Trama: Artists' Initiatives and the Politics of *Autogestión* in Contemporary Argentina

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the unprecedented phenomenon of *autogestión* which proliferated in the Argentine contemporary art scene in the aftermath of the economic crisis and popular revolts of December 2001. Premised on the notion that the crisis encompassed significant transformations in all spheres of life, the thesis examines the key role of artists' initiatives based on *autogestión* in the reconfigurations within the art field. By focusing on the specific case of Trama – a project for cooperation between artists that evolved into a national and international network of artists' initiatives (2000–2005) –, the study argues that *autogestión* became a legitimate artistic practice that gained visibility and strength within the artistic landscape in Argentina in the post-crisis period. As such, it challenges local art historical discourses which, all too often, limit discussions of the political to a rhetoric of art activism or artists' collectives.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's multifaceted conceptualization of *autogestión*, the study also aims to reinvest the term with its political connotations: autonomy, democracy, and self-determination. Relying on Lefebvre's theoretical framework as an heuristic tool, it examines the ways in which Trama functioned as a political strategy by enacting ethical concerns and values, and by generating a set of conditions within the art field with regard to the social, the subjective and the spatial; these are analyzed in turn in the thesis. Emphasizing these inter-related registers – and guided by an interdisciplinary approach –, this research illustrates the ways in which Trama was not only implicated in, but resonated with the broader socio-political processes and transformations taking place in Argentina at this historical conjuncture.

Steering the focus away from the 'art work' to 'artistic practice', this thesis offers a valuable insight into the discipline as it identifies a new area of investigation – artistic *autogestión* –, while arguing for the need for more sustained and comprehensive scholarly research on this topic.

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INTRODUCTION

'Let's democratize the institutions of art, the law of the museums NOW!', was the title of one of the letters sent by Artistas Organizados to the director of the Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (MAMBA) in which they criticized the acquisitions policy of the Institution and requested a more transparent and democratic management of the policies and regulations of the city's art institutions.[1] Artistas Organizados was a group of visual artists that convened to discuss the issues and polemics raised within the artistic community by the exhibition 'Últimas Tendencias II' ('Latest Tendencies II'), celebrated in June 2012.[2] This exhibition – which, as the title suggests, intended to offer an account of the latest trends in the production of contemporary art in Argentina – was the result of an invitation sent to 112 artists to donate artworks to MAMBA's collection. The donation-based methodology was justified by the fact that this exhibition was an iteration of the 'Últimas Tendencias' organized in 2002, immediately after the economic crisis of December 2001. Artistas Organizados questioned the motivations of the Museum to implement this strategy of massive donation more than ten years later, when the national political and social landscape had completely changed.[3]

Underlying the donations of artworks for 'Últimas Tendencias II' was the idea that artists would gain, in exchange for their works, a 'place in the history of art', as well as the possibility of becoming part of the cultural heritage conferred by being part of the art collection of a state museum.[4] Naturally, this would increase the value of the works, given the legitimating character of such an institution. Furthermore, the

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[1] Artistas Organizados, 'Democraticemos las instituciones de arte, ley de museos YA!', *Artistas Organizados* [website], 2 September 2012, <https://artistasorganizados.wordpress.com/2013/09/02/democraticemos-las-instituciones-de-arte-ley-de-museos-ya/>, accessed 15 December 2014. [This and all subsequent quotes to Artistas Organizados have been translated by the author, unless otherwise stated.]

[2] Artistas Organizados emerged 12 days before the inauguration of the exhibition.

[3] Artistas Organizados, 'Últimas Tendencias II. Nueva colección donada al MAMBA, en suspenso', *Artistas Organizados* [website], 27 June 2012, <https://artistasorganizados.wordpress.com/2012/06/27/ultimas-tendencias-ii-nueva-coleccion-donada-al-mamba-en-suspenso-2/>, accessed 15 December 2014.

[4] Artistas Organizados, 'Segunda solicitada. MUSEO CERRADO. Crónica/declaración sobre los hechos acontecidos el 25 de agosto en el Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires', *Artistas Organizados* [website], 29 August 2014, <https://artistasorganizados.wordpress.com/2012/08/29/museo-cerrado-cronicadeclaracion-sobre-los-hechos-acontecidos-el-25-de-agosto-en-el-museo-de-arte-moderno-de-buenos-aires>, accessed 15 December 2014.

fact that the museum intended to renew its collection through donations was a transaction regarded by Artistas Organizados, not as a gift but, rather, as an unequal exchange.[5]

The condition *sine qua non* set by the exhibition (donating as a requirement to participate in the show) caused great discomfort and indignation in the artistic community, stimulating the artists to mobilize and to make their claims heard. Consequently, many of the invited artists declined their invitation to take part altogether, while a large cross-section of artists and non-artists from the cultural scene united and gathered in public assemblies to discuss the situation and to express their critique of the ambiguity of the curatorial terms and conditions of the exhibition, and the acquisitions policy proposed by the museum. After several meetings, the artists decided to support the realization of the exhibition, but the donation of the artworks would be 'suspended' until their concerns were appropriately addressed and discussed between the institution and the artists in question.[6]

Against this background, Artistas Organizados organized the first in a series of proposed round tables entitled 'De lo Real a lo Ideal' ('From the Real to the Ideal') in the auditorium of the MAMBA on 25 August 2012. As the title suggests, the 'ideal' museum would be an open museum in which artists would have the opportunity to actively participate in its policy and public program. Hence, the discussions were intended to challenge and rethink the role of public museums today. Entirely organized by Artistas Organizados, the event gathered together more than 50 artists, curators, art critics, art historians, students, researchers, art gallerists, journalists, writers and members of the general public. In spite of the fact that the Museum Director, Laura Bucellato, had been notified of the event, the Director General of Museums, Pedro Aparicio, showed up accompanied by police officers in a bid to try to stop the event from taking place. The activity was described as 'irregular' and 'unauthorized', and the doors of the Museum were shut, preventing the public's entrance into the event, while the panelists and members of the public already

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[5] Artistas Organizados, 'Segunda solicitada'.
[6] This decision was communicated to the director of the Museum in a letter signed by more than 700 persons from the cultural field.

participating in the event itself were locked inside.[7] After this incident – in which Artistas Organizados were accused of violating the law – the artists collectively decided in an assembly not to make the donations to the Museum.

Beyond the contentious debates raised by this exhibition and the subsequent actions undertaken collectively, this situation demonstrated a (renewed) consciousness on the part of artists regarding their practice vis-à-vis the institutional art system, attesting to significant changes within the art world in Argentina in the last decade(s). Underlying Artistas Organizados' statements is the recognition of the figure of the artist who not only produces artworks, but who is conscious of the value of his/her work. This is suggested by statements, such as, 'Artistas Organizados summons the artistic community to join in the transformation of our working conditions and visibility', and to develop rules 'based on consensus...that allow us to regulate our practice directly from below.'[8] The discontent of Artistas Organizados demonstrated the determination of artists to claim their rights, as they refused to passively accept the conditions imposed on their artworks and their practice 'from above'. This reveals a shift in the figure of the artist who would produce works, waiting – usually in vain – to be 'discovered' by the market or the art institution.

Artistas Organizados' claims and demands evince the disposition and courage of contemporary artists in assuming the responsibility of negotiating the terms and conditions of the different aspects related to their practice and production with museums and cultural institutions. This attitude, whereby artists manifest themselves as subjects capable of speech and action, was not commonplace in the art field, as they themselves contend.[9] However, this spirit of solidarity and self-empowement

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[7] For a detailed account of this incident, see: Artistas Organizados, 'Segunda solicitada. MUSEO CERRADO. Crónica/declaración sobre los hechos acontecidos el 25 de agosto en el Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires', *Artistas Organizados* [website], 29 August 2014, <https://artistasorganizados.wordpress.com/2012/08/29/museo-cerrado-cronicadeclaracion-sobre-los-hechos-acontecidos-el-25-de-agosto-en-el-museo-de-arte-moderno-de-buenos-aires/>, accessed 15 December 2014.

[8] Artistas Organizados, 'Convocatoria abierta para artistas visuales', *Artistas Organizados* [website], 11 December 2012, <https://artistasorganizados.wordpress.com/2012/12/11/convocatoria-a-asamblea-abierta-para-artistas-visuales/>, accessed 15 December 2014.

[9] Artistas Organizados, 'Breve presentación de AO Artistas Organizados (para mesa1)', *Artistas Organizados* [website], 29 August 2012, <https://artistasorganizados.wordpress.com/category/textos/>, accessed 20 December 2014. Also, a similar claim is made in, Reinaldo Laddaga, 'Interview with Roberto Jacoby', tr. Jane Brodie,

that seems to be latent in the artistic community of the Argentina of today – as demonstrated by Artistas Organizados – can be regarded as a legacy of the new forms of organization and the changes in subjectivity that took place ten years before, when, out of necessity, artists learned to self-organize and do without the mediation of the institutions. Thus, I would argue that this collective mode of organization in the sphere of the visual arts in 2012 has, as a precedent, the movement of self-organized undertakings, or *autogestión*[10], which arose spontaneously in society in the context of the neoliberal crisis that Argentina experienced during the 1990s and that collapsed in 2001.

I

Considered as the most severe and profound crisis in the history of Argentina[11], the crisis that culminated in the popular uprisings of 19th and 20th of December, 2001 established a before-and-after that greatly modified the political, economic, social, and cultural reality of the country. Against the backdrop of a withering national State and the deterioration of the labor market, new social actors gained protagonism and legitimacy, while engaging in different forms of autonomous initiatives and direct action. In a period characterized by social revolts and political upheaval, the phenomenon of *autogestión*, or self- organization, emerged as a significant feature, mainly driven by the new social movements that started to organize into autonomous systems of production, interchange, and political organization. These movements, a 'multitudinary counterpower' that originated as a response to the consolidation of

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<http://www.buenosairesreview.org/2013/11/interview-with-roberto-jacoby/>, accessed 15 May 2014.

[10] The translation into English of the term *autogestión* has been, admittedly, a difficult task, as none of the English equivalents seem to have the same scope. Although it has been deemed by some authors as an 'untranslatable' term, *autogestión* translates most commonly into English as 'self-management' or 'self-organization'. In my thesis, I will mainly use the term *autogestión* in Spanish — to be consonant with the specificities of the phenomenon in the Argentine context — however, I shall occasionally refer to *autogestion*, 'self-organization' or 'self-management' to link in with quotations or whenever relevant to the discussion.

[11] Maristella Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente. La Argentina bajo el signo del neoliberalismo*, Editorial Taurus, Argentina, 2005, p. 263.

the neoliberal model implemented in the region since the 1990s, gave way to new and original forms of anti-capitalist resistance.[12]

The crisis of December 2001 also represented a moment of radical change in the Argentine cultural scene.[13] The economic and social crisis and the weak role of the State in matters of culture led to new forms of organization, production, and circulation within the cultural field founded on new social values and a militant ethos.[14] Within the particular field of the visual arts, numerous artists' collectives and initiatives, oftentimes linked to social movements, started to emerge and gained visibility, reactivating the public sphere and organizing into networks. Furthermore, in the context of the crisis, the practice of *autogestión* also became widespread in the realm of the visual arts. It was established as a trend within artistic practice in Argentina in the period post-2001, as numerous artists engaged in self-organized initiatives demanding greater autonomy from the market and the established art institutions. Even though some forms of artistic association and collective formations already existed prior to the popular uprising, they multiplied and intensified during and after December 2001 as the country became immersed in a new period of intense social mobilizations.

As commonly happens during periods of crisis, the events of 2001 incited 'reappraisals of conditions of production, a re-evaluation of the nature of artistic work, and a reconfiguration of the position of the artist in relation to economic, social, and political institutions.'[15] Thus, the appearance of these multiple and heterogeneous artistic manifestations and artist-led actions resulted in new forms of political and symbolic economy that reconfigured the Argentine contemporary art scene.

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[12] Toni Negri, 'The Ballad of Buenos Aires', in Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20: Notes for a New Social Protagonism*, Minor Compositions, Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson, 2002, p. 20.

[13] Andrea Giunta, *Poscrisis: Arte argentino después de 2001*, Siglo XXI, Spain, 2009, p. 26.

[14] Ana Wortman (ed.), *Entre la política y la gestión de la cultura y el arte: nuevos actores en la Argentina contemporánea*, Eudeba, Buenos Aires, 2009, p. 24.

[15] Okwui Enwesor, 'The Production of Social Space as Artwork: Protocols of Community in the Work of Le Groupe Amos and Huit Facettes', in Blake Stimson & Gregory Sholette (eds.), *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2006, p. 225.

II

Read within this historical conjuncture, this dissertation analyzes the unprecedented phenomenon of artists' initiatives based on *autogestión*, which was already present since the mid-1990s, but thrived exponentially throughout the country in the period post-2001. This dissertation focuses decidedly on the case of Trama because of its deliberate engagement with the practice of *autogestión* and the fundamental role it played in the process of legitimation of artists' initiatives within contemporary art in Argentina. Trama was a program for cooperation and confrontation between artists that operated in Buenos Aires and the provinces between 2000 and 2005. The project was created by visual artist Claudia Fontes and its activities were managed through different teams of artists. Claiming to be a political project, Trama emerged as response to the necessities of critical artistic formation, visibility, dialogue, and horizontal exchange among artists within its particular context. The program consisted in the organization of a series of debates, workshops, lectures, public presentations, and collaborative projects focused on intercultural exchange. In Trama, *autogestión* was assumed as a means to an end; that is, as a strategy through which they created an apparatus to confront structures within the system, as well as issues and engagements in the constitution of artistic thought.

Underlying the practice of *autogestión* in Trama was a strong sense of social responsibility – an ethical conception of artistic practice – that materialized in their many activities and was enacted in their encounters, dialogues, and interrelations. The conceptualization of the project itself can be understood as resulting from this ethical awareness and need for creating and producing art from a different, a more cooperative, standpoint.

Even though Trama started operating one year before the crisis, the sense of urgency and radicalism of the events marked an important point of inflection within the project. If, during its initial phase (2000–2002), the project focused on the analysis of artworks and production of knowledge and collective artistic discourse, in the second phase (2002–2005), they focused more on *autogestión* and on consolidating a network that would foster exchange and cooperation among the numerous artists' initiatives that started to emerge all over the country, naturalizing in the process the

figure of the *artista-gestor* (artist-manager).[16] Towards the end of the program, Trama had provided exchanges and training in issues related to cultural management to more than 70 artists' organizations, giving visibility to the resulting productions, stimulating their platforms through inter-regional artistic exchanges within the country, and facilitating connections with the international art milieu.

Similar to Trama, many artists' initiatives define their practice as '*autogestionaria*' or self-organized in an attempt to differentiate themselves and establish their independent position vis-à-vis the official circuits of the art system, such as the art market and museums. In effect, the term *autogestión* has become increasingly used in the discourse of contemporary art within the circuits of independent spaces and artists-run initiatives in Argentina, as well as in many other Latin American contexts. Notwithstanding, most of the time, it is used in a descriptive manner. For instance, Argentine sociologist and artist, Syd Krochmalny, discusses the 'línea autogestionaria' ('self-organized strand'); while Ana Wortman comments on 'proyectos culturales de corte autogestionario' ('self-organized cultural projects').[17] Even though similar phrases such as 'espacios autogestionados' ('self-organized spaces'), 'práctica de la *autogestión*' ('the practice of self-organization'), and 'proyecto de autogestión' ('self-organized project') have become commonplace, the term tends to be used rather arbitrarily, or simply taken for granted. Consequently, the term *autogestión* – a term closely linked to ideas of autonomy, self-determination, participation, and democracy – has become somewhat diluted and devoid of meaning, and dissociated from any type of politico-ideological connotation.

In Trama, as well as in many social movements, the use of the word *autogestión* comes close to the way anarchists have spoken of 'self-organization' in the past, reflecting an autonomous and collective practice based on non-hierarchical associations or relations. The etymological root of the Spanish word *autogestión* is both Latin and Greek. 'Auto' comes from Greek *autós* ('self' or 'same'), and 'gestión'

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[16] See Chapter II for further discussion on the notion of the *artista-gestor* (artist-manager).

[17] See, for instance: Syd Krochmalny, 'Arte en relación: de la autogestión a la profesionalización', *Syd Krochmalny* [blog], 17 May 2010, <http://sydkrochmalny.blogspot.co.uk>, accessed 20 February 2011; also see, Ana Wortman, 'Escenas de los consumos culturales en la Argentina', in Mariano Barbieri (ed.), *Buscando señal: lecturas sobre nuevos hábitos de consumo cultural*, Ediciones del Centro Cultural de Espana, Córdoba, 2009, p. 112.

from the Latin *gestio* ('managing'), related to the Latin word *gestus* ('movement of the limbs', 'bodily action', 'carriage'), which in turn comes from *gerere* ('to bear', 'carry', 'manage').[18] Put together, the two words come to signify 'to manage for oneself'. It can also be conceptualized as 'self-gestation' – self-creation, self-control, self-provision, and, ultimately, self-production. Thus, the term denotes the self, albeit 'a collectivized self, not an individualist one.'[19] More specifically, it is to 'self-constitute' social and productive lives while minimizing the mediation of traditional bureaucracies or hierarchical organization.

III

My interest in this topic – which constitutes a logical continuation of my Masters' research – lies in the political potential of *autogestión* within the context of artists' initiatives.[20] Throughout modern and contemporary history, visual artists have tended to rely on the institution and its various legitimizing mechanisms to account for the recognition and relevance of their artistic activity. Contemporary artists' initiatives can be said to subvert this traditional outlook by reinventing ways of valorizing artistic labor. One of the ways they do so is through the practice of *autogestión*, or self-organization. Regarded as a new form of the politicization of artistic practice, artist-led initiatives deny, displace, and relativize the centrality of the art institution in the process of the valorization and legitimation of artistic practice and discourse.[21]

With the aim of reinvesting the term of *autogestión* with some of its political connotation, in this dissertation, I draw upon the ideas of French Marxist sociologist,

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[18] Marcelo Vieta, 'Autogestión and the Worker-Recuperated Enterprises in Argentina: The Potential for Reconstituting Work and Recomposing Life', paper presented to the 1st Anarchist Studies Network conference, Loughborough University, UK, 4 – 6 September, 2008, p. 9, http://www.anarchist-studies-network.org.uk/Re-Imagining_Revolution, accessed 27 July 2011.

[19] Michael Seidman, *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968*, Berghahn Books, New York, 2004, p. 176.

[20] My MPhil thesis, entitled 'Making Space: Artist-Run Initiatives as Vehicle for Cultural Agency' (Leiden University, 2008), sought to explore the phenomenon of artist-run initiatives operating outside arts' global mainstream in relation to the notion of 'cultural agency', a term borrowed from the field of Cultural Studies. The thesis addressed the potential of this kind of initiatives in effecting social change and transforming the wider cultural sphere.

