

Recovering and Recreating Spaces of Production: A Virtual Roundtable with Protagonists of Argentina's Worker- Recovered Enterprises Movement

TORONTO SCHOOL OF CREATIVITY AND INQUIRY

The following are excerpts from a series of exchanges, during the summer of 2005, between protagonists in Argentina's worker-recovered enterprises movement (*movimiento de empresas recuperadas por sus trabajadores*, or ERT) and Toronto School of Creativity & Inquiry. These voices are assembled here, in a virtual roundtable, as a narrative about struggles over spaces of production. This act of assemblage is a contribution to the circulation of critical analysis, joyful affects, affirmative statements, and creative actions. ¹

We hear from: *Pablo Pozzi*, an Argentine labour and guerrilla-movement historian and Chair of US History at the University of Buenos Aires who works as a radical pedagogue in numerous *villas de emergencias* (shantytowns) and unions across Argentina; *Eduardo Murúa*, an organizer of the autonomist ERT collective *Movimiento Nacional de Empresas Recuperadas* (National Movement of Recovered Enterprises, or MNER), who is currently in the midst of various workspace recoveries while forging links with the ERT movement across Latin America; *Edith Oviedo*, former journalist, educational book publisher, and member of the Editorial Cefomar workers' co-operative; *Plácido Peñarrieta*, the current president of the Artes Gráficas Chilavert workers' cooperative and a housing-rights activist; *Cándido González*, a Chilavert worker, spokesperson for MNER, and an activist who assists recovered enterprises in their crucial moments of struggle; *Manuel Basualdo*, an experienced book-binding specialist at Chilavert; *Walter Basualdo*, Manuel's son, an apprentice machinist who has worked at Chilavert for three years; and *Martín Cossarini*, an apprentice machinist at Chilavert who has been active in setting up cultural spaces in workers' cooperatives.

With these protagonists our collective shares common questions: How do bodies insulate themselves from reactive forces? What new forms of constituent sociability, subjectivity, in short, composition, are emerging today? "What alliances might be forged while under siege?"² What are bodies, in practices of intentional cooperation, capable of? What does it mean to make subjectivity a locus of struggle? What tensions exist between a strategy oriented towards the reclamation of work and one based on the refusal of work? How might creative assemblages keep lines of affinity moving without freezing their fluid material?

We write from Toronto. These voices speak from Buenos Aires. We visit. They stay. We find ourselves recalling a closing line in an email we received from one of the protagonists who speaks in these pages: "the greatest support you *compañeros* from the North can offer us here in Argentina is for you to continue to struggle against the system in your own localities, where you live."

The voices gathered here speak across the theme, “occupy, resist, and produce.”³ The last term is, perhaps, the key term, the catalytic force coursing throughout: production not just of goods, but of desires, of affinities, of communities—all circumscribed by struggle, ‘*lucha*,’ undertaken in response to an urgent need, to produce autonomous spaces.⁴

1976 ... 19/20 ... 2006

Oviedo

I was part of the militant student movement of 1969—the *Rosarioazo*.⁵ I have conserved my ideals. And, okay, I thought to myself: “My children are grown up now. Now I have time to return to militancy. I can do it again.” Now today I’m freed up to take on the activities of recovering an enterprise.



At each crossroads, dilemma, or conflict we have to realize that there are also great opportunities. To confront our challenges, saying, “I can,” and finding the ways and means to do it, is both a struggle and an opportunity. Anxieties accompany us along the path of lifting ourselves out of these difficulties. Lifting yourself out of the void is hard.

Most of us in the movement [of worker recovered enterprises] have fallen off the system because, financially, we are not subjects of credit—we can’t show that we have sufficient incomes, or because we can’t get someone to vouch for us. We can’t access credit or funds available to small- and medium-sized businesses because we are a bankrupted enterprise, and, as a bankrupted enterprise now managed by its workers, we are not recognized in the system. So where do you start?

Murúa

One cannot understand the movement of recovered enterprises without contextualizing what Argentina lived through. The dictatorship (1976-83) that installed itself in our country imposed a neoliberal model with a strategic plan to destroy Argentina’s industrial base. Until 1976 Argentina had an unemployment rate of three percent. The dictatorship’s implementation of the neoliberal model—and its continuity under the

subsequent formal democracies—provoked the destruction of industry in our country.

