and through lived experiences during their lifetimes. We can understand how this category, which is contended in itself, is differently appropriated by members of the student movement, as a means for identification, legitimation, and for the vindication of a continuity with past generations of the student movement. Furthermore, we can see in the live rituals associated with collective memory, a window into the different political identities that members of the student movement may hold, and how these are negotiated or how they may conflict with each other. Thus, we can appreciate the figure of

collective memory, through the notion of *memoria viva* (live memory), as a key element for the student movement because of its capacity for metamorphosis; for linking and weaving together identities, objects, and situations, such as the memory of those disappeared in episodes of State Terrorism, to the victims of gender violence today - within the *#NiUnaMenos* campaign, and the larger women's movement – and to the demands of victims of State violence across national borders. Here, movement through the form of collective memory becomes a driving force for the FUBA which is constantly under construction, contention, and re-articulation; the past endowing the present and the future with spontaneity and imagination.

When considering what spaces, other than the University, can serve for the sustainability and reproduction of the student movement as well as other movements and social organisations, we can turn back to the reflections of chapter 8 on other spaces of circulation and diffusion outside of University. As we have seen, there lies an important point in recognising that the articulation of networks which nurture the life of the FUBA's student movement and the political identities of its members, does not only happen within the university space, but also in an array of other spheres and sites, and that deal with a distribution of the sensible; spaces such as cultural centres, worker-run companies, cafes, music and theatre venues, and so forth, that in some way offer counter-hegemonic opportunities in terms of acts of political intervention and protest to be staged through endless forms. As we have seen, these spaces allow for the possibility of participation in the life of the student movement to consist of a whole lifestyle in itself. We can therefore learn from how the sensible aesthetics present in such places allow for processes of political subjectivization to develop; how the material enables the relational, and in turn how life outside the university informs political life within said university. Importantly, we can consider how these other sites of circulation and diffusion are also immersed in a hegemonic struggle playing out across Buenos Aires, and many other cities, where increasingly the power to shape the urban fabric is handed over to the hands of private and quasi-private interests driven by consumerist market-niches (Harvey 2012). In such a scenario these sites also constitute vital hegemonic battlegrounds to be contested, through which the FUBA's student movement begins to blend in a porous and diffused gesture into the rest of the city, as many other social

movements do; moving and agitating the city of Buenos Aires in itself.

Lastly, when we consider the dynamic of movement for the academic and militant researcher, I propose that we recognise, as in chapter 2, the methodological considerations implicated when conducting research within and through social movements. As such, it is vital that we recognise movement on an embodied and personal level, with the agitation of the body that is implied by movement; the excitement of the molecules that constitute our organisms, the displacement of the body and of the mind that allows us to become familiarly engaged with the social phenomenon being studied. In the form of movement, both physically and imaginatively, we are constantly twisting and moving, we encounter the necessity of thinking on our feet, in the way of the detour; in the course of the displacement and the experiment, in a dynamic play of forces that is always in reconfiguration, where the reflection on our own sensory perception is at all times vital to the knowledge being produced (Pink 2009). And in the midst of this dynamic of thinking on our feet it seems key to approach movement through the role of the artisan, with a notion of theory and politics that is open-ended and non-formulaic; that values the unpredictable affective effects of the process of critical engagement and encounters in themselves (Osterweil and Chesters 2007). Thus, for the researcher of movement, as we have reflected, engagement with the group being studied can happen in the form of “*caminar preguntando*” (walking in the course of asking); accepting the complications of not having eternally correct answers, instead looking to facilitate knowledge by walking in or alongside social movements through the precept of equality, not just integrating into organisations, but moving one’s self to capture and reconfigure (Zibechi 2012). We can learn to situate ourselves in the midst of the torrential energy that social movements give off, to allow ourselves to be affected by the movements being studied and to openly affect them in return.

I present these reflections so that they may help us think of how we can apply some of the lessons learned through the FUBA’s student movement to our own forms of conducting academic theory and political practice. Admittedly, not so that we may attempt to replicate this student movement, for as I have argued throughout this thesis, every social space is simultaneously charged with its own potential for radical political alterity. But certainly, difference across time and space should not impede us from reflecting on how other communities have

generated alternatives in the face of violence and crisis. As Graeber suggests, global governance is so keen to erase accounts of these other forms of being, precisely because to become aware of them, and to share their knowledge, allows us to see everything that people are already doing in a new light; already communists when working on common projects, already anarchists when solving problems without the police, and already revolutionaries when making something genuinely new (Graeber 2011).