[21] Marcelo Expósito, 'Inside and Outside the Art Institution: Self-Valorization and Montage in Contemporary Art', in Gerald Raunig & Gene Ray (eds.), *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique,* MayFly Books, London, 2009, pp. 142.

philosopher, and urbanist, Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), and the recent revisions of his theoretical discourse on *autogestión*.[22] Even though the theme of *autogestión* is widespread in Lefebvre's *oeuvre*, scholars have paid very little attention to this concept or to his critique of all forms of power, an issue that reappears as a *leitmotif* in all his texts. Lefebvre's more thorough theoretico-philosophical engagement with *autogestión* began with his involvement in the journal *Autogestion,*[23] an important platform for discussions on the topic at the time, although he had already begun to articulate the foundations for this project in his writings on the *Critique of Everyday Life* (originally published as *Critique de la Vie Quotidienne* in 1947).[24] His ideas on the concept of *autogestión* appeared in numerous places throughout his vast writing, for example, in his detailed historical analysis of the Paris Commune of 1871 (1965), in his interpretation of the French student revolts of 1968, as well as in his various critical commentaries on Marxist theory.[25] Notwithstanding, it would be during the 1970s when he would come to develop the concept in a systematic way and at more length in relation to state theory in the four-volume *De l'État*. From here on, his ideas on *autogestión* would be increasingly linked to issues of rights and citizenship,[26] and would be conceived within a territorial dimension since they were tightly interwoven with his writings on state, space, and the world in general.

Lefebvre was one of the main advocates of *autogestión* in the period before and after the social revolts of May 1968, when *autogestión* – understood in its French variant *autogestion* as 'worker's control' or 'grassroots democracy'[27] – was widely promoted and debated as an alternative to the hegemony of the capitalist system.[28]

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[22] In particular, I refer to the revisions on the topic expounded by Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden in their book *State, Space, World: Selected Essays / Henri Lefebvre*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009.

[23] Published from 1966–1986, this journal championed worker's militancy, especially those which came from below.

[24] This book would later serve as a primary intellectual inspiration for the founding of COBRA and, eventually, of the Situationist International.

[25] See for instance, his chapter 'On Self-Management', in *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Revolution* (1969) and 'Alternatives', in *The Survival of Capitalism*, Editions Anthropos (1973).

[26] This emphasis appeared in *Le Manifeste Différentialiste* (1971) and in his text 'From the Social Pact to the Contract of Citizenship' published as the introduction to a collection of essays written with the Groupe de Navarrenx in 1991.

[27] N. Brenner & S. Elden, op. cit., p. 14.

[28] By the end of the 1970s, the notion of *autogestion* had been 'adopted by different dissident factions of the French and European Left that explicitly rejected the hierarchical, statist authoritarianism of the PCF'... Thus, it became an "infinitely plastic idea" that encompassed at one and the same time, anti-

Notwithstanding this, in contrast with other authors who were engaged with the notion of *autogestión* in the late 1960s and 1970s – such as Pierre Rosanvallon, Michel Rocard, Edmond Maire, and Cornelius Castoriadis – Lefebvre argued in favor of an understanding of *autogestión* that went beyond the definition of 'worker's control', or the administration of economic matters: 'workers do not only have a life in the workplace, they have a social life, family life, political life; they have experiences outside the domain of labor.'[29] Thus, Lefebvre's notion of *autogestión* clearly moved away from traditional critiques of political economy which tended to locate production in the factory. For Lefebvre, *autogestión* was a multifaceted concept that implied a practice that included all aspects of social life. In his words, *autogestión* describes a situation where 'a social group refuses passively to accept its conditions of existence, of life or of survival'; where a group 'attempts not only to learn but to master its own conditions of existence.'[30] Lefebvre's fundamentally anti-statist account of *autogestión* derives from a democratic ideal. The term has connotations of radical and direct democracy, 'of a moving beyond mere representation' and 'of returning power to local communities.'[31] As such, in practice, it can lead to the reorganization of society by transforming it from bottom to top.

Drawing from Marx, Lefebvre adopted a broader understanding of production to encompass everything that constitutes social and cultural life. As Neil Smith noted, he 'insisted on the importance of "production", always in material and conceptual, social, and spatial terms, as imbricated in daily life.'[32] In this sense, the social practice of *autogestión* becomes, in Lefebvre's view, a potent strategy for radical democratic transformation.

From a contemporary perspective, some of Lefebvre's ideas on the question of *autogestión* may have lost much of their intensity and relevance given their historical specificity. However, I would argue that many of Lefebvre's ideas on self-

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statist and statist political projects, anti-productivist and productivist visions of modernization, and grassroots and liberal-parliamentary forms of political participation. See Elden & Brenner, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

[29] Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*, Continuum Books, New York/London, 2004, p. 111.

[30] N. Brenner & S. Elden, op. cit., p. 135.

[31] S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre,* p. 226.

[32] Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber, *Autogestion, or Henri Lefebvre in New Belgrade*, Fillip/Sternberg Press, 2009, p. 84.

organization not only remain pertinent, but regain their resonance in light of recent massive social protests and uprisings (e.g. the Arab Spring and Occupy Movements) that have sprung up in different cities around the world in response to the global neoliberal crisis; all the more so, if we consider that the financial crisis at the end of the last decade was prefigured by the Argentine crisis of 2001. As sociologist Marina Sitrin argues:

> The movements in Argentina, and the new relationships and articulations of the process of creation there, have become a point of reference for many others around the world: from a network of Greek assemblies collectively translating the oral history of the Argentine movements and organizing dozens of conversations about the experience in 2011, to the US Occupy movements using horizontal language, whether it be horizontalism or another derivation, to describe what they are creating; and in the movements that emerged in Egypt, Greece, Spain, and other parts of Europe and from 2010 onwards, speaking of the forms of democracy that they are constructing as horizontal.[33]

The recrudescence of these social revolts, all of which demonstrate a clear will to generate initiatives from 'below', would seem to suggest that it is an auspicious moment to re-engage with Lefebvre's theoretical framework on *autogestion*.

IV

While in this thesis I subscribe to an understanding of *autogestión* as a political strategy, the practice of *autogestión* is not necessarily inherently political. Hence, there is not one generalized conception of *autogestión* that can be applicable in all cases and situations. Out of context, *autogestión* is 'empty', as Lefebvre contended.[34] Its political potential, then, will depend greatly on the context in which it arises and the objectives to which it serves.

Contrary to the widespread understanding of artists' initiatives as 'a model', advocated by many curators or writers, *autogestión* does not provide a blueprint. Rather, following Lefebvre, it points to a strategy. It implies a political project born

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[33] Marina Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions: Horizontalism and Autonomy in Argentina*, Zed Books, London/New York, 2012, pp. 6-7.
[34] H. Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*, p. 120.

spontaneously out of the voids in social life which are created by the state. Thus, it springs up as the expression of fundamental social needs.[35]

The autonomous social movements in Argentina, as well as many artists' initiatives at the time, did not aim at changing the world. They organized out of necessity in order to transform their day-to-day realities. To this end, they dared to cultivate possibilities, to imagine alternatives. As Lefebvre put it, 'people do not revolt to change governments…but to change their lives.'[36] By seeking to reclaim control over the conditions of their existence from the forces of the neoliberal system, they established the conditions for the development of alternatives. In Lefebvrian terms, they enabled an opening toward 'the possible'.

The practice of *autogestión* in Trama was motivated by a similar set of ideas as those at the base of the social movements focused on *autogestión* in this period: a reaffirmation of autonomy, commitment to the decentralization of (art) production, and the democratization of the (art) field. In the context of this dissertation, then, *autogestión* is understood as a political strategy that encompasses a conception of artistic practice which transformative potential extends beyond the mere production of artworks by operating in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, Trama can be understood as a political strategy in that its structural organization and activities responded to specific ethical issues and objectives. That is, as a strategy through which ethical concerns were enacted; a strategy through which artists sought to conjoin the ethical and the aesthetic in order to search for more democratic and cooperative configurations within their particular cultural context.

On the other, the political in Trama unfolded simultaneously in the registers of the social, the subjective, and the spatial, as it constituted new processes of subjectivation, new modes of sociability, and new spaces. By discussing Trama in relation to the social movements and to Lefebvre's broader view of *autogestión* as well as its productive potential, I demonstrate how Trama mirrored, to an extent, the socio-political processes developed in the wider social framework.

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[35] H. Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*, p. 120.

[36] Valérie Fournier, 'Utopianism and the cultivation of possibilities: grassroots movements of hope', in Martin Parker (ed.), *Utopia and Organization*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford/Massachusetts, 2002, p. 191.

In this sense, it is not possible to think of Trama as isolated from the broader social and political conditions. In order to understand the emergence of Trama and the role it played within the Argentine artistic scene during its years of operation, it is important to consider it in relation to the broader historical and cultural context. That is, against the backdrop of the art scene in Argentina at the end of the 1990s, but also the new social and political landscape that emerged with the radical events linked to the economic crisis of December 2001. It should be noted that within the context of this study the reference to 'the crisis' stands as the epitome of an era that extended roughly from 1998 to 2003.

Since its inception, Trama operated transversally, interweaving or bridging – through trial and error – different contexts, generations, subjectivities, disciplines and realities. In fact, the word 'trama' in Spanish has multiple meanings, referring simultaneously to 'link', 'plot', but also, 'weft'. In this particular case, 'Trama' means weft: 'it refers to a horizontal structure, were connections are equal and where the figure that is drawn by it appears only in the weaving of the whole.'[37] Following this reference, Trama can be understood as a node traversed by multiple vectors; while, at the same time, it became a vector of multiple potentialities.

The structure and methodology of this thesis intended to reflect this 'trama'. Thus, my methodological approach to the research on the phenomenon of *autogestión* in the field of contemporary art in Argentina and, particularly, the issues I examine in relation to Trama, has been guided by an interdisciplinary, mainly sociological, approach to art history in order to account for the way in which artistic practice is implicated in particular socio-political contexts, geographies, and discourses at particular moments of time. Hence, qualitative research was conducted through the combination of discourse analysis and the collection and examination of both primary and secondary sources. Given the lack of comprehensive studies on this topic, the collection of first-hand information and testimonials through interviews was a fundamental aspect of my research. During my fieldwork, carried out between November and December 2012, I conducted more than twenty interviews to persons

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[37] 'Trama: Confrontation and Cooperation Program for Artists' (project proposal – in progress), June 2000, p. 2. [unpublished document, Trama archive / Claudia Fontes, Brighton, United Kingdom]

with different levels of involvement in the project.[38] For instance, some of the interviewees were founding artists of Trama; some were artists or academics from disciplines other than art who participated in Trama's workshops, public talks or activities; while others were researchers or art professionals involved in the art scene but were not directly related to the project, albeit they were familiar with it. The selection of the interviewees sought to follow Trama's inclusive and democratic principles. Therefore, in order to avoid conveying events merely through a Buenos Aires perspective, and to be able to incorporate diverse viewpoints and voices, I travelled to different provinces – such as Rosario, Salta and Tucumán – to obtain first-hand information and have a better understanding of the different contexts in which the initiatives linked to Trama developed. In this regard, the research residency I conducted at El Levante, an artist initiative in Rosario, was of utmost importance; not only did it provide an opportunity to share my research and exchange ideas with other local and international artists who were also doing a residency there, it also allowed me to gain a better insight into the workings of this kind of independent spaces in Argentina.

<p align="center">V</p>

Although, in historical terms, the genealogy of artistic self-organization could be traced back to modern times, the term *autogestión*, or its English counterpart, self-organization, has generally been used to describe 'new developments in collective practices from the 1990s to the present day'.[39] Thus, considered today as a distinct mode of artistic, curatorial, and institutional practice, *autogestión* or self-organization is a fairly recent phenomenon within the field of contemporary art. Regarding the development of the term, Maibritt Borgen points out that 'self-organization took over from older (but still widely used) terms to describe collective practices, primarily labels such as "artist-run" or "alternative".'[40] I would argue, however, that more than taking over, the discourse on self-organizing experiences in contemporary art coexists

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[38] For the complete 'List of Interviews', please refer to Appendix A, p. 223.
[39] Maibritt Borgen, 'The Inner and Outer Form of Self-Organisation', in Stein Hebert & Szefer Karlsen (eds.), *Self-Organised*, Open Editions, London, 2013, p. 38.
[40] Ibid, p. 42.

with other closely related terms, in particular, those of 'artists' collectives', 'alternative spaces', 'independent spaces' 'artist-run spaces', as well as that of 'artists' initiatives', to which I refer in this study. Furthermore, the notion of *autogestión* or self-organization, is also closely intertwined with rhetorics around 'do-it-yourself', 'non-profit', 'activist', 'collaborative' practices, and 'networked' culture. Consequently, its meaning has been constituted not in and of itself, but in its articulation with the others. Numerous international events and symposia[41] as well as recent publications attest to this intersection in the discourse and practice, and to the art world's increased interest in self-organizing practices, adding to the polyvalent and heterogeneous discourse emerging around this somewhat slippery term.

Perhaps one of the first engagements with the concept of self-organization in relation to cultural production was put forward by Anthony Davies (London), Stephan Dillemuth (Munich), Jakob Jakobsen (Copenhagen) in their text 'There is no alternative: the future is self-organised (Part 1).'[42] In this manifesto, written in 2005, the artists posed a critique to cultural institutions which had become 'the administrative organs of the dominant order',[43] as their objectives seemed to be intrinsically linked to corporate and neoliberal agendas. The subject of self-organization has also been discussed in Will Bradley et. al.'s *Self-Organisation/Counter-Economic Strategies* (2006), a book that highlights alternative models and strategies to classical capitalist economic organisation that exploit, or have been produced by, the existing global economic system. Moreover, self-

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[41] In the last two decades there have been numerous regional and international symposia celebrated around this subject, such as: FESARS 'First European Seminar for Artist Run Spaces' (Stockholm, 1999), 'Space Traffic: Symposium of International Artists' Spaces' (Hong Kong, 2001), 'Pause' at the Gwangju Biennale (2002), 'InFest: International Symposium on Artist-Run Culture' (Canada, 2004), 2nd 'In-Between: Globalism and Alternative Spaces' (Seoul, 2004), 'No Soul for Sale: Festival of Independents' (New York, 2009 / London, 2010), 'Just Do(ing) It: Artist-led and self-organised cultural activity as resistance to capitalism' (Sheffield, 2011), and 'Institutions by Artists' (Vancouver, 2012). In relation to Latin America in particular, we could mention: 'Primer Encuentro Internacional de Arte Independiente' (Valparaíso, Chile, 2005), SELAI 'Semana Latinoamericana de Arte Independiente' (Barcelona, 2006), 'Encuentro Internacional Medellín' (Colombia, 2007 and 2011), and the 'Second Ibero-American Meeting of Alternative Spaces' (Uruguay, 2008), and, more recently, the symposium 'New Methods' (Miami, 2011).

[42] 'There is no Alternative: The Future is Self-Organised. Part 1', in Nina Möntmann (ed.), *Art and Its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, Black Dog Publishing, London, 2006. For the revised version 'There is no Alternative: The Future is Self-Organised. Part 2' see: Stein Hebert & Szefer Karlsen (eds.), *Self-Organised*, Open Editions, London, 2013, pp. 27-36.

[43] Ibid.

organization is an underlying subject in *Decentre: Concerning Artist-Run Culture* (2008), a book about artist-run organizations and culture that describes the breadth and quality of artist-initiated programs, projects and events in different countries with the aim of demonstrating the vital role artist-initiated activity plays in the larger cultural scene. In *Policy Matters: Administrations of Art and Culture* (2006), Clive Robertson, an artist, activist, and producer, examines the significant political investments that artist-run centres, collectives, and other formations have made and continue to make to arts policy in the particular context of Canada. Publications such as *Artist-Run Spaces* (2012), *Institutions by Artists* (2012), and *Institution for the Future* (2012), have all – in their own way – alluded to self-organization as one of the most predominant methods of contemporary cultural production today. However, the recent publication, *Self-Organised* (2013), edited by Stein Hebert & Szefer Karlsen, has been the most relevant to this study insofar as it provides a more nuanced appreciation of the role of artists with regards to the institutional establishment. Moving away from previous approaches based on the opposing dichotomy alternative versus institutional, and going beyond labels such as 'alternative' and 'artist-run' that have dominated the self-organized art scene, this book approaches self-organization as a *field* in the contemporary art world. It is within this (discursive) *field* where my research could be situated. However, while this anthology examines self-organization within the art world, in this dissertation, as explained thus far, I analyse self-organizing artistic practices in relation to the phenomenon of *autogestión* as it developed in Argentine society at large.

In spite of the increased recognition, discussion, and documentation around self-organization and independent artists' initiatives in recent years, it is worth noting that artist-generated activity – beyond art production – has not yet been subjected to a serious and systematic study within the discipline of art history. Art historian, Anna Brzyski, has addressed this inconsistency claiming that '…this failure of recognition is likely a result of paradigm driven assumptions which have determined not only the narrative focus of classical art history, but also its deeply engrained aversion to thinking about art as an outcome of professional practice.'[44] In other words, as Brzyski

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[44] Anna Brzyski, 'What's in a Name? Artist-Run Exhibition Societies and the Branding of Modern Art in Fin-de-Siècle Europe', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Visual*

suggests, the lack of attention that this subject has received within traditional art historical discourse could be partly explained by how the discipline itself has perceived and, ultimately, negated the 'professional practice of art'.

In the particular context of Argentina, and Latin America in general, the history of independent artistic initiatives remains largely undocumented. This is particularly true for those that operated before the use of the internet became widespread. Consequently, a multitude of not-yet-articulated and potential genealogies of artistic *autogestión* remain absent from historical accounts or in the shadow of the hegemonic discourse of Latin American art. Interestingly, the artists themselves tend to adopt self-reflexive and self-historicizing tendencies and have been gradually setting the conditions for their histories to be written through the creation of archives and the documentation of their activities through books, catalogues, journals, e-zines, webpages, and other communication media.

One of the first texts I encountered on self-organized spaces or initiatives in Latin America was Michelle Faguet's 'A Brief Account of Two Artist-Run Spaces', first published in the journal *Fillip* (2006), and re-issued, more recently, in the publication *Institutions by Artists Vol. 1* (2012). Faguet's text examines two specific cases from the 1990s: La Panadería, an artist-run space in Mexico that is often considered as the model for alternative spaces in Latin America, and Galería Chilena, a lesser known artist-run, nomadic, commercial gallery that moved around Santiago over the course of several years, organizing exhibitions in borrowed spaces. Indeed, the retrospective catalogue *La Panadería: 1994–2002* (2004) provides a collective testimony on the artistic productions and exhibitions that were organized in the space, which was founded in 1994 in a former bakery by local artists Yoshua Okón and Miguel Calderón.