Throughout the 1990s the process of the privatization of our state corporations is instigated, together with the modification of our laws, the flexibilization of labour, the loss of union power, and a failure on the part of union bureaucracies to resist the neoliberal model. Unions, it is important to remember, are part of the business of the state and don't represent the interest of workers. What this provokes from 1995 to 1997 is an unemployment explosion: an unemployment rate of 35% settles in.

In addition to the changes in the legal framework and labour flexibilization, the national government also proceeds to modify the national bankruptcy law and the process of reallocating credits. Before these changes were made, debts owed to workers were privileged; workers were the first to be paid when a firm declared bankruptcy. But as part of the neoliberal model that was entrenching itself, the law was changed so as to screw the workers by privileging the credits of banks and financial institutions.

Pozzi

What happened on December 19/20, 2001 affected mostly the middle-class, some sectors of the upper-class—and the stupid ones who weren't well-connected enough to take their money out in spite of the law.

As a middle-class thing, it was mostly something that was a negative movement, "negative" meaning: "I don't want something," as opposed to "I do want this." "What don't I want? I don't want them to take my money away. I want them to pay me dollars for my deposits. Now, some of those people, my heart goes out to them. But others were real crooks. Some, I really don't give a fuck. Some were people who actually cheered when they were firing workers all over the place. The middle-class is the middle-class. Some were good guys. The lower middle-class—*moi*—we didn't get caught; we had nothing to get caught.

Mostly, for the middle-class, these were symbolic demonstrations. Banging, banging, banging: "We want our money!" TV covered it. Everybody thought it was great. So what? That was the bad part. The good part: the good part is that popular mobilization kicked three presidents out. The good part is that people sought different forms of organization. The neighborhood assemblies were one of them... I believe this affects the collective unconscious. Having lived through the resignation of three presidents, due to popular mobilizations, no matter who caused it, why it happened or whatever, in three months, it's not bad. It's something real; it makes a political impact.

The *asambleas* still exist but more as an open-air market. I participated in a whole bunch of *asambleas*. Some of them were very important. I taught in the Asamblea Dorrego, Asamblea Parque Centenario, Asamblea San

Telmo... I taught in an *asamblea* in Córdoba. I helped organize neighbourhoods. And what we were trying to do in Córdoba was set up a flourmill, a flourmill that was small enough so that you could mill 46 pounds, enough for several families, twenty families, let's say. ...

Oviedo

What happened at our workplace (Cefomar) was that the former owner was transferring shares privately, illegally, in order to shift the debt load onto other businesses he had. He would suspend operations in one locale, transfer shares by cooking the books, and then open a smaller business that had a similar name to this one so that the public would continue to recognize the brand name. At that time Cefomar was called Marymar Sociedad Anónima. He turned Marymar into a holding company responsible for the mortgage and sundry debts that plague us to this day. He then opened another business that he called Editorial Marymar. While he began to recover market share, he started siphoning off cash and didn't pay his debts.

This *vaciamiento* happened over two years.⁶ He tricked us into believing that what he was actually doing was preparing our workplace for renovations. That was the excuse he gave in order to take away machinery and move employees around. He then carried out a self-theft,⁷ and eventually closed the other publishing house he'd opened up. By that time I was on to him. We didn't have much to say to each other because everything was out in the open.