To conclude I would like to offer a counterpoint to the commentary made in the introduction about the characteristics of living organisms, by asking: what is the opposite of movement? What is the name of the process in which living cells cease to move? The cessation of movement implies death. So, reflecting on today's landscape, so seemingly eroded of possibility for the political proper to exist, for radical difference to be expressed, for antagonisms to be enacted, and for a weaponized form of happiness to be upset, it seems increasingly important to study through movement to attempt to capture the ephemeral ways in which social movements create meaning. For, as Freire argues, in a world where the future is already pre-determined through a series of narratives of capitalism as an inevitability, there is no room for utopia, for a dream of transformation (Freire 1994). Admittedly, in such a landscape as the one we are facing, no single solution to our problems can be enough (Žižek 2019). And in such a critical situation, it is vital to avoid falling into the trap of thinking that anthropology must erase all complexities and contradictions being faced, in a call for realist action, which limits the exploration of alternatives to already established reductionist notions of politics (Osterweil 2013). We can therefore try to learn from movement and its capacity to generate radical irruptions in order to act and theorize differently. Even then, there is the acknowledgement that it may already be too late in terms of our ecological situation on a planetary scale. But if an attempt is not made to learn from communities who in the face of crisis have generated spaces for radical possibilities to exist, the future is certainly forsaken. The FUBA's motto reads "*Si el presente es de lucha, el futuro es nuestro*" (If the present is a struggle the future will be ours); this is a clever play on time, for as we have seen, that future - that horizon - is always by nature undefined, and it is what is articulated and what we do in the present, in the course of aiming towards that hopeful horizon, that constitutes a form of life.



*Image 125*

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## Appendix A. List of Images

<b>Image 1.</b> Source of base map: Google Maps.	14
<b>Image 2</b>	42
<b>Image 3.</b> FUBA flyer, collected 2016.	53
<b>Image 4</b>	104
<b>Image 5</b>	115
<b>Image 6.</b> <i>La Corriente</i> online flyer, retrieved 2019 from <i>Estudiantes por la liberación</i> 's Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/estudiantesxlaliberacion/">https://www.facebook.com/estudiantesxlaliberacion/</a> .	117
<b>Image 7.</b> Distribution of FUBA <i>agrupaciones</i> is noted according to the coalitions assembled for the 2016 student elections.	131
<b>Image 8.</b> Source of base map: Google Maps. Colours of student centres are noted according to the coalitions assembled for the 2016 student elections.	134
<b>Image 9</b>	141
<b>Image 10</b>	143
<b>Image 11</b>	145
<b>Image 12</b>	147
<b>Image 13</b>	149
<b>Image 14</b>	151
<b>Image 15</b>	153
<b>Image 16</b>	155
<b>Image 17</b>	157
<b>Image 18</b>	159
<b>Image 19</b>	161
<b>Image 20</b>	163
<b>Image 21</b>	165
<b>Image 22</b>	167
<b>Image 23</b>	169
<b>Image 24</b>	171
<b>Image 25</b>	173
<b>Image 26</b>	175
<b>Image 27</b>	177
<b>Image 28</b>	179
<b>Image 29</b>	181
<b>Image 30</b>	183
<b>Image 31</b>	185
<b>Image 32</b>	187
<b>Image 33</b>	189
<b>Image 34</b>	191
<b>Image 35</b>	193
<b>Image 36</b>	195
<b>Image 37</b>	197
<b>Image 38</b>	199
<b>Image 39</b>	201
<b>Image 40</b>	203
<b>Image 41</b>	205
<b>Image 42</b>	207
<b>Image 43</b>	211
<b>Image 44</b>	213
<b>Image 45</b>	215
<b>Image 46</b>	217
<b>Image 47</b>	219
<b>Image 48.</b> UJS-PO flyer, collected 2016.	221
<b>Image 49.</b> UJS-PO flyer, collected 2016.	223
<b>Image 50</b>	225
<b>Image 51</b>	227
<b>Image 52</b>	227