Other examples of this self-documenting characteristic in Latin America include the two volumes edited by Galería Metropolitana from Santiago de Chile (*Galería Metropolitana 1998–2003* and *Galería Metropolitana 2004–2010*); the anthological publication of Espacio Aglutinador from Cuba (*Espacio Aglutinador, un lugar de emergencia 1994–2004* (2006); the documentation of the 'Encuentro de

espacios de arte independientes de América Latina y el Caribe', organized by Duplus and Trama from Argentina, collected in the publication *El Pez, la bicicleta y la máquina de escribir* (2006); Mónica Mayer's book *Escandalario: los artistas y la distribución del arte* (2006), which critically reviews the history of Escandalario, an art gallery that operated in Mexico at the end of the 1980s and the involvement of artists in three basic economic activities of the free-market system: production, distribution, and consumption of art. Other artists' initiatives like Capacete from Rio de Janeiro, or El Basilisco, Grupo de Arte Callejero, and Taller Popular de Serigrafía from Buenos Aires have also published their own history, activities and memories in book form.[45] With the exception of La Panadería, all of these were part of Trama's network. Thus, since most of the material available on the topic of *autogestión* and artists initiatives is produced by the initaitives themselves, these sources constitute important primary source material about this topic within the Latin American context. Furthermore, these publications were most useful during the early stages of my research insofar as they provided valuable insight into the different modes of organization as well as the different approaches and strategies put forward by artists' initiatives in the Latin American region.

It is noteworthy that, while most of these publications started circulating in the second half of the 2000s, Trama started publishing early in the decade. In this respect, the case of Trama is exemplary. Their efforts to document their activities in print format was not just to serve a mere documentary purpose, but it was an imperative of the project since the beginning. Their publications were meant to serve as a tool and resource for the artistic community, in order to facilitate the exchange and broad circulation of ideas, information and discourses pertaining artists' initaitives. In this regard, Trama's publications constitute an important point of reference for the artistic community and researchers alike. Moreover, it could be argued that Trama encouraged the scholarship of self-organizing practices in Argentina by commissioning texts and seeking collaborations from many artists and

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[45] Their publications are: *Book to Read: 10 years of Capacete* (2008); *GAC Pensamientos, Prácticas y Acciones* (2009); *Taller Popular de Serigrafía 2002-2007 (2010)*; and *El Basilisco Residencia de Artistas 2004-2009* (2012). For full reference of these sources, see: 'Bibliography', p. 199.

art historians from Argentina and other Latin American countries.[46] These publications have been fundamental in my research, not only because of the detailed information they offer regarding Trama's activities, but because they shed light on the different concerns, debates, and discourses pertaining artists' inititives at the time.

Trama's contribution to the field and discourse of contemporary art in Argentina has been acknowledged by many art historians in Argentina and abroad. Notwithstanding this, for the most part, these tend to be limited to brief references in articles or book chapters. Argentine researcher, María Stegmayer, in 'Estéticas sociológicas/sociologías estéticas: una mirada sobre ciertos transitos conteporáneos' briefly discusses the case of Trama, alongside other examples, like Proyecto Venus and Duplus, as representative of contemporary practices at the turn of the century that sought to emphasize the figure of the 'artist as researcher' or 'the artistic as a research platform' to inquire about society.[47] Similarly, in her article 'Arte, política y discurso. Un aporte al análisis de las discursividades emergentes en el campo del arte en argentina (1995-2005)', Stegmayer makes reference to several art collectives (e.g. Grupo de Arte Callejero, Taller Popular de Serigrafía, Escombros, and Suscripción) and self-organized initiatives (e.g. Duplus, Trama, and Proyecto Venus) in order to examine the discursive construction of collective artistic practices in the period pre- and post-crisis and the relation of these to the broader institutional art circuit.[48]

In his article 'Arte argentino actual: entre objetos, medios y procesos', art historian and curator, Rodrigo Alonso highlighted the case of Trama in his discussion on the relevance of informal programs for artistic training and education that emerged during the 1990s in the Argentine art scene.[49] Similarly, Argentine art critic and curator, Eva Grinstein in her text 'Generation 2000: Building Community

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[46] Many of these art historians and academics also took part in some of Trama's activities; for instance Ana Longoni, Marcelo Pacheco, Roberto Amigo, and María Jose Herrera, to name a few.

[47] María Stegmayer, 'Estéticas sociológicas/sociologías estéticas: una mirada sobre ciertos transitos conteporáneos', in Leonor Arfuch & Gisela Catanzaro (eds.), *Pretérito imperfecto: lecturas críticas del acontecer*, Prometeo Libros, Buenos Aires, 2008, pp. 145-164.

[48] María Stegmayer, 'Arte, política y discurso. Un aporte al análisis de las discursividades emergentes en el campo del arte en argentina (1995-2005)', September 2005, <http://webiigg.sociales.uba.ar/iigg/jovenes_investigadores/3JornadasJovenes/Templates/Eje%20representaciones/Stegmayer%20Discursos.pdf>, accessed 10 January 2012.

[49] Rodrigo Alonso, 'Arte argentino actual: entre objetos, medios y procesos', Rodrigo Alonso [website], 2004, <http://www.roalonso.net/es/arte_cont/arte_argentino.php>, accessed 18 June 2015.

Together', published as part of a collection of articles in a special issue of the magazine *Artecontexto* on collective practices in Latin America, discusses the appearance of artists collectives at the end of the 1990s. As she keenly observes: 'The artists collectives that began operating almost in tune with the new century played an important part in the reconfiguration of the contemporary art scene in Argentina, an art scene which, today, is significantly more dynamic, rich and inclusive than it was ten years ago.'[50]

In spite of these contributions to the history and discourse of contemporary Argentine art, there is a scarcity of texts and written material engaging with artistic practices from the 2000 onwards and, more specifically, with self-organized practices in Argentina. One exception worthy of mention are the few texts written by artist and sociologist Syd Krochmalny were he highlights the self-organizing trend among contemporary artists in the period post-crisis and discusses a variety of artists collectives, mostly, in terms of the 'politics of friendship' that seems to guide many of these groups.[51] Another exceptional case in this regard, is the recent book published by the Fondo Nacional de las Artes entitled *Poéticas contemporáneas: itinerarios en las artes visuales en la Argentina de los 90 al 2010* (2010). Edited by Fernando Farina and Andrés Labaké, this book fills a void in the local art historical discourse in its attempt to encompass – albeit in a panoramic view – a period characterized by important changes, as well as aesthetic and ethical re-positionings. Among the texts included in this compilation, the one written by Andrés Labaké entitled 'Algunas ciudades y otras historias. Fragmentos y transcripciones', specifically addresses the subject of *autogestión* or self-organized spaces. In particular, it highlights a few spaces and initiatives that emerged, mainly in the past ten years, in the provinces of Mendoza, Córdoba and Santa Fe. In so doing, it emphasizes the importance that self-organizing practices have had in the development of artistic scenes outside Buenos Aires. Although far from being an exhaustive study, it makes an important

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50 Eva Grinstein, 'Generation 2000: Building community together', *Artecontexto*, No. 18, 2008, 2, p. 32.
51 For example: 'Arte en relación: de la autogestión a la profesionalización' (2010) or 'Tecnologías de la amistad: Las formas sociales de producción, gestión y circulación artística en base a la amistad' (2012). For the full bibliographic reference, see 'Bibliography', p. 199.

contribution to this area of research within the Argentine context. At the same time, it acknowledges Trama's legacy within the artistic milieu by using Trama's publications as reference.

With a few exceptions, such as the ones I have highlighted here, the discussions pertaining independent spaces and self-organized initiatives in the Argentine art historical discourse, for the most part, tend to be subsumed in a broader discourse of collective artistic practices. As such, recent accounts pertaining to the crucial role of the visual arts in the specific period of the crisis have acknowledged the active role of artists, mostly organized into groups or collectives, in the social and political transformations that took place in this time period. Two art historians that have been engaged in the study and research of collective practices in the period of the early 2000s are Ana Longoni and Andrea Giunta. Longoni, who has extensively researched and analyzed the strand of art and politics in the Argentine context especially in the sixties and seventies, in her text 'Crossroads for Activist Art in Argentina', examines how the involvement of many artists' collectives, in particular activist art practices, in the widespread call for social change at the height of the crisis of 2001, gave 'a certain institutional visibility' to these practices which until then 'had remained decidedly on the margins of the conventional spheres of institutionalized art.'[52]

In her book *Poscrisis*, Guinta, proposes a different reading of the period post-crisis in Argentina. In particular, she examines the role of artists' collectives in their transition from the streets, in the period immediately following the crisis, to the reconstitution of the art scene with the expansion of the institutional field. She examines the period that goes from the proliferation of artists' collectives and the way their practice was altered due to the social protests of December 2001, to the new artistic landscape that emerged in the country around 2004 due to the boom of international tourism and the emergence of new art institutions in different parts of the country. Although both authors cite the same examples (i.e. Grupo de Arte Callejero, TPS, and Grupo Etcetera), which in many ways also recurred to self-

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[52] Ana Longoni, 'Crossroads for Activist Art in Argentina', *Third Text*, Vol. 22, Issue 5, September 2008, p. 575.

organization in their practices, none of these art historical accounts engage properly with the subject of artistic *autogestión*. While Longoni focused mainly on the new forms of artistic activism and interventions in the public sphere that emerged, linked for the most part to the social movements,[53] Giunta has focused more broadly on the way collective artistic practice was widely embraced after 2001, highlighting the 'collectivization of art'[54] as one of the main outcomes of this period. Consequently, not only the phenomenon of artistic self-organization has been subsumed into a generalized discourse of collectivity or activism, but its specificities have been obscured as the practice of *autogestión* has been relegated to a mere description or anecdotal fact of the way these collectives organized and operated. This thesis, then, aims to qualify these approaches by arguing for the significant role played by artists' initiatives based on *autogestión* in the broader process of the reconfiguration of the art scene at this time. Beyond the 'collectivization of artistic practice', I argue that what emerged as a novelty within the art scene was *autogestión* as a legitimate artistic practice, unprecedented in its attempt to exert influence in its wider historical and socio-cultural context.

VI

The phenomenon of artists' initiatives that, like Trama, engaged with their local socio-political context was not an isolated phenomenon. In fact, the proliferation and importance of the role of artists' initiatives in different contexts was in many ways representative of shifts on a global scale. In his book, *Estetica de la Emergencia*, Reinaldo Laddaga argues that the last two decades – 1990s and 2000s – was a moment characterized by significant changes in the art field at a global level. More specifically, this moment saw the emergence of a new artistic culture. As suggested by Ladagga, this formation of a new artistic culture also implies new and different ways of

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[53] See also: Ana Longoni, 'Tres coyunturas del activismo artístico en la última década', in *Poéticas contemporáneas: itinerarios en las artes visuales en la Argentina de los 90 al 2010*, Fondo Nacional de las Artes, Buenos Aires, 2010, p. 44.

[54] A. Giunta, *Poscrisis*, p. 54.

conceiving the production, reception, distribution, and dissemination of knowledge in the art world, thus prompting a reflexive criticism of contemporary artistic practices.[55]

This historical moment was particularly marked by the proliferation of artists' initiatives that sought to create projects which proposed and/or facilitated spaces, programs, or resources that enabled the articulation of conversations among large and heterogeneous groups of people or communities with the aim of modifying the state of things in the local context, as well as the exploration of 'artificial forms of social life', or experimental forms of coexistence or socialization. These projects or initiatives were interested in the articulation of 'ideas and institutions, imaginaries, and practices, new modes of life and objects, and new forms of exchange among other processes.'[56] Beyond the production of artworks, these initiatives participated in what he termed the formation of 'new cultural ecologies', which, in turn, entailed a reorientation or reconfiguration of the artistic realm.[57] This historical moment, as Laddaga notes, coincided with a new cycle of global protests, when new (artistic) configurations aimed at renewing art's capacity to establish itself as site of resistance, while connecting with attempts at social transformation that emerged in different parts of the world.[58]

A more exhaustive account of Trama, especially with regards to the network it created, would require a more rigorous examination of the connections and exchanges it developed internationally – beyond the region of Latin America – through its connection with the RAIN network. However, this interaction between the local and the global rests outside of the scope of this dissertation. Focusing on the specific case of Trama, this dissertation does not aim to provide an exhaustive overview of the phenomenon of *autogestión* in the context of contemporary art in Argentina. Likewise, although it aims to contribute to the historicization of self-organizing practices, it does not outline a comprehensive history of artists' initiatives or even the history of Trama, for that matter. Recognizing its partiality, this study, in

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[55] Reinaldo Laddaga, 'Art and Organizations', in Gertrude Flentge, Els van Odijk, and Edith Rijnja (Eds.), *Shifting Map: Artists' Platforms and Strategies for Cultural Diversity*, RAIN Artists' Initiatives Network/NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, p. 16.

[56] Reinaldo Laddaga, *Estética de la Emergencia*, Adriana Hidalgo Editora, Buenos Aires, 2006.

[57] Ibid, p. 9.

[58] Ibid, p. 8.

turn, offers a reconsideration of the art production of this time period by highlighting the significant role played by artists' initiatives in the reconfiguration of the art field and shedding light on an important moment in the history of contemporary art in Argentina – legitimation of artistic *autogestión* – a topic that, so far, has been overlooked. This lack of engagement suggests the need for a more comprehensive research and analysis of this field of research. Thus, my dissertation can be understood as a call for acknowledgement as it addresses a phenomenon – that of artistic *autogestión* – which has received little attention from scholars in the field, despite being present throughout the modern and contemporary history of art in Argentina.

In the visual arts, art theorists and historians all too often ground their discussions of art on the supposition that art is a representational practice. This dissertation, then, aims to contribute to the scholarship around this subject by steering the direction away from the arena of the 'art work' or the 'artist as author' towards that of 'artistic practice' *per se.* The roles of contemporary artists have expanded as artists take on the creation of spaces for the experimentation and dissemination of their work and that of their peers, create platforms that establish new links with communities and audiences, and elaborate projects focused on informal education. In these cases, artistic practice exceeds the production of artworks by generating a multiplicity of synergies, spaces, relations**,** discourses, and knowledge. Underlying this research, then, is the question of how to think about contemporary art outside a traditional, object- or author-centered, art historical approach. That is, how to think about artistic practice where the artist, instead of material production, socializes resources or produces tools for the common good. In the particular case of Trama, this implies understanding artistic practice as a social practice that produces – an intangible – dispositif for cooperation. Such an analysis represents a clear stretch of the boundaries to which artistic practice has been commonly subjected. Considering the way the micro history of Trama was imbricated with the macro historical context of the 2001 Argentine crisis opens up the possibility to perceive aspects of artistic practice that cannot be reduced to the mere production of artworks. Rescuing and revising this important aspect – artistic *autogestión* – in contemporary Argentine art will have significant implications in the historical

narrative and discourse of the visual arts, which traditionally tends to focus on the art production of particular artists, aesthetic movements, or thematic concerns.

VII

This dissertation is organized as follows: In order to contextualize the phenomenon of *autogestión* in the particular context of Argentina during early 2000s, in Chapter I, I provide a brief historical account of the social and economic crisis of 2001, and discuss the relevance of the emergence and proliferation of *autogestión* in the contemporary art field at a time characterized by political radicalization. Furthermore, I introduce Lefebvre's ideas on *autogestion*, which constitute the basis of the theoretical outlook of this dissertation, followed by my case study – Trama –, which I discuss in relation to the practice and discourse of *autogestión* in field of contemporary Argentine art.

Chapter II examines how the events linked to the crisis of 2001 influenced the program politically and confirmed its relevance within the artistic landscape at the time. In the context of Trama, *autogestión* was understood as forming part of an expanded field of artistic practice. According to this understanding, the ethical is not dissociated from the aesthetic realm, but is rather an expansion of it. Thus, this chapter examines how the practice of *autogestión* in Trama fuctioned as a political strategy by responding to specific ethical concerns and the need for more democratic and cooperative configurations within the art field. I propose that, in Trama, the artist's ethic is enacted and, in this process, it is put into play rather than represented. To sustain this argument, I contrast the relation between ethic and aesthetic in Trama with the role of the ethical in the radical practice of the artists of the late 1960s and 1970s, in particular *Tucumán Arde*, as this work is considered a pivotal moment in the history of political art in Argentina, cited as one of the exceptional cases in which the spheres of arts and politics collided.

Rather than considering what shape or form the practice of *autogestión* took in the case of Trama, Chapter III aims at discussing the political character of Trama by analyzing the conditions it generated, or contributed to generating. By drawing on Lefebvre's broader view of *autogestión* and tracing links between Trama and the social movements, the political implications of Trama's *autogestión* are discussed in

the registers of the social, subjective, and spatial. By elaborating the discussion in these terms, I aim to shed light on how the practice of *autogestión* within the art field resonated with the self-organizing instances and processes taking place within Argentine society at large.

Chapter I   Mapping the Territory

The last days of 2001 marked a watershed in the recent history of Argentina. The economic and social crisis, which had been long underway as a result of the socio-economic transformations experienced in Argentina with the implementation of neoliberal policies under the government of Carlos Menem in the 1990s, culminated in political crisis and the outbreak of the popular insurrection of December 2001.[1] Among the causes of the crisis worthy of particular mention are the fact that the Argentine peso had been legally pegged to the dollar, on a one-to-one basis, since 1991; a huge foreign and domestic debt due to extensive borrowing by Menem's government during its second term (1995–1999); and the wave of privatization of companies (mainly utilities) that left nearly forty percent of the population unemployed or underemployed. Towards the end of the decade, social life was deeply affected as the country experienced a massive recession that generated unprecedented levels of poverty, homelessness, and unemployment. The implosion of the political and financial systems culminated in the popular uprisings of the 19th and 20th of December 2001, also known as *El Argentinazo.*[2]

However, the crisis of 2001 was not only the consequence of economic hyperdeflation, institutional collapse, and social decomposition. It also prompted a series of economic, political, and social changes that resulted in the emergence of 'a new country'.[3] As sociologist, Maristella Svampa, has argued:

> The country was immersed in a generalized crisis, while, at the same time, it would become a deeply mobilized society, between indignation and desperate reaction, it sought to recover its capacity for action, through the creation of bonds of cooperation and solidarity, which had been strongly undermined after a long decade of neoliberalism.[4]

This new cycle of mobilization would be characterized by the 'return of politics to the

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[1] Carlos Menem, who served as president of Argentina from 1989 to 1999, was the first Peronist to be elected president of Argentina since Juan Domingo Perón in 1973.

[2] Raúl Zibechi, *Genealogía de la revuelta: Argentina, la sociedad en movimiento*, Nordan Comunidad, Montevideo, 2003, p. 12.