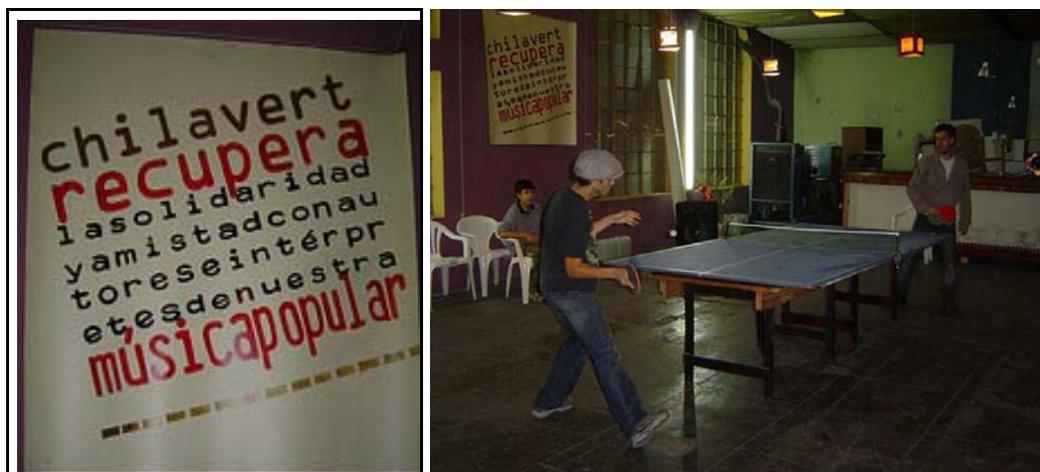
I started to bring a few *compañeros*, like the warehouse attendant, back to this space, and started to build a new group. This was mid-2000. Since I continued to resist, and since we were seeing some revenues trickle in, the owner started to send the creditors from the other firm that he had just emptied and I ended up with court cases against me, because they still saw me as a manager of Marymar and thought that I was also a shareholder. That was when we started to organize ourselves into a co-operative.

Pozzi

All of these are new and different forms of struggle and organization. They are all attempts; most of them have failed. Eventually some will prosper. But they all help to build a social experience in a new reality we're not used to. This means that all the old forms of organization—unions, political parties, whatever—they don't work anymore. In that sense, the autonomists are right. Their questions are right. Now, social sectors, social practice, people in general, are inventing new things; they are inventing them for the best of reasons: necessity.

Occupy ... Resist ... Produce

Murúa This new form of struggle—or, let's say, the *necessity* for a new form of struggle—appears; a new method of workers' struggle. It was a form of struggle that no longer is limited to the common type of union demands for increased wages or for better work conditions. Rather, it was a struggle to *occupy* the factory in order to operate it *ourselves*—as a *response* to the neoliberal model. It was, in the beginning, a defensive struggle. This is when the first recoveries start appearing, and this is also when IMPA is recovered.⁸



Oviedo When I had first arrived here (when Cefomar was known as Marymar) the firm was under the control of the former owner. The successful years of the firm were waning; we had been recognized as one of the great publishers of educational books in Argentina. When I first came to the firm, we managed to recapture our market share. We had reached a point where we had 2000 schools as clients, with 2000 training workshops set up in each school to apply our educational products. But that market became dormant. The former owner slowly started taking away every aspect of the business that was capable of generating cash, like copies of all of our newest titles. By 2000 we were left with nothing. There were a few books in the warehouse, that's it.

Murúa We recovered IMPA in 1998. In 1999 we gathered at IMPA workers from a few of the other enterprises that had been recovered in other parts of the country. There were only a few worker-recovered enterprises at that time—maybe four. It was from there that we co-founded a movement that was made up of not only recovered enterprises, but also housing cooperatives, mutual associations from the *villas de emergencia*,⁹ and micro-enterprises.

At the time our movement was known as the *Movimiento de la Economía Social*,¹⁰ and was made up of all of us who had something to do with the 'social economy.' What we wanted to do was construct a kind of political direction for the concept of the social economy, in order to go out and influence state policies concerning the recovery of employment—beyond the usual formal means. Of course, we brought together *compañeros* who were in agreement with us ideologically and politically, at least with the task of destroying the neoliberal model.

From 1999 until 2001 there was a surge in business bankruptcies. This compelled us to transform this movement, which was constituted by other experiences from the social economy, into one that was almost exclusively a movement focused on going to each conflict where workers were losing their employment, in order to try to see how we could begin to recover the factories. That's how we transformed ourselves from the social-economy movement into the National Movement of Recovered Enterprises.

It was then that we made *solidarity* our central theme. We began our practice of rallying around our *compañeros* in conflict, and we came up with a slogan that communicated what we wanted to do: "Occupy, Resist, Produce." It has to do with *occupation* as a founding practice. When we spoke with our *compañeros* who were engaged in conflict, the first thing we would say was, "Occupy the factory and do not leave!" "Resist," because it was after occupation that the law would arrive. While the workers are being swindled, left out on the streets, and not getting paid, the "law"—and I say this in scare quotes—fails to show up. The reason for the word "resist" is because what the justice system orders is the clearing out of the plant in order to liquidate it. It is then that we have to resist with our bodies, and with the solidarity of our people, so that the police cannot move on the juridical decision. It is this resistance that convinces judges or politicians to seek a solution that will put the factory back into operation.