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D

	400
<b>Image 53</b>	229
<b>Image 54</b>	231
<b>Image 55.</b> UJS-PO flyer, collected 2016.	233
<b>Image 56.</b> UJS-PO flyer, collected 2016.	235
<b>Image 57.</b> <i>Juventud Socialista/MST</i> flyer, collected 2016.	237
<b>Image 58</b>	239
<b>Image 59.</b> <i>SUR</i> online flyer, retrieved 2018 from <i>SUR Filo Uba's</i> Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/sur.filo/">https://www.facebook.com/sur.filo/</a>	241
<b>Image 60.</b> <i>TUN 9 de Mayo</i> flyer, collected 2016.	243
<b>Image 61.</b> <i>Amaranto</i> flyer, collected 2016.	245
<b>Image 62.</b> <i>CEFyL</i> flyer, collected 2016.	247
<b>Image 63</b>	249
<b>Image 64.</b> <i>Seamos Libres</i> flyer, collected 2016.	251
<b>Image 65.</b> <i>La Dignidad</i> flyer, collected 2016.	253
<b>Image 66</b>	255
<b>Image 67.</b> UJS-PO flyer, collected 2016.	257
<b>Image 68.</b> <i>La Dignidad</i> flyer, collected 2016.	259
<b>Image 69.</b> <i>MANA</i> flyer, collected 2016.	261
<b>Image 70.</b> <i>Cultura de Pasillo</i> flyer, collected 2016.	263
<b>Image 71</b>	265
<b>Image 72</b>	272
<b>Image 73</b>	274
<b>Image 74</b>	276
<b>Image 75</b>	278
<b>Image 76</b>	280
<b>Image 77</b>	282
<b>Image 78</b>	284
<b>Image 79</b>	286
<b>Image 80</b>	288
<b>Image 81</b>	290
<b>Image 82</b>	292
<b>Image 83</b>	294
<b>Image 84.</b> <i>ContraPunto</i> online flyer, retrieved 2018 from <i>ContraPunto FFyL's</i> Facebook Page.	296
<b>Image 85</b>	298
<b>Image 86</b>	300
<b>Image 87</b>	302
<b>Image 88</b>	304
<b>Image 89</b>	306
<b>Image 90</b>	308
<b>Image 91</b>	310
<b>Image 92</b>	312
<b>Image 93.</b> <i>La Mella</i> online flyer, retrieved 2016 from <i>La Mella-UBA's</i> Facebook Page: <a href="https://www.facebook.com/LaMellaenlaUBA/">https://www.facebook.com/LaMellaenlaUBA/</a>	314
<b>Image 94</b>	316
<b>Image 95</b>	318
<b>Image 96</b>	320
<b>Image 97</b>	322
<b>Image 98</b>	324
<b>Image 99</b>	326
<b>Image 100</b>	328
<b>Image 101</b>	330
<b>Image 102</b>	332
<b>Image 103</b>	336
<b>Image 104</b>	338
<b>Image 105</b>	340
<b>Image 106.</b> <i>Leon Leon</i> programme, collected 2016.	342
<b>Image 107.</b> <i>Leon Leon</i> programme, collected 2016.	344



	401
<b>Image 108</b>	<b>346</b>
<b>Image 109</b>	<b>348</b>
<b>Image 110</b>	<b>350</b>
<b>Image 111</b>	<b>352</b>
<b>Image 112</b>	<b>354</b>
<b>Image 113</b>	<b>356</b>
<b>Image 114</b>	<b>358</b>
<b>Image 115</b>	<b>360</b>
<b>Image 116</b>	<b>362</b>
<b>Image 117</b>	<b>364</b>
<b>Image 118</b>	<b>366</b>
<b>Image 119</b>	<b>368</b>
<b>Image 120</b>	<b>370</b>
<b>Image 121</b>	<b>372</b>
<b>Image 122</b>	<b>374</b>
<b>Image 123</b>	<b>376</b>
<b>Image 124</b>	<b>378</b>
<b>Image 125</b>	<b>389</b>