[3] M. Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente*, p. 15. [author's translation]

[4] Ibid, p. 263.

streets.'[5] Amid a climate of social unrest, neighborhoods, streets, squares, and local factories were recovered, shaping a new public space where a heterogeneous set of mobilized social actors could engage in new forms of exchange and sociality.

Naturally, these changes also reverberated in the field of cultural production. As art historian Andrea Giunta has argued, December 2001 represented a moment of radical change in the cultural scene in Argentina.[6] The social revolts and political upheaval implied an acceleration of the times, marking a new time and rhythm for the arts. 'Art inserted itself into the rhythms of these transformations with great malleability', Giunta has further noted.[7] Thus, the intensification of protest and radical politicization of various spheres of social life resulted in a greater politicization of artistic practices, as many artists engaged in activism, worked in close dialogue with the social movements, created independent spaces and networks outside the official institutional circuit, and experimented with new forms of association and conviviality. Instances of social participation and horizontal relationships were generated, in stark contrast to the hegemonic imaginary and values of the previous decade, which had been characterized by individualism and competence. Everyday actions and public interventions led to the reconsideration of urban space, while the social value of culture was strengthened as a legitimate resource in times where creativity was closely tied to social and political struggle.[8] It was a moment of tension, but also an auspicious moment that ignited a series of intense mobilizations, actions, and debates.

This new scenario saw the emergence of new forms of cultural organization, marking 'a new phase in the arts.'[9] It has been remarked by several authors – such as art historians Ana Longoni, Andrea Giunta, and Cecilia Vázquez, as well as sociologists, Maristella Svampa, Ana Wortman, and María Stegmayer – that one of the most significant effects of the crisis in the realm of the visual arts, and in the cultural field

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[5] M. Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente*, p. 273.

[6] Andrea Giunta, *Poscrisis: Arte argentino después de 2001*, Siglo XXI, Spain, 2009, p. 26.

[7] Andrea Giunta, 'Post-crisis: Scenes of Cultural Change in Buenos Aires', in Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2011, p. 106.

[8] Guillermo Martín Quiña, 'Cultura y crisis en la gran ciudad. Los colectivos de artistas y el desarrollo de una nueva legitimidad en el arte', in Ana Wortman (ed.), *Entre la política y la gestión de la cultura y el arte: nuevos actores en la Argentina contemporánea*, Eudeba, Buenos Aires, 2009, p. 228.

[9] A. Giunta, 'Post-crisis', p. 106.

in general, was the appearance of artists' groups. While the proliferation of artists' collectives was undoubtedly a significant outcome of the crisis, in this dissertation I contend that what emerged as a new phenomenon within the Argentine artistic landscape during this period was not the collectivization of art, but the validation of artists' initiatives based on *autogestión*. Following Henri Lefebvre's understanding of the term, *autogestión* in this context refers to a strategy whereby individuals assume control over their conditions of existence in order to positively influence and change their reality. By analyzing the case of Trama, exemplary of the cultural initiatives that emerged during this period, I will make this differentiation explicit and I will nuance the role of *autogestión* – a term employed by Trama members themselves – in the reconfiguration of the contemporary arts scene in Argentina.

The Rupture: The Crisis as Context

> Toy soldiers are falling like rain from a sixth floor to the ground. On the street, women, men and children hastily try to catch some of them. They do not know what it is that is falling, but is something that grabs their attention. Bus, taxi and car drivers stop to look at the sky; office men in the opposite building interrupt their tasks, get closer to the windows and try, some with success, to reach these objects that zigzag in the air. They stretch their hands to catch them before they finally fall to the sidewalk or the asphalt. They do not know what it is, but there they are, suspending everyday life and chores, forcing passers-by to look up, while some run for one of these toy soldiers with parachutes. Thousands continue to fall and the wind takes them a little farther away. It's been a few minutes, we have no more soldiers to throw, we look down and we salute comrades who came to see the action and who are also recording what is happening with a film camera. It's 5 pm on 19 December 2001.[10]

On the 19th of December 2001, the art collective Grupo de Arte Callejero (GAC) engaged in an action, throwing 10,000 miniature toy soldiers with parachutes from a tall building located in one of the busiest streets in the center of Buenos Aires. Conceptualized within the context of Trama, this action constituted the second phase of a bigger project entitled *'Invasión'* ('Invasion') [Fig. 1.1]. As I discuss in Chapter II, GAC was one of the ten local grantees that participated in that year's research project.

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[10] Grupo de Arte Callejero, *GAC Pensamiento, Prácticas y Acciones*, Tinta Limón, Buenos Aires, 2009, p. 124.

They had presented their proposal for this intervention at Trama's final public event. One month later, as though an act of premonition, this action would coincide with the implosion of the crisis, creating a powerful image just a few hours before the popular uprisings.

This action was, in fact, preceded by an urban intervention that had taken place three days earlier, whereby artists placed stickers with military icons all over the city targeting, in particular, the billboards and posters advertising multinational companies [Fig. 1.2].These icons sought to equate the codes of the military with those of the market.[11] The tank, a highly mobile armored vehicle, symbolized the pervasive power of the multinationals; the missile was equated with the propaganda of the mass media of the period; and the soldier alluded to the oppressive forces used by the state to maintain neoliberal order. With these interventions, GAC aimed at exposing the alliances of the political and economic powers, and to call into question the fiction behind their optimistic and legitimated discourse, sustained by the media, based on the expropriation and privatization of natural resources and health services, as well as education and communication (i.e. the monopoly of transport and communications systems). By using imagery associated with war, GAC made an explicit reference to the repression and violence that would clearly manifest during the crisis. From amongst the projects proposed at Trama's workshop that year, '*Invasión*' was one of the projects that came closest to foreshadowing the events of the 19th and 20th of December.

The series of events that took place in the streets of Buenos Aires, and many other Argentine provinces, at the end of 2001 were not originated by the crisis. Rather, the discontent that led to the popular insurrection can be traced back to the neoliberal decade of the 1990s and to the military dictatorship that laid its foundations during the late 1970s.[12] Hence, while 'severe economic troubles had affected the vast majority of Argentines for years before the period of total collapse', as sociologist, Marina Sitrin, has keenly observed, the freezing of bank accounts is

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[11] Grupo de Arte Callejero, op. cit., p. 123.
[12] Cara Levey, Daniel Ozarow & Christopher Wylde (eds.), *Argentina since the 2001 Crisis: Recovering the Past, Reclaiming the Future*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, p. 9.

considered a key moment which led to Argentina's financial turmoil.[13] The catalyst of the popular uprisings, then, were the restrictive measures and exchange-market control imposed by the Minister of Economy, Domingo Cavallo, with the implementation of the so-called 'corralito' law.[14] This government decree consisted in cash restrictions (i.e. cash withdrawals were limited to 250 Argentine pesos per week, while withdrawals from US dollars-denominated accounts were completely prohibited), as well as the freezing of bank accounts in order to avoid 'capital flight' and the collapse of the whole monetary system. The severe austerity measures that meant to alleviate Argentina's massive foreign and national debt exacerbated the recession and angered the public causing millions of 'ordinary' citizens to swarm to the streets in protest.

Comprised of workers and the unemployed sectors, as well as the middle class and those recently de-classed, the numerous outbreaks of *en masse* protests in Argentina's urban centers – particularly in Buenos Aires – were also accompanied by widespread food riots and lootings. The popular response to macro-economic mismanagement was met with a significant wave of state repression that ended in violent confrontations between civilians and the police force, causing numerous deaths and hundreds of injured [Figs. 1.3 & 1.4].

The revolt that came with the crisis brought to the fore the massive dysfunction of the system: the state and its institutions. Over the course of two weeks, the protests precipitated the collapse of five consecutive governments: 'The resignation of President Fernando de la Rúa followed by parliament's *election of*, and then subsequent *removal of* four provisional presidents in just two weeks, clearly demonstrate the institutional implications of the crisis.'[15]

The generalized sense of discontent and lack of trust towards the institutions was manifested in the phrase '¡Que se vayan todos!' (All of them must go!) [Fig. 1.5]. Directed not only towards the foreign multinational companies and corrupt

[13] Marina Sitrin, 'Ruptures in Imagination: Horizontalism, Autogestion and Affective Politics in Argentina', *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 5, autumn 2007, pp. 44.

[14] Alluding to the financial restrictions imposed by the measure, the Spanish word *corralito* – diminutive form of *corral* – refers to 'corral', 'animal pen', or 'enclosure'.

[15] Maristella Svampa, 'Revisiting Argentina 2001-13: From "Que se vayan todos!" to the Peronist Decade', in C. Levey, D. Ozarow & C. Wylde (eds.), *Argentina since the 2001 Crisis*, p. 157.

politicians, but towards the entire political system, this unifying slogan was sung collectively to the banging of pots and pans. The banging of the *cazerolas* marked a claim whereby the people were taking matters into their own hands. The *cazerola, or* casserole, a domestic symbol associated with precariousness, and a distinctive icon of the manifestations, stood as a visual metaphor for the power of the people [Fig. 1.6]. The message underlying the many *cacerolazos*[16] that took place during and after the crisis was not only a protest against the negative effects of the neoliberal socio-economic model: salary reductions, unemployment, job insecurity, and the loss of quality of life. It also purported to claim that Argentine society was dissatisfied with its political representation. 'For the middle-class, the current political class, represented by radicals and Peronists, no longer serves', a local newspaper read.[17] 'It was a rebellion without representation or parties from either the right or the left', as Sitrin and Emilio Sparato have argued.[18] The uprising marked the culminating point of a crisis of representation that, for many years, had been increasingly intensifying:

> […] two decades of neoliberalism accompanied by the weakly developed 'delegative democracy' that emerged in the aftermath of the 1976–83 military dictatorship had left Argentina with a representative system that was corruption ridden, unresponsive to the demands of its citizens, and which, increasingly under Menem's administration, had devolved power both to the Executive (as rule by presidential decree became more commonplace) as well as to local *caudillos* as quasi-authoritarianisms emerged, especially in the provinces.[19]

Hence, the *cazerolazos* would come to reveal a crisis of representation at the social level, as the Argentine people no longer felt represented by the state: 'The people

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[16] One of the largest and most recent *cacerolazos* occurred in Argentina in 2001. However, this form of popular protest – which consists in a group of people creating noise by banging pots, pans, and other utensils in order to call for attention – began in Chile in 1971 in protest at shortages during the Salvador Allende administration. These pot-banging demonstrations have usually been practiced in Spanish-speaking countries, although more recently, they have also taken place in cities like Québec (2012) and Turkey (2013).

[17] Mariano Grondona, 'Un escenario de alto riesgo', *Noticias*, 16 February 2002. [author's translation]

[18] Marina Sitrin & Emilio Sparato, 'New Languages from New Practices in Argentina', *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest* [online journal], Issue 3, <http://www.joaap.org/new3/sparatositrin.html>, para. 9, accessed 15 March 2013.

[19] C. Levey, D. Ozarow & C. Wylde (eds.), op. cit., p .6.

have had enough, not only of a particular mode of economic policy, but more simply, of a particular model of doing politics.'[20]

Throughout its history, Argentina has undergone long periods of domination whereby those in power have mainly profited from those they claimed to represent: the Argentine people. The political culture of the country has been characterized for its personalist, vertical and hierarchical organization; 'even in the more emancipatory groups on the left, political groups were always organized around a strict hierarchy with a strong leader.'[21] This has been particularly the case under Peronism, a movement that began with the military general and politician, Juan Domingo Perón,[22] in the late 1940s and for more than half a century has managed to establish itself as the hegemonic political ideology in Argentina.

The history of Peronism and its relation to Argentine society is as complex as it is polemical. The emergence of the party – called *Justicialismo*, or the Justicialist Movement – took place at a particular historical juncture: 'with international fascism not yet defeated and liberal capitalism still tarnished by the global depression.'[23] In its origins, the movement purported to incorporate previously excluded groups and classes into national affairs. To this end, Perón gave the growing working class 'a political voice' by promoting the unionisation of the workers (their organization as a labour force) and recognizing its civic and political rights within society.[24] The fact that Peronism has continued to re-emerge, even after Perón's death in 1974, demonstrates how deeply rooted the movement is, not only in Argentine politics, but in its national culture.[25]

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[20] 'Ha sonado la hora del tiempo social', Editorial, *La Voz del Interior*, Córdoba, 23 December 2001. [author's translation]

[21] M. Sitrin, *Horizontalism*, p. 49.

[22] Army colonel, Juan Domingo Perón (1895-1974), served as president of Argentina (1946–52, 1952–55, 1973–74). Founder and leader of the Peronist or Justicialist Movement, Perón transformed Argentina's political culture and made deep changes, not all of them beneficial, in the country's economic structure, social relations, and politics.

[23] James P. Brennan, *Peronism and Argentina*, Scholarly Resources Inc., Delaware, 1998, p. 16.

[24] Laura Tedesco, *Democracy in Argentina: Hope and Disillusion*, Frank Cass Publishers, London/Portland, 1999, p. 5.

[25] Of the presidential elections since 1946 in which Peronists were permitted to run, they won nine, losing only two.

Throughout the past decades, Peronism has proved capable of embracing the most heterogeneous, and even opposing, political and ideological trends – a baffling combination of fascism, liberalism, populism, nationalism, democracy, labourism, state capitalism, and socialism – while also 'reasserting its superior political productivity.'[26] Although the movement's demise has been predicted several times, Peronism's remarkable resilience and ideologically flexible appeal is perhaps most clearly attested by the subsequent iterations of Peronism and its multiple 'faces' embodied, for instance, under the Menemist and, most recently, Kirchnerist governments. In this regard, Svampa points out:

> It is worth mentioning that since the return to democratic rule in 1983, Peronism has governed in Argentina for 22 of these 30 years and that during this time it has manifested two quite distinct political incarnations, its neoliberal character in 1990s under the two administrations of Carlos Menem and then latterly since Nestor Kirchner became president in 2003, it has revealed progressive and increasingly national popular virtues. Peronism's national popular trajectory has intensified further since 2008 under Cristina's mantle.[27]

Nowadays, 'the features of Peronism that have remained constant have been its populism, pragmatism, and dependence on strong leaders.'[28] Rather than an ideology, Peronism is considered as a political 'brand' that bestows 'the idea of power as an end in itself.'[29] This political model, in turn, 'has resulted in a politics of 'clientelism' where, particularly in poor neighborhoods, nothing could be accomplished without the mediation of the *punteros*,[30] and people were forced to exchange their autonomy for basic necessities', as Sitrin has noted.[31] The numerous *cazerolazos* that emerged spontaneously in the urban centers of Argentina at the height of the 2001 crisis demonstrated how society had become deeply critical of the political class' increasingly authoritarian streak. The new autonomous social movements promoted

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[26] M. Svampa, 'Revisiting Argentina 2001-13', p. 168.

[27] Ibid, pp. 167-68.

[28] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20: Notes for a New Social Protagonism*, tr. Nate Holdren & Sebastián Touza, Minor Compositions, Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson, 2002, p. 56.

[29] 'The persistence of Peronism', *The Economist*, 17 October 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21674783-argentinas-dominant-political-brand-defined-power-not-ideology-persistence>, accessed 20 October 2015.

[30] The *punteros* are political leaders charged with giving out funds to impoverished neighbourhoods and use their role as distributor in order to turn a profit.

[31] M. Sitrin, *Horizontalism*, p. 5.

a conscious break with this form of politics, what many considered as the state's paternalistic relationship to the population.[32] Regarding society's dependent relationship to the government, an unemployed worker from the MTD Solano (an unemployed workers' movement) has clearly expressed:

> ...in this area – as in many areas surrounding Buenos Aires – the PJ [Partido Justicialista] apparatus, that's the Peronist party, is very strong. Very strong, and there's a lot of political clientelism. We didn't want to reproduce that in any way. We were totally fed up with that way of organizing. There was always someone who wanted to make decisions for us, and to drive things, and we would always end up in the same situation or worse. So we said, okay, let's invent a new way of doing things, with new social relationships rooted in *horizontalidad* and direct democracy. A new walk where we create our own subjectivity, our own way of understanding and transforming reality – and these became sort of pillars for helping guide our horizon.[33]

As this testimony manifests, the crisis signaled a clear rejection of and decisive ruptures with the past, with old forms of governability based on vertical and centralized organizational structures, as well as old concepts of 'representation'.[34] In its place, they promoted direct democracy, based on open and collective decision-making.

In addition, the thousands upon thousands participating in the protests and getting involved in experiences of direct action also represented a decisive break from a history of silence and fear inherited from the last dictatorship; a history that still weighs in the collective memory of the Argentine people even after the reestablishment of 'democracy' in the early eighties.

The last dictatorship that ruled Argentina from 1976 till 1983 was considered the most horrifying and violent period in Argentine history. A military junta – led by the three Commanders-in-Chief of the Armed Forces: Lt. General Jorge Videla, head of the army who was also appointed President of Argentina until 1981; Brigadier Orlando Agosti; and Admiral Emilio Massera, heads of the navy and air force, respectively – seized political power by *coup d'état* on 24 March 1976.[35] The new

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[32] M. Sitrin, *Horizontalism*, p. 5.
[33] Ibid, pp. 100-101.
[34] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 36.
[35] With this *coup* the military junta overthrew the constitutional government of the Peronist Isabel Martinez de Perón, the third wife of Juan Domingo Perón, who ran the government after Perón's death

military regime, referred to by its leaders as *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganization Process), or *El Proceso*, was justified by the government as a necessary response to left-wing 'subversives' who were allegedly undermining Argentina's political and economic stability (during the late 1960s). While the 'official' aim of the junta was the 'establishment of a new order in Argentine society through Christian values, national security and justice', in reality, as political scientist Laura Tedesco has observed, its main objectives were:

> ...the removal of the guerrilla, the *disciplinamiento social* through the subordination of the working class in both the political and the economic sphere, and the recovery of the state as 'guarantor not of the *immediate* interests of the bourgeoisie, but of the ensemble of social relations that establish the bourgeoisie as the dominant class'. Its objective was the restructuring of the state and of class relations.[36]

The new military government imposed its 'order' by undertaking two main policies that were broadly supported by the public: a structural reform of the Argentine economy and the re-establishment of social order, which would be achieved through systematic acts of state terrorism.

In order to combat economic inflation, the junta favoured open markets, a re-distribution of income through salary reductions, and smaller public expenditures, while increasing the public and private external debt.[37] The package of economic reforms launched by Videla began undoing the labor rights and welfare state policies that had been the result of decades of workers' struggles.[38] Through the liberalisation and modernisation of the economy, the new government sought to institutionalize the power of the bourgeoisie and of financial capital to include Argentina in the process of capitalist globalization. During this period the military regime borrowed excessively. In fact, 'the external debt was one of the most serious consequences of the dictatorship in the sense that it would continue to severely constrain the future of the Argentine economy.'[39] The dictatorship failed to stabilise the economy and

in 1974. Martinez de Perón's government (1974-76) inherited problems of inflation, labor unrest, and political violence which she was not able to control. She was accused of being a weak government with neither political nor economic goals.