Oviedo Perhaps we could have used the money we used to begin to pay back the former owner's debt for other things—but, right off the top, we lost this money. In one year we lost 150,000 pesos! That loss wore us out tremendously. But eventually we started to sell things again, just enough to be able to stay alive, mind you. We sold old books as scrap paper—books that had been in our warehouse for forty years. We starting selling off our rights to international titles that Marymar had once owned—the editorial house held the rights to a huge catalogue of important titles, like Machiavelli's *The Prince*. We sold our surplus stock. We were eventually able to form a founding co-operative group in 2002.

Murúa The number of recovered enterprises began to grow until 2001, a year which culminated in the severe crisis of the convertibility model.¹¹ The

state fails to collect its revenues, the sector of the dominant classes made up of exporters are no longer profitable, and there is a crisis of the system from above and a high degree of conflict from below, with the maximum expression of our people being the struggles of work stoppages and mass picketing. The combination of the experiences of the working class in these work stoppages, plus the experiences that were generated within the mobilizations of the *piqueteros*,¹² made the system reflect on itself and say, "We can no longer continue on this path." This was at the time a country in flames!

Our movement saw growth after these events. Because there were so many factories in crisis, so many closed factories, the growth of the movement was exponential. The fact that the country was in flames and that our workers were mobilizing—and the pressure we began to exert on the government—allowed us to begin to extract public policies from the state that were favourable to the recovered enterprises.¹³ Throughout 2001-02 worker recoveries of enterprises continued, and there are now 182 recovered enterprises throughout the country.

Oviedo

When we were in the process of recovering the firm a lawyer friend of mine with experience in the recovered enterprises movement told me to go and see Eduardo Murúa, who was at IMPA at the time. That's how the Cefomar co-operative got started after a long time of trying to deal with the Buenos Aires city legislature on our own. We had at the time a lot of initiative, but little experience in these matters. When we connected with MNER they were busy recovering a metallurgical plant in San Antonio de Areco. But Murúa came to see us anyway. We told him our plight. That's how we connected ourselves with the movement. After that, on my part anyway, because I had a background in previous political struggles that my *compañeras* didn't have, I took on a militant role within the movement [MNER]. I helped build up the militancy of my *compañeras*.

Cossarini

Now I'm a machinist apprentice. Before I arrived here at Chilavert I had been at IMPA for four years working as a cultural organizer. Without a doubt what I most identified with in the movement was the struggle that the IMPA workers were engaged in. From that moment I started supporting other factory occupations that I could support. So, it's not a coincidence, let's say, that I came to work here, understand? At one level, I was looking to work at a place like this. It was an honour for me to get offered a position by the Chilavert workers.

M. Basualdo

Things were very different before, mainly because, before, someone told you what to do, and you did it. Now nobody orders you around. Now you're more responsible, because our work depends on us and nobody else. It's just us. Before, with the owner, it was different, because you would put in your hours, and leave. But now you sometimes have to work a bit harder, or a bit longer, do a little more. Before we were controlled so

much. That's why they built the office with windows as walls. It was their way of controlling us, making sure we were doing something.

Things are much calmer now. There's no comparison with what this place used to be like. Before you couldn't even drink a *mate* during work hours. Now we're all so much more relaxed! We work but we also drink *mate*. Sometimes during the middle of the workday we'll sit down and have a *mate*. It's important to have a chat and drink *mate* with each other. Before we couldn't do this. Even if there wasn't any work to do, the manager would insist that we grab a broom and sweep the floor. We had to always be doing something—picking up a piece of paper, whatever, we couldn't be seen doing nothing.

W. Basualdo

How do we make decisions? Well, here we don't have a *caudillo* who says, "OK, today you'll do this because I tell you so." No, no. Here we take the things we have to do, we put them on the table, and we hash things out amongst ourselves. If the majority of us agree, or better said, if we all agree, then it gets done. But if anyone has a doubt as to what has to get done, or if there are any outstanding issues, then we discuss things so that we can all come to some workable agreement. All of our decisions are made in a group made up of the personalities of this cooperative. Now, if there are certain decisions that have to be made in the moment, a group of us, or all of us, will stop working. We'll get together and discuss what has to get done, what has to get worked out, what we have to set up first, and we'll decide things at that moment, as a group. Sometimes we don't have to get together as an assembly of the entire cooperative. Sometimes a situation requires that only a small group of us to get together, so we stop working and clear things up right on the spot, right then and there. And that's it: we come to a decision right there. But whenever we have substantial issues to clear up we bring these to the cooperative's assembly that we hold each month. That's where we lay out and hash out everything we need to work out as a cooperative, and the decisions are made amongst all of us.

Murúa

We don't want to convert this movement into a movement that's only about recovered enterprises, that only debates the theme of work in Argentina. Our main commitment is to the social liberation of our people. This means the taking of power by popular sectors. We do not want the dominant sectors that manage our country to be made up of private interests or of the export sector. Rather we want the people to run their own affairs. This movement is autonomous from the state and from political parties, and it doesn't want to be converted—as various union movements have—into an organization that is based merely on demands. Although the state might meet the demands that we seek for the recovered enterprises, it will always require us facing them square on, face-to-face, to fight for our liberation...

Oviedo

Cefomar is now starting to publish new books and 2005 editions of books with authors that sympathize with our struggle. The way it usually works is that we take care of part of the costs of producing a book and the author contributes another part. We contribute our know-how as a publishing house, and we also contribute our technology. But there is a portion of the costs of paper and other materials that we can't finance for all of our authors. Educational texts are the main product line for our publishing cooperative and we'll continue to invest our resources into this line. We're more than happy to publish other books, but we have to take them on as co-published works.

When we decided that we were going to publish again we chose two main streams: the educational stream, and a series that I totally fell in love with, the Patagonia Collection. This Collection contains twenty titles focusing on the history of how Patagonia was founded and its indigenous communities.

Peñarrieta

Before we were 'workmates.' But today we aren't anymore. We're more like *socios*,¹⁴ where the problem of one *socio* affects us all. And there are times when we have to look at the problem of each *socio* and try to resolve them so they won't affect the entire society we form. Before, if something happened to someone, it was the owner's responsibility. Before, that responsibility didn't affect us individually. We were all just mere acquaintances with each other, nothing more. We didn't have direct contact with all of our workmates. But now we're a much tighter unit. And what binds us together is the fact that we're all responsible for this cooperative as a society, and we all have to contribute to moving it forward. In other words, we have to know everyone's everyday needs and problems for the simple reason that we have to protect our work and each other.

Facilitate ... Extend ... Connect¹⁵

Oviedo

I'm sure you've heard the words of Eduardo Murúa, and they are well known amongst all of us: that at the core of this movement is the notion that we must assist all of our *compañeros* in the recovery of their workspaces, their jobs, their means of production. But after a recovery the internal dynamics of each enterprise belongs to the workers that make up the cooperative.



If there are internal problems—and there are many—there is often an important factor that is worth stating: In many cases the formation of the co-operative has been a form of legal protection; this legal framework protects the collective.¹⁶ But to a great extent, the *compañeros* within the movement haven't experienced co-operativism before, or don't, initially at least, have a conception of what co-operativism might be. Generally, each recovered enterprise will have someone who initiates ideas within each group that will say, "Listen, here we have to form a co-operative, one rooted in work." But the rest, the other 80%, remain workers. With all of the love I have for them I have to say they don't know the seven principles of co-operativism, which are like our ABCs. To begin again as a co-operative is to shed oneself of the mentality of being a dependent labourer.

Murúa

IMPA is very important in the process that was later to form the movement: in the middle of Buenos Aires, IMPA is not only a factory that begins to produce, but also a factory that opens itself up to the community as a whole. IMPA, apart from being a factory with workers, formed a cultural centre so that the entire society could participate, and it also had a health centre.

When we took the factory we set out to open it up to the community. That's why we generated the cultural centre. This recovery was carried out by a combination of its workers and a group of militants who, like me, brought with them a background in union and political struggles. That conjunction of forces gave IMPA its new project and its political vision. In the middle of the city, and against the discourse in favour of neoliberal globalization that existed in the country at the time, we said, with this recovered enterprise, "Okay, we're going to dispute this one-sided discourse of globalization." That's why we initiated the cultural centre, which was envisioned as a 'factory of ideas' where people could go to discuss a different discourse, to create new cultural expressions, and to

generate, from this location, a space of resistance against the neoliberal model.