[36] L. Tedesco, op. cit., p. 24. [emphasis in the original text]

[37] Jonathan C. Brown, *A Brief History of Argentina*, 2nd edition, 2010 p. 241.

[38] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 2.

[39] L. Tedesco, op. cit., p. 43.

subsequent generations became encumbered with a massive foreign debt, which eventually led to the collapse of the economy in late December 2001.

While a plan of economic 'normalisation' was implemented by the Minister of Economy, José Martínez de Hoz, to achieve social order, the junta repressed its population by closing the National Congress, imposing censorship, reintroducing the death penalty, and bringing the press, universities, labor unions, as well as state and municipal government agencies under military control. Videla promised to control social unrest by eliminating the leftist guerrilla movements – mostly members of the *Montoneros* (the revolutionary-wing of the Peronist Party) and the Marxist *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* (People's Revolutionary Party) – that had been active in the country since the late 1960s. The Armed Forces justified its brutal actions by claiming that it was fighting a civil war. In this regard, historian Jonathan C. Brown has argued:

> The generals expressed their cause in medical terms: The nation had a 'cancer' (left-wing terrorism) that they had to remove surgically. They believed that Argentina was the entryway through which communism chose to invade South America, and national security demanded harsh countermeasures.[40]

Thus, the guerrilla threat was mainly the authority's excuse to justify 'the use of violence as a means to achieving social discipline.'[41] However, as Tedesco clarifies, when the Armed forces took control, the guerrilla movement had already almost been defeated by the Triple A – Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, the paramilitary squads that began to operate under the cloak of the state after 1973.[42]

With the 1976 *coup*, Argentine history entered another dark period characterized by state terrorism. The armed forces established an organized system of terror, known as the 'dirty war'. Videla and the military junta initiated a brutal campaign against suspected dissidents, political opponents, and anyone believed to be associated with socialism. As Sitrin points out, 'every level of society was monitored and censored.'[43] Thousands of citizens who were perceived as potential threats or who did not support the regime were then persecuted, abducted, and taken to secret detention centers. During this period, the *centros clandestinos de detención*

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[40] J. C. Brown, op. cit., p. 243.
[41] L. Tedesco, op. cit., p. 26.
[42] Ibid.
[43] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 25.

(clandestine detention camps, or CCDs) became the principal political means of achieving *disciplinamiento social*.[44] Around 340 CCDs were established throughout the country, although their existence was resolutely denied by the authorities. While some of these detention centers were located in military installations, others would be located in 'ordinary' places such as: rural schools, hospitals, old radio stations, or other state offices; a fact that demonstrates the impunity with which the military regime operated. Here, 'subversives' were imprisoned, tortured (both physically and psychologically), raped, and/or brutally murdered. In most cases, their bodies were hidden, burned, buried in collective unmarked graves, or thrown from airplanes on the notorious '*vuelos de la muerte*', or 'death flights'. The latter constituted a form of forced disappearance routinely practiced during this period, whereby victims were drugged or sedated and then pushed into the Río de la Plata or the Atlantic Ocean to drown. Pregnant women that gave birth in the detention centers were murdered shortly thereafter and the new-born babies were given for adoption – mainly to military families and government supporters – or confiscated by their captors.[45]

Whereas the selective persecution, torture, and killing of political opponents had been methods implemented by previous dictatorships in Argentina, the enforced disappearance of dissidents as an instituted technology of power (and its related institutional apparatus) was a characteristic particular to the last dictatorial regime; albeit it was also implemented in other Latin American countries.[46] Human rights organizations have estimated that approximately 30,000 persons – between fifteen and thirty-five years of age – were 'disappeared', especially between 1976 and 1978.[47] Guerrilla members, political activists of various tendencies, union leaders and workers, teachers, priests, nuns, lawyers, artists, journalists, students, and intellectuals with left-wing ideals and sympathies were among those who disappeared, clandestinely executed and never to be found. With the term '*desaparecido*', the aim of Videla's totalitarian regime was not only to prevent the

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[44] Pilar Calveiro, *Poder y desaparición. Los campos de concentración en Argentina*, Ediciones Colihue, Buenos Aires, 1997, p. 15. [author's translation]

[45] Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, tr. James P. Brennan, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 2002, p. 218.

[46] P. Calveiro, op. cit., p. 15.

[47] L. A. Romero, *A History of Argentina,* p. 218.

reconstruction of the events by concealing the bodies of those abducted (known as '*los desaparecidos*', or 'the disappeared') as well as the identity of the perpetrators. Their aim was to erase any memory of them. Thus, for the junta, the subversives had to be eliminated 'physically and discursively.'[48]

As mentioned above, in the beginning, the 'dirty war' was broadly supported by a large sector of the population – especially the middle-class – who assumed as its own the authoritarian discourse of the military junta and the social demands for 'order' after the turmoil experienced in Argentina during the previous government. However, public support for the regime began to decline with growing evidence of civil rights violations in the late 1970s. With a few exceptions like the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Disappeared) [Fig. 1.7], who continue to demand justice and punishment of those responsible and the return their stolen children, most people chose to ignore or deny the atrocities and crimes committed by the regime. Any mode of resistance or deviation from the 'order' stipulated by the regime was severely punished. In this sense, the real victims were the living, as Argentine historian Luis Alberto Romero has contended:

> …the whole of society…had to be controlled and dominated by terror and by language. The state became divided in two. One-half practicing terrorism and operating clandestinely, unleashed an indiscriminate repression free from any accountability. The other, public and justifying its authority in laws that it had enacted, silenced all other voices. Only the voice of the state remained, addressing itself to an atomized collection of inhabitants.[49]

Consequently, silence and terror spread throughout the social fabric.[50] The generalized sense of fear and silence that dominated the entire population was possible, to a great extent, because it was particularly promoted by the political authorities and the high ranks of the syndicates and the Catholic Church. This fact would play a crucial role in the submission of the people, as researcher Mercedes Barros has observed:

> The silence of political and union leaders was highly regarded by the military junta who found in their compliance a way of ensuring the widespread silence of the rest of the population and avoid any kind of confrontation and

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[48] Luis Alberto Romero, 'Las raíces de la dictadura', *Puentes*, March 2001, p. 29.
[49] L. A. Romero, *A History of Argentina*, p. 219.
[50] Mercedes María Barros, 'El silencio bajo la última dictadura militar en la Argentina', Pensamento Plural| Pelotas, 5, July-December, 2009, p. 84.

questioning that could jeopardize their plans and objectives. But it would be the silence of the cleric and the Catholic Church that would prove critical to the PRN and its future.[51]

Given the evidence of systematic repression, many Argentine citizens adopted a variety of self-censoring or self-defensive attitudes and behaviours (e.g. denial and cynicism). While the military's extreme violence faced resistance from the cultural community, numerous artists and intellectuals were watched over, and many of their works were either censored by the authorities or self-censored by the artists themselves. During these years, the collective gathering of groups of people in the public space was prohibited. The street itself represented a threat for the Argentine people. Hence, many fled the country and settled abroad, and those that stayed lived in 'internal exile', in hiding, or simply kept a low profile: 'blending into the surroundings while waiting for the breach that would allow a return to the surface.'[52]

Fear was, then, the mechanism through which the junta prompted the population to conform to the objectives and mandates of the regime.[53] Furthermore, the illegal and repressive strategies of the dictatorship were widely received in society due to the long tradition of authoritarianism and exclusion that, for decades, had been a strong component of the political culture in Argentina.[54] In this regard, it must be stressed that *'El Proceso'* and the military regime that began in 1976 was not an isolated experience. Throughout the twentieth century, Argentina had been under dictatorial rule several times: Dictatorship of Uriburu (1930-1932); Dictatorship known as the Revolution of '43 (1943-1946); Dictatorship of the Liberating Revolution (1955-1958); Dictatorship of Guido (1962-1963); the Dictatorship of Onganía or the Argentine Revolution (1966-1973); and lastly, as I have been discussing, the *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (National Reorganization Process, 1976-1983).[55] This long succession of military regimes speaks of the extent to which violence is deeply

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[51] M. M. Barros, op. cit., p. 89. [author's translation]
[52] L. A. Romero, *A History of Argentina*, p. 220.
[53] M. M. Barros, op. cit., p. 83.
[54] Luis Alberto Romero, 'La memoria del Proceso argentino y los problemas de la democracia: La memoria, el historiador y el ciudadano', <http://www.unsam.edu.ar/escuelas/politica/centro_historia_politica/romero/La%20memoria%20del%20procesoargentino.pdf>, p.6, accessed 10 August 2015.
[55] In this study, I mostly make reference to the latter, as it constituted the most critical expression of a succession of authoritarian governments in Argentina.

embedded in Argentina's political life, and society in general.[56] Pilar Calveiro, sociologist and a survivor of the dictatorship, has acknowledged this assertion in her book *Poder y Desaparición* (1997): '…the constant presence of the military in political life manifests the difficulty of hiding the violent character of domination…which is displayed as a perpetual threat, as a constant reminder to the whole of society.'[57]

In Argentina, the imprint and legacy of authoritarianism persists, even after the dissolution of the dictatorial regime, in what Juan Corradi has called a 'culture of fear',[58] a term that refers to the violation of human rights as a massive and daily experience. The longstanding effects of this 'processing' of Argentine society are still present at many levels of society. For instance, this attitude is reflected in the mind-set and expression of distrust, 'No te metas' ('Do not get involved'), an attitude that was commonplace at the time and that continues to be engrained in Argentine society today.[59] More than 30 years later, Argentina continues to grapple with the legacy of the military regime through ongoing human rights trials and a continued search for the lost children of *los desaparecidos* (the disappeared). Although this 'culture of fear' is still felt in Argentine society, as I will discuss further in Chapter III, the rebellion of 2001 challenged this legacy. Not only has it been considered one of the most important insurrections of Argentine contemporary history, but the first great insubordination of the post-dictatorship era.[60]

The new social movements that emerged towards the end of the 1990s and that became protagonists at the height of the 2001 crisis can be understood as a fundamental rupture with this wound in Argentina's past. The hundreds of popular assemblies organized by the people began to recreate what had been broken in the dictatorship. For the neighbours meeting in these assemblies, the new social space created by the assemblies was 'distinct from institutionalized places.'[61] As Natalia, from La Toma and Asamblea Lomas Este (an occupied building and a neighborhood

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[56] L. A. Romero, 'Las raíces de la dictadura', p. 29.
[57] P. Calveiro, op. cit., p.13. [author's translation]
[58] For more on this concept, see: Juan E. Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen & Manuel Antonio Garretón (eds.), *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, 1992.
[59] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 25.
[60] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 67.
[61] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 27.

assembly), recalls: 'It is a place where we can create new ways of being social, and new senses of sociability.'[62]

One of the most representative examples of this rupture with the culture of fear and silence is that of the H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia, contra el Olvido y el Silencio – Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice, against Forgetting and Silence), a human rights organization that emerged in 1995 comprised of the children of those who were disappeared and murdered during the last dictatorship. Against the impunity conceded by the State to those responsible for the genocide, the emergence of H.I.J.O.S. actualized the struggle for memory, truth, and justice in post-authoritarian Argentina. Similar to the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, they address society as a whole in an attempt to break with the 'atmosphere of silence and forgetting' in which they were brought up.[63] They achieved this through a practice called *escraches,* a tactic for social awareness that is based on direct action, theatre and education. In the local scene, *escrachar* means 'to put into evidence, disclose to the public, or reveal what is hidden.'[64] As defined by Colectivo Situaciones, an *escrache* is:

> a particular organizational form that consists of demonstrating in front of the house of former military officers in order to expose their ongoing impunity, occupying public space with colorful signs, graffiti, and street art.[65]

Linked to many other social movements that were active in the Argentine scene at the time, H.I.J.O.S. introduced a new format of protest and a new pattern of collective organization combining an anti-repression militant ethos, direct action, and the search for more flexible organizations based on horizontality.[66] In the following years, the *escraches* would become a practice common to many militant collectives, especially to many cultural and artists' collectives, such as Grupo de Arte Callejero and Etcétera, whose collaboration in the *escraches* contributed to consolidate the identity and visibility of this strategy of social protest in the Argentine society [Fig. 1.8].

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[62] M. Sitrin, *Horizontalism*, p. 149.
[63] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 20.
[64] Ibid, p. 22.
[65] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 29.
[66] M. Svampa, *La Sociedad Excluyente*, p. 215.

The Phenomenon of *Autogestión* in Contemporary Argentina

The new social protests that emerged outside traditional party politics in the wake of the crisis involved a heterogeneous set of actions, as well as social actors and forms of collective organization.[67] These, in turn, resulted in the emergence of a collection of practices and languages that gave way to a new type of intervention in the social and political sphere.[68] Among these was the practice of a*utogestión*, which became a significant feature of the times mainly driven by autonomous social movements, such as that of unemployed worker's movement or *piqueteros* (picketers), which emerged in the Argentine scene in the mid-1990s during the administration of President Carlos Menem. The *piqueteros* was perhaps the largest among the new movements of resistance [Figs. 1.9]. Although some of the most visible *piquetero* methods consisted of barricading, burning and blocking urban arteries, the *piquetero* movement also embodied a political organization, grouping a multiple and heterogeneous variety of social practices, including self-organization. With the deterioration of the economy in 2001, the movement began to 'gain legitimacy within the middle classes who joined them in the streets in response to additional pension and salary cuts implemented by a government scrambling to avoid the inevitable debt default.'[69] This trend soon became a frequent form of protest that still prevails on the South American socio-political scene.

The movement of worker-recuperated enterprises (*empresas recuperdas por sus trabajadores*, or ERT) was also among the new formations advocating for *autogestión* during this period [Fig. 1.10]. The actions of this movement, which involves roughly 180-200 mostly small- and medium-sized enterprises, consisted in 'the seizure of deteriorating, bankrupted, or failed companies from former owners, their potential occupation of them for weeks or months, and their desire to put them

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[67] M. Svampa, 'Las dimensiones de las nuevas protestas sociales', *Revista El Rodaballo*, Buenos Aires, Winter 2002, <http://www.maristellasvampa.net/archivos/ensayo12.pdf>, accessed 30 January 2013.

[68] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 24.

[69] Francesca Fiorentini, '2002-2012: Remembering the Social Movements that Reimagined Argentina', The Argentina Independent, 17 January 2012, <http://www.argentinaindependent.com/currentaffairs/analysis/2002-2012-remembering-the-social-movements-that-reimagined-argentina/>, accessed 21 March 2014.

into operation once again under *autogestión*.'[70] As such, most ERTs originated as a direct and immanent response of the workers' deep concern 'about becoming structurally unemployed.'[71] In occupying and managing their work places for themselves, this movement directly questioned the logic of private property as well as the hierarchical dynamics inherent within capitalist labor structures.

In addition to the *piqueteros* and the ERTs, countless grassroots groups and surging networks of solidarity spearheaded by self-managed microenterprises, affordable housing activists, human rights groups, and environmental and rural groups also experimented with and concretely practised *autogestión*, as social researcher Marcelo Vieta has observed.[72] However, it is important to note that the emergence of these initiatives was not a direct effect of the crisis; many of these manifestations had been developing for some years from the radical experiences led by the new social movements that originated as a response to the consolidation of neoliberal models implemented in the region since the 1990s.[73]

Although *autogestión* has a long tradition in Argentina dating back to the nineteenth century (libertarian/anarcho-sindicalist tradition), the term *autogestión* became a buzzword during the popular uprisings of December 2001. Phrases like 'La solución, Autogestión' ('The solution, self-organization') or 'Ni Dios, Ni Patria, Autogestión' ('No God, No Country, Self-organization') [Fig. 1.11], written in the monument located in front of the official state building, Casa Rosada, in Buenos Aires' Plaza de Mayo, were public manifestations of the militant ethos underlying the collective practices of *autogestión* which were taking place throughout the country. In a context defined by a vacuum of political power and severe economic necessity, *clubes de trueque* (bartering clubs) – which had existed prior to the crash – began to multiply all over the country. Reaching 5,000 members in 2002, 'these clubs invented their own forms of currency and began to trade food, goods, and services, creating an

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[70] Marcelo Vieta, 'Autogestión and the Worker-Recuperated Enterprises in Argentina: The Potential for Reconstituting Work and Recomposing Life', paper presented to the 1st Anarchist Studies Network conference, Loughborough University, UK, 4–6 September 2008, <http://www.anarchist-studies-network.org.uk/Re-Imagining_Revolution>, accessed 27 July 2011.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Colectivo Situaciones, 'Argentina. A través y más allá de la crisis', March 2003, para.4, <http://www.nodo50.org/colectivosituaciones/articulos_07.htm>, accessed 2 February 2011.

alternative economy based on principles of solidarity.'[74] In the same communal spirit, hundreds of popular assemblies were created across the country [Fig. 1.12]. Designed to meet local community needs, these assemblies adopted diverse forms of self-production, besides alternative social and economic engagement, such as: waste recycling, public dining rooms, popular education initiatives, communal gardens and workshops, cooperative health clinics, and radio stations. Involving thousands of active participants at times, the neighbourhood assemblies – which referred to themselves as '*autoconvocados*' (self-convoked) – were based on horizontality, or horizontal social relations, and direct democracy.

As will be discussed in Chapter III, the new forms of social organization reflected efforts to rebuild the social ties that had been broken, not only due to the neoliberal model, but since the last military dictatorship. Notably, they were not trying to take state power, but, as Colectivo Situaciones has asserted, they articulated a 'counterpower' through the creation of alternative ways of living and relating to one another. Based on anarchist principles, they constructed new relationships and social networks rejecting the hierarchical 'power-over' template by established politics in favor of a 'power-with' or more egalitarian model of social organization.[75]

The popular revolts at the beginning of the new millennium inaugurated a moment of intense social, political, and cultural creativity.[76] 'It was a time when creativity was mixed with protest', as Giunta has argued.[77] From the manifestations of the *piqueteros* to the popular neighborhood assemblies, from bartering clubs and networks to recuperated factories, from *cartoneros*[78] to small independent publishers to music cooperatives, thousands of people became involved in self-organized projects to support one another and to manage their own sustenance and survival.[79]

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[74] F. Fiorentini, op. cit.

[75] M. Sitrin, 'Ruptures in Imagination', p. 45.

[76] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 17.

[77] A. Giunta, 'Post-crisis', p. 111.