Having a cultural centre in a factory is a unique development in the world of a functioning factory. Yes, there have been experiences in other parts of the world where closed factories have been converted into cultural centres. But the difference with our experience here is that at the same time that the factory was producing it also had a cultural centre that was also producing—but producing culture. IMPA's was the first cultural centre in a recovered enterprise.

We created it for two reasons. The first one is strictly political: to have a space where we could go and discuss the one-sided discourse of globalization from within a factory, to begin to debate the model. We needed a place from which we could generate political ideas. Another important factor in the decision to open a cultural centre was defensive: we knew that constructing and opening the centres to the community surrounding the factory would make impossible, or at least complicate greatly, the shutting down of the factory. We knew that the state and the justice system would not only be getting involved with one hundred or so workers, but they would also have to contend with the entire community. In essence, it was like a shield against the enemies of our initiative.

We became convinced that it is not only the workers who recover the factories, but that they are also recovered by the support of our people. Although only a portion of the politically active population got involved in actively supporting the worker recoveries, the majority of Argentines saw it as a good thing that workers were struggling to recover their jobs. Without this consensus, the state would have acted in another manner and we would not be here today.

Oviedo

At one point I said, "Okay, we have to make a decision and go out and show who we are. We have to start lobbying. We don't have money. But we have to create something in this place. They have to get to know us. We have to position the name of Cefomar in everything that's related to education, to culture, and to the struggle for identity." That's how we started the workshop on oral memory. We also connected with the Historic Institute of Buenos Aires, with the Monserrat Development Association, with the organization for the promotion of culture at the Buenos Aires city government, with educational initiatives, with community libraries. Cefomar began to be recognized within these circles and we insisted and dedicated ourselves to these things. We weren't producing anything at the time but our name began to stick. We also joined the network of cultural and neighbourhood initiatives.

We eventually started to offer a major free service to our neighbours, which is the assistance that we offer to children up to five years of age centred on early childhood education. Because these are very vulnerable

kids that come from families with low levels of economic and cultural means, these children need to be helped so they can have the capacity to learn, otherwise they'll never be able to succeed at the most basic levels. This initiative started from scratch. We eventually built affiliations with the group of schools that focus on caring for children with special needs. While we're not officially recognized as a special needs school, these schools always send us cases of children in need.

Oviedo

Our most immediate dream would be to have total control over the house in which we're located. We'd like to have the tranquility of at least a temporary expropriation for two years.¹⁷ And we'd like to have the mortgage paid off. We're also renovating the warehouse in order to be able to open up a cultural centre. But first we must fix the roof, the leaks, the walls—basically starting little by little.

We have a group of workers taking on the tasks of getting the cultural centre up and running. And this September we'll be holding our Literary Conference again, where poetry is read, where we invite authors. This is an experience we've already had. We also hold debates and discussions throughout the year, we show films that MNER has been involved with and that have to do with the recovered enterprises.

We also have a constant stream of visitors here. Last year we hosted a group of German interns, a young woman from Portugal who is studying in New York and doing her thesis on the recovered enterprises, a French fellow that came to shoot a documentary, and, at the moment, there is a group of Germans shooting a film out of IMPA. These visits have become a daily occurrence that we absolutely love. I guess we're writing history here, something that is very powerful for us.

Murúa

One of the things we want from the state is the creation of various funds for recovered enterprises, because the state—when it should have been defending the interests of its workers—failed to keep watch over business owners to ensure that they were paying workers' social security contributions.

What we're also proposing is the financing of our cultural and educational centres. This is about the community development that we do from the recovered enterprises, together with the community. We know well that in a dependent country like Argentina, where there is a certain economic model in place, that that model is certainly accompanied by cultural and educational policies that complement that model and that obliges the working classes to be submissive to that model. That is why an organization that fights for the social and national liberation of our people is obligated to construct its own cultural and educational spaces. It is not just about having our own production. It is also about having our own education and our own culture.

Oviedo

We communicated the existence of the free special needs school throughout the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood of Monserrat, where we find ourselves, is part of the historic heritage of Buenos Aires. Seventy percent of its population is in vulnerable situations. There are many hotels for long-term stays that are financed by the city government here. There are many tenants with little means, and many houses that are being squatted. Many of these kids don't have toys, they don't have spaces for playing in. They'll never be able to learn. In response to this, Cefomar put together a play area with toys, a library for kids, a centre for early childhood education. Last year, coinciding with the Day of the Child,¹⁸ we organized, together with MNER and other co-operatives, a festival for over 300 kids here in the local plaza in Monserrat. We had balloons, chocolate, and presents for all of the kids, and games that went on all day. We also held a *murga*.¹⁹ They lived a truly beautiful day. It was the kind of day that most of them had never had before.

González

Early on in the fight to reclaim our work we started fighting for our salaries, for getting out of our severe debt-loads that the owner had left us. But now I know, looking back on our struggle three years on, now I can see where the change in me started, because it begins during your struggles. First, you fight for not being left out on the street with nothing. And then, suddenly, you see that you've formed a co-operative, and you start getting involved in the struggle of other enterprises. And you don't realize it at the time, but within your own self, there's a change that's taking place. You don't see it directly at the time. You realize it afterwards, after time has passed. But there is definitely a change in you that's been produced—and it's a very big change. It's so big that you don't see it. Then, suddenly, you find yourself protesting in the local legislature, you find yourself fighting, yelling inside of the legislature to the point where you're actually stopping the official proceedings from taking place, influencing change—something you would never have imagined yourself doing.

Oviedo

With the passage of time in this journey, internal problems do arise. So what MNER tends to do is counsel these workers, or perhaps hold an assembly of workers so issues can be heard. But the movement doesn't interfere with any final decisions that are made. We have always preserved the independence of each place of work.



Cassarini Obviously, I am personally in favour of the liberation of workers, of workers' organization as a political idea. And I try to contribute wherever I can. And, without a doubt, working in a place where the group of workers that you're with has been through a tough struggle means that you have a responsibility to communicate what was lived. If one commits oneself to this struggle, one has to be committed to communicate everything that was suffered, so the things that happened here under owner-management will not happen again. There's a responsibility to strengthen each other, to inspire one another. When a factory is going through its moments of occupation it is so tough for those going through it. And so it is necessary for those workers who have already gone through an occupation, and who are now working, to go to the workers that are going through an occupation and encourage them. This acts as an inspiration for those who are in the struggle. For someone who's been through it to tell you, "Come on, man, yes, it is possible, you can do it, we did it!" That's what we need to do in those most vulnerable moments of struggle.

Oviedo And we have other struggles to consider. I often speak to Eduardo [Murúa] about needing to go out and denounce how the "gifts" of our country are being given away: our natural resources, our land, our water. There are many other struggles that we have to get involved in...

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Notes

¹ The excerpts of the voices assembled in this piece are part of a greater archive of interviews, conversations, and presentations. These voices were recorded in Argentina by a member of Toronto School of Creativity and Inquiry in the summer of 2005 with the assistance of the Argentina Autonomista Project. While these words first found expression at different moments and in different encounters, they were uttered by individuals with common experiences of recovering production, who live within shared conjunctures, who collaborate in the struggle against the enclosures of everyday life and fight collectively for the liberation of work and their society. We want to express our gratitude to the many workers, organizers, and *compañeros* in Argentina, Canada, and the US for facilitating these encounters.

² Blackwell, Adrian and Thorne, Kika. (2004) "1:1 over 1:300," *Public 29: Localities*. (Liinamaa, Marchessault, Shaw Eds.) Toronto: Public Access, 209.

³ The slogan "Occupy, Resist and Produce" was adopted by MNER to resonate across collective practices of resistance.

⁴ For an historical overview and analysis in English of the worker-recovered enterprises movement in Argentina, see Marcelo Vieta, "The Worker-Recovered Enterprises Movement in Argentina: Workers' Self-Management as a Struggle Against Capital-Labour Relations and Social-Economic Crisis" (forthcoming). For a collection of interviews with protagonists of the myriad bottom-up, grassroots movements that have emerged in Argentina in the past decade and their adaptation of horizontal forms of social organization, see Marina Sitrin, "Horizontalidad in Argentina" (Oakland, CA: AKPress, 2005). For an analysis of the impact of autonomism in Argentina's worker-recovered enterprises movement, see Graciela Monteagudo, "Autonomism in Argentina in a new Governmentality" (forthcoming).