[78] One of the most visible consequences of the 2001 crisis was the proliferation of waste scavengers or *cartoneros*, as they became popularly known. *Cartonero*, wich comes from the Spanish word *cartón* (cardboard), refers to persons that informally collect and sell paper, but it quickly extended to incorporate a wide range of recyclable materials. By 2002, an estimate of 40,000 *cartoneros* were operating in Buenos Aires as a survival measure against the high levels of unemployment and poverty. Over the past decade, the *cartoneros* have been self-organizing themselves into cooperatives, gaining recognition as a spatial as much as a socio-economic phenomenon. Furthermore, new collectives have formed to sort through what the *cartoneros* collect and to sell it or turn it into new products.

[79] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 125.

In consonance with the spirit of the popular assemblies and the *piquetes*, the collective experience of taking matters into common hands also permeated the artistic scene. At the same time that institutional structures were being dismantled, artists took to the streets, appropriating urban space and organizing ad hoc forms of visual and performative interventions. The entire city was occupied as visual artists also created spaces for action, debate, and collective organization. This immediate response revealed, as sociologist Ana Wortman explains, 'a new way of positioning of a section of artists in relation to social conflicts and forms of thought.'[80]

The economic crisis 'catalyzed the process of shifting the aesthetic order in a more collective direction.'[81] The figure of the individual artist disappeared, at least for a while, according to Giunta, dissolving into the wider collective social body.[82] As the city became collectivized, so too did artistic production. This was evinced mainly by the emergence and proliferation of (1) artists' groups or collectives – some of which were linked to social movements and activist groups, i.e. GAC and Taller Popular de Serigrafía (TPS); and (2) artist's initiatives based on *autogestión*. It is important to note that, although many of them did emerge at the height of the revolt (e.g. TPS, Argentina Arde, Arde Arte!, and Proyecto Venus, among others), the collective organization of artists in itself was not new within the Argentine art scene. Many examples can be cited throughout the twentieth century: Artistas del Pueblo in the 1920s–30s; Movimiento Madí in the 1940s; CAYC-Centro de Arte y Comunicación (Art and Communication Centre) in the 1960s–70s; Escombros since the 1980s; Grupo de Arte Callejero, founded in 1997; and Grupo Etcétera in 1998, among many others. In fact, the constant presence of different collective social forms or artistic associations makes this a feature of continuity in the history of art in Argentina. While the appearance of these collective artistic manifestations was not a direct result of the crisis, 'the weakened condition of institutions post-crisis lent further potential to these collaborative strategies.'[83] As Giunta observed:

> Groups multiplied and proposed a form of aesthetic production that was not new but spread quickly and presented itself as capable of having an immediate

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[80] A. Wortman, *Entre la política y la gestión de la cultura y el arte*, p. 12. [author's translation]
[81] Craig Epplin, *Late Book Culture in Argentina*, Bloomsbury, New York/London, 2014, p. 61.
[82] A. Giunta, *Poscrisis*, p. 73.
[83] A. Giunta, 'Post-crisis', p. 113.

influence on the order of things.[84]

As previously mentioned, the visibility gained by artists working in a collective manner, and the extent to which they became widespread in the period post-2001, has led art historians and researchers – like Giunta, Longoni, Svampa, and others – to identify arts' collectivization as one of the main legacies of the crisis. In my view, this affirmation is somewhat problematic as authors use 'artists' collectives' as an umbrella term that encapsulates most practices and productions by artists whose work privileges collectivity or that are based on collective collaboration. This collapsing of the term is not unique to Argentina's art historical discourse, but extends to the broader field of contemporary art at a global level. Consequently, as previously mentioned, the use of the term *autogestión*, or its English variant 'self-organization', invariably overlaps with that of 'artists' collectives', and even with that of the 'artist-run movement' or 'independent/alternative spaces'. The overlapping of these notions can be partly explained by the fact that they all represent different instances of resistance, sharing similar values and motivations, such as: the attempt at challenging or contesting existing power relations within the field; a certain rhetoric of change and transformation; and critical efforts to theorize representation as a contested arena and to create venues for self-representation and distribution. So, while there might be some overlapping between these concepts, a distinction between these terms is necessary in order to unpack what is distinctive about *autogestión* and how I deploy the term in my analysis of the case of Trama. Although the topics of art collectivism, artist-run movement and independent spaces, have been a recent art historical theme internationally, I will limit my discussion here to establishing a distinction between 'artists' collectives' and *autogestión* in the context of 'artists' initiatives' in Argentina. This responds to the need to remain within the boundaries of the local art historical discourse.

In her book *Poscrisis*, Giunta defines the term 'artists' collectives' as a group of artists that act and work in an independent manner. As she points out, artists tend to get together in order to facilitate the financing of a (work/studio) space because they share similar ideas and ways of working, because they have common agendas, or to

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[84] A. Giunta, 'Post-crisis', p. 113.

promote forms of creativity developed from working together.[85] While the practice of *autogestión* also reflects an independent and collective sense of artistic practice, it connotes a discourse based on ideas of empowerment, participation, direct action, and democracy. As the example of Trama shows, it could be said that, it refers to artists who work collectively in the creation of platforms independent of institutional or corporate structures, which are non-hierarchical, open, and operate participatory decision-making processes.

Although *autogestión* can be, in many respects, a slippery term, in its reference to artistic production, it points to artists' claims for autonomy, demands of self-determination and control over their own work. That is, they assume the responsibility of creating their own alternative circuits of production, dissemination, and reception of their work. Artists involved in these initiatives tend to seek acknowledgement from their peers, bypassing the mediation of legitimating figures such as art gallerists, critics, curators, and other cultural operators.

Even though artistic collective practices, and even that of individual artists, can be based on *autogestión*, in the particular case of this study, *autogestión* is understood to constitute a fundamental characteristic of artists' initiatives. The term 'artist's initiative', which in itself is no less problematic, refers to a wide constellation of artist-generated activities that tend to range from temporary event-based projects or activities that are context specific to spaces or platforms that can either occupy a fixed location or have a more nomadic character. Its particularity lies in that the landscape of artists' initiatives and the pluriform shapes they take is ineluctably set against the backdrop of globalization, and, therefore, against the challenges and demands imposed by an increasingly globalized art world. Within the particularities of their field, artists' initiatives strive to find new ways of questioning current structures and conditions, and of negotiating the challenges imposed by globalization processes and neoliberal politics. They do this, not by directly opposing the mechanisms of globalization, but by critically embracing globalizing tendencies from their respective localities. In so doing, they position themselves in 'the territory between active social engagement and autonomous experimentation', from which they claim ideological

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[85] A. Giunta, *Poscrisis*, p. 253.

and physical spaces that consider broader political and social implications.[86] The political potential of artist's initiatives has been, perhaps, most explicitly stated by writer and curator, Charles Esche:

> These organizations are concerned with art and culture though they could also be involved in other independent political or social activities. Such groups of artists have emerged as the key force in art making as artists have developed alternative strategies to negotiate a different basis for making institutions, questioning the relationship between art and society and reflecting the position of art in relation to globalism... Young artists want to instigate independent alternative spaces so that they can continue to exist in places to which they are committed without leaving for the presumed centers or being dominated by the market and central institutions. This development is a very beautiful metaphor for the power of negotiation between globalized economic power and all kinds of effort to provide alternative solutions and local responses.[87]

In the specific context of Trama, the term 'artists' initiatives' was borrowed from Dutch art discourse; most particularly, from RAIN – Rijksakademie Artists' Initiatives Network.[88] This network was set up in 2000 by former students of the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, who were engaged in or had an interest in setting up artist-led projects in their respective contexts. Claudia Fontes, who had been doing an artistic training in the Rijksakademie at the end of the 1990s, belonged to the initial group of artists that participated in this network. In fact, as I discuss below, it was during her period of training at the art academy in Amsterdam that Fontes outlined the first version of what would later become Trama's program. The initial proposal was conceptualized as a program of cooperation among visual artists developed in the city of Buenos Aires. Later, when the possibility of materializing the project appeared, its scope was extended, becoming a nation-wide program for cooperation and artistic exchange. RAIN's support was crucial in this regard as it made possible, to a great extent, the setting up of Trama's project. Hence, Trama was part of an international artists' network since its inception, alongside initiatives like Ruangrupa (Jakarta, Indonesia); Open Circle (Mumbai, India); Pulse

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[86] Charles Esche, *Modest Proposals*, Baglam Publishing, Turkey, 2005, p. 31.
[87] See, Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, 'Harnessing the means of production', New Institutionalism, 2003, <www.shiftyparadigms.org/harnessing_means.htm>, accessed 25 January 2008.
[88] RAIN was initially set up with the support of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs/Development Co-operation.

(Durban, South Africa); Centre Soleil d'Afrique (Bamako, Mali); Art Bakery (Douala, Cameroon); El Despacho (Mexico); and CEIA (Belo Horizonte, Brazil).

The focus of RAIN was to promote artistic research and experimentation, as well as the exchange of ideas and artistic experiences within South-South and South-North axes. In the context of RAIN, South-South exchanges referred to those between Latin America, Africa and Asia (eventually incorporating the Middle East), while South-North referred to exchanges between these continents and 'the West' (i.e. USA and Europe), in the direction stated. Although the nature and objectives of the initiatives were all different from each other, 'a common denominator for most of the partners in RAIN is the aim to create an alternative place – not yet existing – in their countries for (young) artists to discuss, produce and/or present their work.'[89]

Initially, the projects supported by RAIN were meant to foster art production and exchange among the artists belonging to the network. Eventually, after the insistence of a few members – including Fontes – the scope was expanded to support projects including artists or initiatives from outside the network. In this sense, although the discourse of artists' initiatives in Trama was appropriated from RAIN, the way it was adapted to the Argentine context meant that it had a collective or community-based component since the beginning. In other words, Trama – as an artist-initiated program – was conceived as a collective platform for the art community, rather than for promoting the individual work of the artists that organized it. Following Trama's own definition, 'artists' initiatives' referred to:

> …self-managed projects by artists, either collectively or individually, but in each case with community-oriented objectives. These organizations, projects and undertakings play a key role in the local production of art, artistic thought, artistic formation and education, and in the distribution of culture in general, especially where the State fails to meet the needs of the community in terms of culture, and in cases where the visual arts do not represent a profitable business for the private sector.[90]

Generally set up by artists for artists, Trama's concept of artists' initiatives constituted a wide constellation of artist-generated activity, playing important roles in the

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[89] For more information on the RAIN network, see: http://www.r-a-i-n.net/.
[90] See, *Trama: El Encuentro. Jornadas regionales de intercambio en gestión artística y redes de cooperación cultural en Latinoamérica* [brochure], Buenos Aires, 2005, p. 1.

communities where they are established. In this sense, it is closely related to an 'artist-run paradigm' in the 'suggested provision of services for and challenges to artists that other entities cannot or do not want to provide.'[91] Thus, whereas artists' collectives refer to artists that get together to produce an artwork or project resulting in shared authorship, artists' initiatives tend to focus more on services, facilitation of infrastructure, and the socialization of resources and symbolic capital. Consequently, they tend to be regarded as constituting an alternative to mainstream institutions.

The practice of a*utogestión* enables a directed vocabulary to take place around how artists *do* things. Thus, within the context of this study, the focus is placed on the doing. It entails a move away from the artwork to the *practice* itself, and the conditions and relations of production within artistic practice. Implicit in the practice of *autogestión* is an ethic of generosity or hospitality. Thus, *autogestionar* is the verb that drives how artists democratically and ethically reconstitute productive (artistic) life.

In the particular context of Argentina, the practice of *autogestión* became a defining characteristic of the artists' initiatives which started to emerge and organize themselves into networks, producing different apparatuses of collaboration, participation, relations, and social weavings.[92] Artist and sociologist, Syd Krochmalny researched the self-organizing trend in Argentina, observing that many of the groups that had been operating before the 2001 crisis broadened their activities, stimulating, in part, the emergence of new self-organized and self-legitimating entities. By the mid-2000s, more than 80 artist-led initiatives and organizations had been established or created in Buenos Aires and throughout the Central and Northern provinces. Their proposals were wide-ranging; from exhibition spaces to web-based projects, from independent publications to artists' residencies and pedagogical projects. By way of example, one of the independent spaces with the longest trajectory is Casa 13 in the city of Córdoba. Established in 1993, it started as a workshop/seminar in the Escuela de Bellas Artes (School of Fine Arts) that went by the name of 'Centre of Communication and Production - ARTE'. It was dedicated to the study of new aesthetic languages and aspects related to production and cultural management. One year later,

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[91] Clive Robertson, *Policy Matters: Administrations of Art and Culture*, YYZBooks, Toronto, 2006, p. 5.
[92] S. Krockmalny, 'Arte en relación', para. 15.

as they themselves have described, they started operating in a house – #13 – that was 'taken over' from the houses belonging to the cultural complex 'Paseo de las Artes' under the administration of Cordoba's town hall authorities. Since then, this appropriated house has hosted a number of exhibitions (mainly of young local and international artists), seminars, workshops, *'clínicas',* artistic residencies, editorial projects, a documentation center, and a radio program. The house – which comprises a kitchen, a lounge, a multi-purpose living room, a bathroom, a small study and a yard – is permanently inhabited. Through its residency program, Casa 13 has promoted the functioning of the house as a space that is public, open, and politically engaged; a space that has been created and sustained by and through resistance. Although the profile of the house has changed over the years, it has been a place devoted to experimentation and encounters, a place 'where art-related problems serve as starting point for building up new social, political and cultural senses.'[93] In this way, through the myriad of events organized and the transversal links and connections established with other artists, spaces, and cultural institutions, Casa 13 encourages the cross-pollination of experiences and ideas that feed back into the local cultural scene.

Another artist initiative that emerged in the early 1990s, is La Baulera Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, located in the city of San Miguel de Tucumán. It was created and co-directed by theatre (stage) director and artist, Jorge Gutiérrez, in 1993, initially as an experimental theatre group focused on production and research. In 2002, it acquired juridical status as a non-profit Civil Association, and in 2004 opened a Contemporary Art Center, which closed in 2010, focusing on contemporary art productions (such as performances, actions, and public interventions), artistic training, and activities on cultural management. Since its inception, La Baulera had been dedicated, not only to the production of artistic events, but to the development of strategies for the distribution and reception of contemporary ideas and aesthetics in the local community and the region. La Baulera proposed a new mode of artistic organization in the local art scene, attracting many artists and promoting significant exchanges with other initiatives and cultural institutions, it became a point of

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[93] Trama, *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 115.

reference in the city, resulting in the strengthening and increased visibility of the local artistic productions in the national art scene.

Proyecto VOX in Bahía Blanca is an independent editorial project that, since 1995, has been committed to fostering and developing links between contemporary poetry and the visual arts. It was founded by artist and editor, Gustavo López, who initiated the publication of VOX magazine, publishing works of many local and national writers and poets. From 1999 to 2006, it operated as an exhibition space, Espacio VOX, focused on the production and critical analysis of contemporary aesthetic practices. With time, 'writers from the area joined the original group and the activities continued: management of events, organization of art exhibitions, scholarship developments, and *'clínicas'* with teachers from other parts of the country who contributed to establishing an invigorating relationship among Bahía Blanca creators.'[94]

Another initiative worthy of mention is Duplus, which was a collective devoted to the research and experimentation of artistic thought and creative processes. In its early stages, between the end of 1999 and the end of 2001, Duplus served as an independent space housing exhibitions of contemporary art managed by artists Santiago García Aramburu, Lucio Dorr, Pablo Ziccarello, and Hernán Salamanco. The events of 2001 prompted the group to rethink its role within the art field and, towards the end of 2002, a new team – formed by Santiago García Aramburu, Valeria González, Teresa Riccardi and Santiago García Navarro – took over with new objectives and interests. The new context characterized by social upheaval and resistance prompted Duplus to question the concept and limits of the exhibition space and to redefine the conceptual bases of their curatorial practice. Rather than being oriented to the exhibition of works of art, aesthetic ideas, or actions, they engaged in the creation of links or networks connecting various sources of symbolic production, fostering relational practices among people and organizations that hold either loose relations or were not related at all. Thus, in Duplus' perspective, curatorial practice would no longer be restricted to the art sphere, but may also create suitable conditions for social creativity or creative situations beyond the artistic realm. To this end, Duplus

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[94] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias: Experiences and Projects in Contemporary Argentine Art*, Editorial Trama, Buenos Aires, 2002, p. 163.

established workshops to reflect collectively on artistic practice; produced and circulated texts and archives; and created public practices 'beyond the logic of communication'. During its second phase, Duplus sought to establish deeper relationships with other artistic projects and initiatives in Latin America, which resulted – as will be discussed in Chapter III – in the Meeting of Independent Contemporary Art Organisations from Latin America and the Caribbean, co-organized with Trama in 2003.

Belleza y Felicidad (ByF) was created in 1999 by Fernanda Laguna (artist and writer) and Cecilia Pavón (writer) [Fig. 1.13]. It was initiated as an underground editorial project that promoted the use of unusual materials and later developed into an art gallery in Buenos Aires. By 2002, Pavón disassociated from the project and Laguna continued managing the gallery until it closed down in 2007. Besides housing the editorial project, ByF exhibited the works of many national and international artists. ByF also organized a variety of musical events, poetry readings, jam sessions, and literary clubs. It was conceived as a heterogeneous and open space that promoted experimental modes of artistic and literary practice and community. Described as 'the anti-thesis to the traditional cultural model in Argentina',[95] ByF created a space where the traditional hierarchies and conceptions of art where deliberately questioned and challenged.

Interestingly, Laguna was also involved in the foundation of worker cooperative and publishing house, Eloísa Cartonera, which was established in 2003 by Laguna in association with writer, Washington Cucurto, and visual artist, Javier Barilaro, in the neighborhood of La Boca in the city of Buenos Aires [Fig. 1.14]. Since then, the small independent press has been dedicated to making artisanal books of contemporary Latin American literature out of cardboard material purchased from the *cartoneros* (urban cardboard pickers), many of whom would also participate in the workshops. In this sense, the project can be regarded as a product of the crisis. As they themselves describe: 'Eloísa Cartonera was born in 2003, in those furious days when people took the streets, protesting, fighting, gathering in neighborhood

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[95] Cecilia Palmeiro, 'Belleza y Felicidad: Girls just want to have fun', Crítica Latinoamericana [website], n/d, <http://criticalatinoamericana.com/belleza-y-felicidad-girls-just-wanna-have-fun/>, accessed 15 March 2014.

assemblies, the barter clubs, all sorts of communal and collaborative endeavours.'[96] Eloísa Cartonera's editorial collection comprises more than 200 titles of fiction and poetry by many well-renowned Argentine and Latin-American writers, such as: César Aira, Ricardo Piglia, Alan Pauls, Rodolfo Fogwill, Enrique Lihn, Martín Adán, Dani Umpi, and Mario Bellatin, among others. Eloísa Cartonera has also participated in various art exhibitions and projects as well as literary conferences and book fairs. Its precarious aesthetics and style has been autonomously replicated in many Latin American countries and beyond.

Another self-organized project that emerged around the time of the crisis was Proyecto Venus, created in 2001 by visual artist and sociologist, Roberto Jacoby, who had been active in the Argentine art scene since the late 1960s. This was one of the main initiatives supported by Fundación START (Fundación Sociedad, Tecnología y Arte), a non-profit organization begun by Jacoby in 1999. This initiative focused on experimentation and the development of networks that could articulate and expand the cultural activities in Argentina. The self-organized micro-society was constituted by a network of artists and groups who exchanged goods, services, abilities and knowledge by using their own, self-issued currency called the 'Venus'. In their text, 'Experimental Communities', Reinaldo Laddaga and Carlos Basualdo describe the project as follows:

> …[A]t a time of severe economic and political crisis in the country, Jacoby invited several dozen people to develop a fictitious market. The means of exchange in this market would be a specific currency, which he called 'Venus' (this is why the project was given the name of 'Proyecto Venus'). Each member received a set number of Venuses and was invited to announce services and goods that he or she would be willing to offer on the project's website. The services and goods were bought and sold using the new currency. A multitude of offerings were immediately produced, from the most trivial (classes in painting or English, woodcutting services) to the most idiosyncratic (the preparation of unusual banquets and other anomalous social gatherings).[97]

Interestingly, as Ana Longoni has noted, by creating a system of relations based with a currency of their own, the artists and other participants involved reproduced within

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[96] For more information, see: http://www.eloisacartonera.com.ar/ENGversion.html
[97] Carlos Basualdo & Reinaldo Laddaga, 'Experimental Communities', in Beth Hinderliter et al., *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2009, p. 210.

the cultural field the kind of bartering clubs that propagated in the period pre- and post-2001 when several types of alternative currencies were circulating in Argentina.[98] However, while the bartering clubs emerged out of necessity, Venus sought to stimulate the 'production and circulation of other images and desires.'[99] Conceived both as an 'economic game' and a 'political experiment', Proyecto Venus was 'an advanced experience in the field of technoculture', as they themselves have stated.[100] It relied on new digital technologies, like the Internet, to articulate the virtual community with spaces for interpersonal encounters, encouraging in this way new modes of social relations. The networks and exchanges promoted by Proyecto Venus were not limited to the their interactions via the project's website, they also crystallized through a wide variety of collaborative projects and artistic events organized in different galleries and cultural centers in Buenos Aires and in the rest of the country.

The period post-2001 would also see the emergence of El Levante, a project that was initiated in Rosario in 2003 and, during its early years, would maintain close ties with Trama [Fig. 1.15]. Coordinated by Mauro Machado, Graciela Carnevale, Lorena Cardona and Luján Castellani, El Levante was established in response to the increasing demand posed by young artists for training and exchange in the city of Rosario. It started as a workshop dedicated to the discussion of artistic practice and production in order to stimulate dialogue and exchange among artists. Emphasizing horizontal communication bonds as well as connections between the country and the region, it later incorporated, in addition to the workshops, an exhibition space and artists' residencies. In the beginning, the aim of the initiative was twofold: to create an 'alternative training space where artists from [the] region can multiply their possibilities of action'[101] taking into consideration the local specificities of the social and political context, and to contribute to the expansion and 'consolidation of a more mature, dynamic and complex cultural environment in Rosario.'[102] Most recently, after

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[98] Ana Longoni (ed.), *Roberto Jacoby. El deseo nace del derrumbe: acciones, conceptos, escritos*, La Central/Adriana Hidalgo Editora/Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2011, p. 420.
[99] C. Basualdo & R. Laddaga, op. cit., p. 211.
[100] Trama, *The Network as a Common Place: Strategies for Participation and Cooperation in Artistic Projects in Argentina*, Editorial Trama, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 119.
[101] Ibid, p. 117.
[102] Ibid.

a careful evaluation of the project and outcomes, the attention has been placed on collaborative projects that enable the discussion of new modes of seeing and doing and that can generate new meanings through critical reflection and collective engagement.

As these multiple and heterogeneous examples show – many of which were linked through and by Trama –, artists' initiatives in the Argentine context of this period can be characterized by their focus on: (1) the organization of independent platforms or exhibition spaces; (2) the organization of projects, programs or events; (3) the production and transmission of knowledge (informal educational) through training courses and workshops, archives and publications; (4) an emphasis on experimentation, collaboration and interdisciplinarity; (5) the organization of networks; and (6) the organization of artistic residencies or exchange programs.[103] Whereas initiatives within these categories – which are not mutually exclusive, but in many cases overlap – are based on collaborative work, they differ greatly in terms of their objectives, organizational forms, production structures, and levels of political engagement. In the period post-crisis, these platforms and networks of collective *autogestión* worked, not only as a dispositif of visibility, but they also produced space and enabled a particular discourse around artists' initiatives and self-organization in art that was not present before.

While many of these initiatives of alternative production and circulation gained great attention in local and international circuits, between 2004 and 2006, the momentum and sense of urgency of the phenomenon declined given the break in solidarities, unresolved differences within groups, exhaustion, and the pre-eminence of personal aspirations.[104] As Krochmalny has contended, this was partly due to the simultaneous process of expansion of the institutional art system and the art market, which accompanied the recovery of the economy in the following years. The case of the MALBA-Colección Constantini, inaugurated in 2001, is particularly interesting in this regard. While, on the one hand, the glass façade of the building (the only one of its kind in the city of Buenos Aires) evoked the years of splendour of a decade that

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[103] Syd Krochmalny, 'Tecnologías de la amistad: Las formas sociales de producción, gestión y circulación artística en base a la amistad', *Ramona* [website], <http://www.ramona.org.ar/node/21668>, accessed 14 March 2012.

[104] S. Krochmalny, 'Arte en relación', para. 19.

was coming to an end, on the other, the museum would soon become part of the new scenario that began to take shape within the art field in the period post-2001, and that would be attested by the expansion of artistic creativity and the creation of new spaces for the development of contemporary visual arts.[105] In this regard, Andrea Giunta has noted: 'Despite the instability posed by the 2001 crisis, this museum was able to swiftly articulate a program of exhibitions, becoming one of the most solid institutions in the Argentine art scene post-2001.'[106] Thus, one of the main characteristics of the art scene in the period immediately following the 2001 crisis was the emergence of, either new, or transformed public cultural institutions. Among these were: the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in the city of Neuquén (2000); the MAC-UNaM (Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de la Universidad Nacional de Misiones (2002); the MACRO – Museum of Contemporary Art in Rosario (2004); the new headquarters of the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Bahía Blanca (2004); the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Salta (2004); and the new installation of the collection of Argentine art in the MNBA – Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (2005). The emergence of new art museums in the provinces outside Buenos Aires was, to a great extent, linked to the appearance of *artistas-gestores* who undertook the task of developing new art institutions in in these regions, as Giunta has noted.[107]

The qualitative and quantitative increase of art institutions that took place in the general context of normalization and reactivation of the economy, was also accompanied by an increase in cultural tourism. In addition, Krochmalny has observed that during this period there was also an increase in public and private sponsorships for the arts, publications, grants and prizes, artists participating in residencies abroad, as well as an increase in the sales of contemporary artworks.[108] Concurring with Guinta, it would seem paradoxical that the field of the visual arts would flourish, while

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[105] Andrea Giunta, 'Crisis y patrimonio', in Luis E. Cárcamo-Huechante, Alvaro Fernández Bravo & Alejandra Laera (eds.), *El valor de la cultura. Arte, literatura y mercado en América Latina*, Beatriz Viterbo Editora, Rosario, 2007, p. 221.
[106] Ibid, p. 222.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Syd Krochmalny, 'Tres hipótesis sobre ramona y el arte contemporáneo argentino', *Ramona*, 101, July 2010, p. 62.

the country was undergoing one of the most dramatic and profound crises in its history.[109]

This institutional expansion, in turn, increased the opportunities and expectations for artists to become inserted in the art system or to associate themselves with official projects. Consequently, by mid-2000s, the necessity of artists to collectivize their practices had seemingly decreased. Many artists returned to their studios, while a process of fragmentation and segmentation of groups, collectives and networks of solidarity, as well as indications of state and private institutional cooptation of artists' initiatives, began to take place.[110]

Regardless of its inevitable decline, the artist-led action and discourse that became widespread in the period post-2001 played an indisputable role in the reconfiguration of the Argentine contemporary art scene, expanding artistic practice, and generating new contexts for art production parallel to the institutional system. Beyond the collectivization of art, I argue, that what emerged as an innovative element during this period was the validation of *autogestión* within the artistic landscape and in the field of cultural production in Argentina.

Autogestión as Emancipatory Mode of Political Action

As the effects of the crisis encompassed the totality of political, economic, social and cultural life, the practice of *autogestión* was also generalized, extending to almost every aspect of everyday life. As Sitrin has observed, people saw themselves creating the future in the present, through direct action, agency, and the creation of new democratic relations.[111] Sitrin's words recall those of French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre pertaining to the concept of *autogestión.* Although highly overlooked by scholars of Lefebvre, his notion on *autogestión* forms 'the basis of his understanding of politics and his hope for the future.'[112] With this concept, Lefebvre

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109 A. Giunta, 'Crisis y patrimonio', p. 222.
110 Ibid.
111 M. Sitrin, 'Ruptures in Imagination', p. 47.
112 Mark Purcell, 'State, Space, World: Selected Essays' [book review], *Social & Cultural Geography*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2012, pp. 203-204.

emphasizes the re-appropriation by groups and individuals of the conditions of their own existence, so that they can create a world in which power remains with the people, rather than being governed by outside authorities, i.e. the state or corporations. According to his definition:

> Each time a social group…refuses to accept passively its conditions of existence, of life, or of survival, each time such a group forces itself not only to understand but to master its own conditions of existence, *autogestion* is occurring.[113]

Thus, *autogestión* is by definition a process whereby people govern themselves. Extending it beyond the definition of 'worker's self-management' or the management of economic affairs, Lefebvre expounds a multifaceted conceptualization of the term which extended to all aspects of social life. It is precisely because of this broad understanding that I turn to Lefebvre in this study. As he would later insist in his text 'From the Social Pact to the Contract of Citizenship' (1991):

> *Autogestion* is defined as knowledge of and control by a group…over the conditions governing its existence and its survival through change. Through *autogestion*, these social groups are able to influence their own reality.[114]

Lefebvre relies on *autogestión* as constituting a potent strategy for radical transformation, a practical way to change life. In this sense, Lefebvre's notion of *autogestión*, is permeated with possibility, it enables the movement towards 'the possible'. This characterization should be understood as 'a thinking through of what makes something possible, its historical conditions; and…as an opening of what might be (or become) possible within that context.'[115] As Stuart Elden observes, the practice of *autogestión* 'offers future promise, new potentials.'[116] To advocate for *autogestión*, then, is to assume a position with regards to the future; to imagine the future and generate the conditions of possibility of such social form.

However, contrary to the widespread understanding of *autogestión* as a 'model', rather than something that is achieved or established once and for all, for

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[113] Henri Lefebvre, 'Comments on a New State Form', in N. Brenner & S. Elden (eds.), *State, Space, World*, p. 135.

[114] S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, p. 227.

[115] N. Brenner & S. Elden, op. cit., p. 134.

[116] Ibid, p. 243.

Lefebvre, '*autogestion* is itself the site and stake of struggle.'[117] It implies a conflictual, contradictory process through which participants 'continually engage in self-criticism, participation, debate, deliberation, conflict, and struggle...'[118] Through this process of continual struggle, new problems are posed and must be solved in social practice.

Underlying Lefebvre's understanding of *autogestión* is an argument for the improvement of the quality of the lives of individuals. As such, it presupposes a belief in individual potential, proposing a framework that allows the subject to exercise some agency in the world. Alienated subjects cannot address the question of potential, of human capabilities suppressed in everyday life. This is where Lefebvre's conception of *autogestión* is linked to his work on everyday life, which, as he argued, was in a state of crisis because of the control exerted over it by the capitalist system.[119] According to Lefebvre, *autogestión* provided a response to the problem of alienation. The dissociations between private life, work, leisure, social, and political life in everyday life break down as *autogestión* 'orients' us towards a path of de-alienation.[120] For this reason, Lefebvre sets the term 'appropriation' in opposition to alienation: 'only through *autogestion* can the members of a free association take control over their own life, in such a way that it becomes their work. This is also called appropriation, de-alienation.'[121]

Lefebvre identifies alienation not only in capitalist production and labor relations, but also in diverse constraints that play a part in structuring all aspects of everyday life.[122] In his book, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City*, Chris Butler identifies various forms of alienation in Lefebvre's work: alienation of workers from the products of their labor, which objectifies workers themselves; alienation and fragmentation of productive activity in which repetition replaces the creative and fulfilling aspects of labor; alienation of people from their own humanity and social needs, alongside an estrangement from bodily and natural

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[117] N. Brenner & S. Elden, op. cit., p. 134.
[118] N. Brenner & S. Elden, op. cit., p. 16.
[119] S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, p. 228.
[120] H. Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*, p. 295.
[121] N. Brenner & S. Elden, op. cit., p. 150.
[122] Klaus Ronneberger, 'Henri Lefebvre and the Question of *Autogestion*', in S. Bitter & H. Weber, *Autogestion, or Henri Lefebvre in New Belgrade*, Fillip/Sternberg Press, 2009, p. 91.

needs; and alienation of people from one another.[123] From a Lefebvrian perspective, then, alienation extends beyond its strict economic relationship with labor and marks, as Lefebvre contends, the impossibility of individuals within bourgeois society of being able 'to grasp and think the other'.[124] This is where Lefebvre's 'new societal ethics' become important to the anti-statist project of *autogestión*; by strengthening the 'associative ties' in civil society.[125] As Klaus Ronneberger asserts:

> His interest in acquiring more knowledge about a critique of political economy – in the critique of everyday life – that is oriented to the entire process of socialization aims to attain his declared goal, namely to 'give subjectivity renewed value' and to seek a place for autonomy and creativity. Here the notion of 'creation' plays a key role and is intended to replace Marx's much narrowly defined notion of work. This term cannot be equated with artistic activities but instead on the social level stands for 'the activity of a collectivity assuming the responsibility of its own social function and destiny – in other words for self-administration.'[126]

To be able to make decisions for oneself about matters that concern the individual is what constitutes a democratic exercise for Lefebvre. It is a kind of indicator or measure of democracy, 'one which can be appreciated by the degree of knowledge among the citizens and their involvement in what affects them.'[127] In Lefebvrian terms, *autogestión* has connotations of radical and direct democracy. In fact, as has been noted by Mark Purcell, Lefebvre's political project is essentially a project for democracy.[128] As such, in the practice, it can lead to the reorganization of society by transforming it from the bottom up. However, for Lefebvre, democracy is not a form of governance, an institutional framework, or a 'condition of being' to be achieved. It is, rather, a political orientation. In his text, 'The State and Society' (1964), Lefebvre

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[123] Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life, and the Right to the City*, Routledge, New York/London, 2012, p. 16.

[124] Henri Lefebvre, *The Critique of Everyday Life Vol. 1*, tr. John Moore, Verso Books, London/New York, 1991, p. xvi.

[125] For a broader discussion of Lefebvre's 'new societal ethics', refer to Chapter III.

[126] K. Ronneberger, 'Henri Lefebvre and the Question of *Autogestion*', p. 92.

[127] Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas, & Eleonore Kofman (eds.), *Henry Lefebvre: Key Writings*, Continuum, New York/London, 2003, p. 62.

[128] Mark Purcell, 'From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution: Lefebvre Reconsidered', paper presented to the 2012 Association of American Geographers conference, New York, 24-28 February 2012, <http://pathtothepossible.wordpress.com/2012/03/01/lefebvre-and-democracy/>, accessed 26 October 2013.

provides a clear definition of the term when he suggests that democracy is an ongoing striving toward the horizon of democracy:

> There are degrees of democracy and of revolution. The degree of democracy or more exactly the degree of democratization of public life, of political and social life is quite precisely proportional to the intensity of the struggle for democracy. Democracy is nothing other than the struggle for democracy. The struggle for democracy is the movement itself. Many democrats imagine that democracy is a type of stable condition toward which we must tend. No. Democracy is the movement. And the movement is the forces in action. And democracy is the struggle for democracy, which is to say the very moment of social forces; it is a permanent struggle and it is even a struggle against the State that emerges from democracy. There is no democracy without a struggle against the democratic State itself, which tends to consolidate itself as a bloc, to affirm itself as a whole to become monolithic...[129]

Purcell alludes to this definition when, drawing on Lefebvre's *Urban Revolution*, he asserts that 'we can think of democracy as a horizon toward which we travel, one we can never reach because a horizon always recedes, but one that suggests to us a direction in which we must move.'[130] Thus, democracy is less a state of being than a *struggle to become democratic*, an ongoing effort to manage our affairs for ourselves; it is becoming-democratic. Here, Lefebvre draws on Marx, who insisted that human consciousness is seen as 'a succession of changing stages and shifting moments' (becoming). However, he not only follows Marx's trail, but uses him as a starting point; of returning to the process of becoming and opening up a future. Of course, becoming democratic also requires that we become active in a similar way; that we struggle to become political actors rather than political spectators.

Words such as 'movement', 'process', 'participation', 'appropriation', and 'enactment' are not only common to Lefebvre's discourse on *autogestión*, but tend to recur as part of his particular reading (open/humanist) of Marxist philosophy in general. This use of an active, rather than passive, lexicon is consonant with his emphatic refusal to passivity, as this passivity is strongly associated with subjugation and alienation of individuals in capitalist societies: 'it is impossible to seize the

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[129] N. Brenner & S. Elden, op. cit., p. 61.
[130] Mark Purcell, 'Democracy, squatting, and my forthcoming book', Path to the Possible. Democracy toward Horizon [webpage], 11 May 2012, <https://pathtothepossible.wordpress.com/2012/05/11/democracy-squatting-and-my-forthcoming-book/>, accessed 15 July 2013.

everyday as such if we accept it, in the "living it passively"...'[131] Lefebvre's ideas of *autogestión* as a political strategy demands the activation of the individual as a political actor, rather than a political spectator. *Autogestión* is, therefore, not only multifaceted, but it is also dynamic. It points to an action, a way of doing things which demands agency. This strong emphasis on action – where *autogestión* is not fixed or established, but perpetually enacted; and it is not a model, but a process of continual struggle – attests to the performative character of *autogestión*. This understanding of the social practice of *autogestión* places the focus not on *what* is produced (content), but on *how* it is produced (i.e. the conditions and relations of production). In this sense, it echoes Sitrin's words when she considers *autogestión* in Argentina: '*Autogestión* is not based on the what, but in the how...it is the relationship among people creating a particular project and not the project itself.'[132]

Within Lefebvre's view, *autogestión* is also understood to have a productive potential, as he seeks to rehabilitate the productive character of all human activities (i.e. the power to produce its subject/self-production, the production of the 'other', and the production of space). The notion of 'production' in Marx is central to understanding Lefebvre's concern here:

> ...According to Marx's early works...production is not merely the making of products: the term signifies on the one hand 'spiritual' production, that is to say creations (including social time and space), and on the other material production or the making of things; it also signifies the self-production of a 'human being' in the process of historical self-development, which involves the production of social relations. Finally, taken in its fullest sense, the term embraces re-production, not only biological...but the material reproduction of the tools of production, of technical instruments and of social relations into the bargain; until they are shattered by de-structuralism, a society's social relations remain constant, their reproduction being the outcome of a complex impulse rather than of inertia or passivity; this impulse...this praxis and poiesis does not take place in the higher spheres of a society...but in everyday life.[133]

The notion of production acquires its full significance as production by a human being of his own existence. Thus, in considering the term of production to encompass the

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[131] S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, p. 113.