⁵ *El Rosarizazo* was a student and union uprising that occurred in the city of Rosario between May and September of 1969. It occurred during one of the most creative times for Argentina's movements of the left.

⁶ *Vaciamiento*, refers to the "emptying" of a closed or bankrupted firm's machinery and assets by returning owners or court trustees.

⁷ During the economic crisis of the late 1990s and 2000s, many owners illegally confiscated and hid their moveable constant capital in order to prevent debt collectors from seizing them.

⁸ IMPA, *Industria Metalúrgica y Plástica Argentina*, one of the first recovered enterprises of the ERT movement, is a medium-sized metallurgic co-operative in the neighbourhood of Caballito in Buenos Aires. It currently dedicates part of its space to an art school, silkscreen shop, theatre, and cultural centre.

⁹ Colloquially, *villas de emergencia* are called *villas miserias* (towns of misery) in Argentina, commonly known as shantytowns in English. It is telling that Murúa chooses to refer to them using the more empowering term *villas de emergencia* instead of the rather derogatory term *villas miserias*. The term *villas de emergencia* in Spanish has a double meaning: "towns of emergency" and "emergent towns."

¹⁰ The Social Economy Movement.

¹¹ The fixed-rate exchange policy that pegged the Argentine peso to the US dollar was known as the "law of convertibility." It was introduced by the administration of President Carlos Menem in 1991 in order to stem the tide of acute inflation and hyperinflation that plagued much of Raúl Alfonsín's government, Menem's predecessor, throughout the 1980s. While inflation was curtailed, an overpriced peso caused exports to gradually decline throughout the 1990s. As a result, a chronic trade deficit took hold by the middle of the decade as cheaper imports saturated local markets. Unable to do business in such an economic environment, an escalating number of once-profitable small- and medium-sized businesses, faced with dwindling national and international markets, declared bankruptcy.

¹² A *piquetero*, or picketer, is the commonly used term for a member of the myriad groups of organized unemployed workers that started to emerge since 1996. *Piqueteros* usually, but not always, belong to the *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados* (*Movement of Unemployed Workers*).

¹³ These policies include the legal recognition of worker-recovered enterprises that become co-operatives and a redefinition of each provincial legislature's laws of expropriation. The latter legal reform being spearheaded by MNER would permit workers' co-operatives to control and use a bankrupted business' machines and buildings when such recoveries are deemed by local legislatures to be beneficial to the local community. These reforms would see the immediate application of these laws to all workers' co-operatives instead of requiring the co-operative to have to go through months and years of legal battles in the local courts and legislatures, which is currently the case.

¹⁴ The word '*socio*' translates into English as 'a member' or 'partner' of a club, a society, a group, a cooperative, or a collective. It is not to be confused with the English word 'associate.'

¹⁵ See also: Nate Holdren and Sebastian Touza "Introduction to Colectivo Situaciones," *ephemera*, 5:4 (2005) 595-601.

¹⁶ Becoming a legally recognized co-operative is, in part, a pragmatic move taken on as a protective measure against state repression and unfavourable laws. The co-operative model also frames the horizontal form of decision-making that most worker-recovered enterprises adopt.

¹⁷ Before definitive expropriation is granted to worker-recovered enterprises, worker co-operatives are usually granted a two-to-five year window whereby the co-operative can control the firm under a law of "temporary" expropriation. Under this law, worker-recovered enterprises are ensured temporary control of machines, customers, trademarks, patents, and real estate while the application of the definitive expropriation law is being heard in the courts and regional legislatures. These temporary reprieves are usually granted after much lobbying, but are never guaranteed. Since this interview was conducted, Cefomar, after years of lobbying and precarious business conditions, had finally been granted the temporary law of expropriation for two years by the legislature of the city of Buenos Aires.

¹⁸ Argentina's Day of the Child (*El Día del Niño*) is celebrated on the second Sunday in August, when it is customary to give children presents.

¹⁹ A *murga* is a popular form of musical theatre using a chorus and colourful costumes.