[132] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 10.

[133] Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, tr. Sacha Rabinovitch, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1971, pp. 30-31.

production of societal-social relations and space, Lefebvre places the focus on human practice. In the operation of self-organized projects, then, not only are new subjects produced, but new objects, new spaces, new ways of relating to others, as well as new categories of knowledge and expertise are also created in the process by inciting and channeling desires, and by generating and focusing individual and collective energies.

Trama and Argentine Art during the 1990s

Autogestión, as Lefebvre contends, tends to manifest spontaneously or informally, but not just anywhere or in any way. It usually appears in the 'weak' points of society:

> ...between these strong points we find the cracks, the zones of weakness. This is where things happen. Initiatives and social forces act on and intervene in these lacunae, occupying and transforming them...Weak parts, voids, are revealed only in practice, through the initiative of individuals who have the capacity for the latter, or through the haphazard investigations of groups that have the capacity to intervene.[134]

In the Argentine context, the crisis of 2001 deepened the fissures within the system, acting as a condition of possibility for the propagation of self-organized initiatives in the cultural field. The way artists seep through the fissures of the system was noted in the editorial of Trama's 2002 publication:

> As from that moment, community initiatives managed by artists proliferated at the pace of social movements all over the country. Regarding the field of art, they echoed the crack-up undergone by the state apparatus at all levels of functioning. Thus, these initiatives filled in the void resulting from institutional collapse, as artists remained determined to move in a self-organization process unprecedented in Argentina.[135]

Against the backdrop of a withering state, *autogestión* has been assumed in the art field as a way of doing things, of making things happen. It is, in fact, 'the only way of doing things in a context where the state has failed to assume its responsibility when it comes to supporting and developing the visual arts', as Pablo Ziccarello, one of

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[134] H. Lefebvre, 'Theoretical Problems of *Autogestion',* in N. Brenner & S. Elden, op. cit., p. 144.
[135] Trama*, Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 114.

Trama's founding members, acknowledged.[136] The state's lack of attention to cultural matters is understood by many artists and cultural practitioners as the norm, rather than the exception. This is what writer and art critic, Alina Tortosa, suggests when she argues, '…the field of the visual arts has almost always been in crisis.'[137]

The proliferation of artists' initiatives and cultural projects of *autogestión* in Argentina revealed a radical critique of the state as the initiatives assumed responsibilities that had been left vacant such as education, security, and culture. This subject was discussed in the context of Trama in various occasions. For instance, in the text 'A Matter of Intelligence', artist from Tucumán and Trama member Carlota Beltrame, observed:

> …independent initiatives not only tend to solve the voids generated by a State in an open process of withdrawal, but are also useful to bridge certain gaps related to specific needs and interests experienced by a sector of the community that is grasping and producing something that the State could hardly have achieved, since it would have been hampered by its own ideological, bureaucratic structure…[138]

As Beltrame argues, *gestión* comes from a necessity to 'solve a problem': 'You try to solve the problem in the most creative way your ethics will allow.'[139] In a country like Argentina, without public or private guarantees of support for the development of arts and culture, the self-management of spaces and artistic platforms of various kinds has been not only a problem-solving or survival strategy, but fundamental in the creation of the 'art field' itself. As Argentine art historian, Roberto Amigo, observes:

> When we examine the construction of historical narratives dealing with the artistic and its particular local features, what stands out is the role played by actions carried out by artists…we can state that 'artists' management' was instrumental to the creation of 'Argentine art'.[140]

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[136] Pablo Ziccarello, personal interview with the author, 26 November 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
[137] Alina Tortosa, 'Nuestra crisis está en crisis?', in Esteban Álvarez & Tamara Stuby (coord.)*, Pensando en voz alta: ciclos de mesas redondas sobre temas de actualidad en las artes visuales*, Buenos Aires 2001–2002, p. 49, <http://www.elbasilisco.com/pensando.pdf>, accessed 18 August 2012.
[138] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias,* p. 151.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Roberto Amigo*, '*Untitled. Notes for a discussion on artists' management', in *The Network as a Common Place: Strategies for Participation and Cooperation in Artistic Projects in Argentina*, Editorial Trama, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 124.

A similar claim is made by art historian Maria José Herrera who, in her text 'Management and Discourse', traces the genealogy of *autogestión* within the artistic context of Argentina back to the end of the nineteenth century when Eduardo Schiaffino, a young Argentine painter, played a key role in the promotion, development and institutionalization of the 'fine arts'.[141] Besides painting, he produced exhibitions and was the first art critic and historian, writing the 'first narrative about art in Argentina.'[142] Member of a group known as the *Generation of '80,* Schiaffino was among the founders of the first art academy, Sociedad Estímulo de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Society), the initial name of the National Academy of Fine Arts, and in 1895, he created the first museum, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA) or National Museum of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires. As director of the museum, he fulfilled most of the basic roles natural to the field – artist, critic, and museographer – and created the first official state collection of Argentine art. Thus, on the face of the weak state policy when it came to dealing with art, the first agents that tried to 'modernize' art were the very artists who played multiple roles as they struggled in an effort to build institutions to legitimize their practice.[143]

This discontent with the institutions and lack of adequate cultural policies has been, as Herrera points out, one of the main drives leading artists to collectively self-manage their own production and discourse. In this regard, Herrera cites other examples in the history of art in Argentina, such as: Artistas del Pueblo (1920-30), Nexus (1907), Tucumán Arde (1968), CAYC – Centro de Arte y Comunicación (1970s), and the group Escombros (1980s). Similarly, creating a proper context for the production, reception, and distribution of her work was also what led Argentine visual artist, Claudia Fontes, to arrive at the practice of *autogestión* and to organize collectively so as to create Trama.

Trama was born in response to the artistic context of the 1990s in Argentina, characterized by a strong sense of individualism, egocentrism, and a competitive attitude, which, as I have been discussing thus far, was a direct inheritance of

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[141] María José Herrera, 'Management and discourse', in Trama*, Images, Narratives and Utopias*, Editorial Trama, Buenos Aires, 2002, p. 171.
[142] R. Amigo, 'Untitled', p. 124.
[143] Ibid.

Menem's culture and the neoliberal politics that eventually led to the socio-economic collapse of 2001.[144] Before engaging in a more thorough discussion of Trama and what the program entailed, it seems relevant at this point to provide a brief contextualization of the panorama of the visual arts in the Argentina of the 1990s.

Along with globalization, neoliberalism and the boom of the Internet, several factors conflated during the nineties that contributed to the consolidation of an artistic scene with its own specificities and characteristics. The process of economic (neo)liberalization that Argentina, as most Latin American countries, underwent after its return to democracy translated into a time of solid and burgeoning, albeit temporarily, financial and economic growth. Buenos Aires, which had always been a consumerist city, entered quickly and almost brutally into a process of financial and technological modernization, and of an expansion of its market economy and consumption goods, inserting itself decisively into the wider net of globalized economies.[145]

Within the realm of the visual arts, the art market became one of the most important actors in the scene dictating the parameters of aesthetic valorisation and shaping, to a great extent, the way contemporary art was produced and consumed in Argentina. The emergence of a 'nuevo coleccionismo' (new collectionism) played an important role in this development. A new breed of collectors arose in Argentina during this decade turning their attention and interest towards the new art produced after the return to democracy. Most specifically, this term tends to designate the collection of artworks created by young artists of the 1990s, especially those associated with the Centro Cultural Rojas, at which time this new collectionism began to gain greater visibility.[146] Associated with a process of the recomposition of a sector of the social elite, this new wave of art collectors was mainly composed of middle or

[144] Trama, 'Cuestionario', Encuentro Internacional de Espacios de Arte Independientes (EIEI), *Hoffmanns' House* [website], Valparaíso, Chile, <http://www.hoffmannshouse.com/eiei/cuestionario/cuestionario-Trama.htm>, accessed 5 November 2010.

[145] Rodrigo Alonso, 'Crónicas en technicolor. Pop, euforia y nostalgia en el arte argentino', Rodrigo Alonso [website], 2006, <http://www.roalonso.net/es/arte_cont/pop_argentino.php>, accessed 16 July 2015.

[146] Mariana Cerviño, 'No, yo tampoco. El amor al arte, probablemente. Notas sobre el coleccionismo de arte contemporáneo argentino', *Apuntes de Investigación del CECYP*, No. 12, July 2008, p. 187.

mid-to-high class professionals with moderate acquisition power who, attracted by the low cost of local art productions, favoured the early works in small or medium size format produced by young artists, rather than artworks by artists with a longer trajectory and prestige in the international art world. Hence, this new local collectionism, best represented by the figure of collector Gustavo Bruzzone, was to be responsible for sustaining and promoting much of the new local artistic production of the times, especially, as I discuss below, that of the younger generation of artists associated to the Rojas Gallery.[147]

The new trends in the consumption and collection of the artworks produced by 'emerging' artists were also stimulated by numerous prizes and competitions that were incorporated during this decade, such as: Premio Telecom, Premio Fundación Telefónica, Premio Fundación Federico Jorge Klemm, Premio Fundación Constantini, and Premio Fundación Banco Nación.[148] In addition, it is important to mention the annual celebration of ArteBa, Buenos Aires' contemporary art fair, and the influence it has had in the art scene since its inauguration in 1991. Combining public and private funds since its inception, ArteBa has aimed at giving visibility to the Argentine art production both in the local and international milieu. These financial incentives and support for the arts granted by private corporations and businesses facilitated the development and subsequent rise of what had traditionally been a meagre art market. At the same time, they contributed to a conception of the figure of the 'artist as supplier of commodities' and, thus, his production was expected 'to be coherent with an image/product – a trademark – that endowed his artistic practice with credibility.'[149]

This branding of the artist was further consolidated by the proliferation of *megaexposiciones* or blockbuster exhibitions, a phenomenon that appeared in the Argentine art scene during the 1990s, associated mainly with exhibitions organized at

[147] Mariana Cerviño, 'Nuevo coleccionismo de arte argentino contemporáneo. El caso de Gustavo Bruzzone', *Arte y sociedad. Revista de investigación*, No. 0, September 2011, <http://asri.eumed.net/0/mc.html>, accessed 15 August 2015.
[148] Natalia Pineau, 'Espacios de exhibición durante los años noventa en Buenos Aires y la formación de una nueva escena artística', in María Isabel Baldasarre & Silvia Dolinko (eds.), *Travesías de la imagen: historias de las artes visuales en la Argentina*, Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, 2012, p. 609.
[149] Graciela Carnevale, 'When Silence Talks', tr. Marta Merajver, *56a Infoshop Social Centre* [website], May 1999, para. 1, <http://www.56a.org.uk/maptramasilence.html>, accessed 17 October 2014.

the Palais de Glace (formerly known as Salon Nacional de Exhibiciones).[150] Following Argentine art historian, Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales, in general terms, the concept of *megaexposiciones* can be defined as:

> …a strategy or a cultural product that has its origin in a series of works of art, of one or more artists, from which a series of activities are organized related to the works on display and a group of activities are offered, motivating the interest and active participation of the public.[151]

This particular mode of presentation and circulation of artworks, which admits innovative forms of display and dissemination of information, gained popularity in Buenos Aires, in part, because of its capacity to attract large audiences. The success of this cultural phenomenon has also been attributed to the role played by private corporations in the production of the exhibitions and their related events. As Gutiérrez Viñuales explains, this sponsorship enabled not only the organization of higher quality shows and activities, but also free visitor entry to the events, greater investment in the promotion of the showrooms through mass media communication and printed advertisements, as well as the ability to meet the necessary security requirements, institutional loans, among other issues.[152]

Along with the rise of the art market, artistic production was also significantly promoted and supported by a new modality of artistic training and formation, the '*clínicas*'. Implemented by the Beca Kuitca (since 1991) and the Taller de Barracas (1994 and 1996), the '*clínicas*' provided an alternative educational space, especially for younger artists. Supported by Fundación Antorchas, the methodology of the '*clínicas*' differed from the traditional model of art education taught in the art academies in the country and the personal studios of the *maestros*, consecrated artists in the field. Both these programs aimed at elevating the art production and training in correspondence with those of the international art world. In so doing, they became important platforms for the visibility and access of local artists to the international art world, as was the case for Claudia Fontes herself.

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[150] For example, exhibitions such as 'Qué bien pinta la Argentina!' (1990), Quirós (1991) and Soldi (1992), all organized and exhibited at the Palais de Glace in Buenos Aires.
[151] Rodrigo Gutiérrez Viñuales, 'Megaexposiciones en la Argentina. La consolidación de un producto cultural diferente', *Revista de Museología*, Madrid, Nº 10, February 1997, p. 50. [author's translation]
[152] Ibid, p. 51.

Another significant factor was the number of art institutions that flourished or emerged during this decade, especially in Buenos Aires, for the exhibition and circulation of art, gaining prominence as primary agents of authority and legitimation. Worthy of mention are: Centro Cultural Recoleta (created in 1980), Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana (ICI, nowadays, Centro Cultural de España in Buenos Aires, CCEBA), Fundación Banco Patricios, Espacio Giesso, the Casal de Catalunya, Fundación Proa, as well as the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas, the locus of what would become known as 'the art of the nineties' or 'the aesthetic of El Rojas'.

The so-called 'art of the nineties' refers to the new artistic scene that emerged in the early 1990s in Buenos Aires and would later become emblematic of the artistic production of the decade. Associated, to a great extent, with the art that was shown at the Rojas Gallery, a small exhibition space established in 1989 in the Centro Cultural Ricardo Rojas at the University of Buenos Aires, this new art scene crystallized around a reduced group of artists that became known as the '*artistas del Rojas*'. The establishment of this new generation of artists – including Marcelo Pombo, Miguel Harte, Fernanda Laguna, Omar Schiliro, Ariadna Pastorini, Sebastián Gordín, Fabio Kacero, Alfredo Londaibere, Fabián Burgos, Cristina Schiavi, Benito Laren, among others – was spearheaded by visual artist, journalist and gay rights activist, Jorge Gumier Maier, director and curator of the Rojas Gallery from 1989 to 1997. Predicated upon romantic ideas of the artist and the autonomy of the work of art, in his writings and curatorial endeavours Gumier Maier promoted 'an art based on visual experience, […] one in which form was to supersede content.'[153] Although each of them displayed a distinct style and aesthetic language, their works placed a strong emphasis on the subjectivity of the artist and privileged the image or the art object, while vindicating the spectator's contemplative pleasure. In spite of their differences, overall, the works of these artists can be defined by a strong emphasis in 'the formal qualities of ordinary objects and in embellishment or decoration as a form of beauty.'[154]

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[153] Ursula Davila-Villa, 'Introduction', *Recovering Beauty: the 1990s in Buenos Aires*, The Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, 2011, p. 23.
[154] Ibid, p. 17.

In terms of aesthetics, this group of visual artists drew references as well as formal elements and materials from both Pop and Geometric art. They usually recurred to the strategy of appropriation, either by extracting design patterns from consumer products and advertising or by intervening the products directly (Marcelo Pombo, Feliciano Centurión) [Fig. 1.16]. While some of these artists made deliberate use of kitsch and low quality or industrial materials (Benito Laren), others created sophisticated compositions from ordinary objects and materials (Omar Schirilo)) [Fig. 1.17], or relied on artisanal techniques such as embroidery (Fernanda Laguna) and/or bricolage (Schirilo). References to the world of fashion (Ariadna Pastorini, Nicola Costantino), the use of bright and colourful surfaces (Ariadna Pastorini, Román Vitali, Cristina Schiavi) [Fig. 1.18], a strong palette (De Volder), and the compositional simplicity of geometric abstraction were also characteristic of their aesthetic language (Gumier Maier) [Fig. 1.19].[155] In this regard, Inés Katzenstein has asserted:

> …their works focused on a wealth of formal elements rather than the known conceptual codes, and they were championed by artists who -in general- worked spontaneously and were neither educated nor trained within the traditional conventions of art. Their styles were varied, but their intentions were always personal, distinct, and somewhat arcane. Some of the artists were sympathetic to Pop art, others to geometric painting, but all revealed quite quickly their rejection of art theory, of explanation or conceptual elaboration. Instead, they emphasized the more direct pleasure derived from the materials with which they worked and the craft they used to build them.[156]

Although the artworks produced by the Rojas Gallery artists during the 1990s have been linked with genres like the 'neo geo' or 'neo pop', there is arguably no explicit intention of reactivating the links with other historical tendencies in Argentine visual arts, like the Concrete art of the 1940s or the Pop art of the 1960s. In spite of the fact that many artists of this generation drew inspiration from these aesthetic tendencies or styles, the artworks produced by the Rojas' artists were distanced from previous historical movements. As art historian Rodrigo Alonso has argued, the artists of the 1990s deliberately ignored the rigorous doctrine and ideological principles underlying the works of the concrete artists. Similarly, although the art of the 1990s emphasized

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[155] R. Alonso, 'Crónicas en technicolor', n/p.
[156] Inés Katzenstein, 'Avatars of Art in the Argentina of the 1990s', in Ursula Davila-Villa (ed.), *Recovering Beauty: the 1990s in Buenos Aires*, The Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austin, 2011, p. 36.

popular culture and a world of consumption and commodities, they did so from a quite different perspective than the pop artists of the 1960s. Moreover, as will be discussed further in Chapter III, the disassociation between these two generations can also be explained by breaks in the social bonds generated by the last dictatorship, to the extent that many artists from the 1990s are not familiar with the artisitic production of pop artists from the 1960s.[157]

In a time of excess, of neoliberal euphoria and pomposity, the artists linked to El Rojas sought refuge in the intimate. Focusing on local themes and references, much of the art produced by these artists reflected their own interior microcosms. As Katzenstein has noted: 'When the artists of the Rojas Gallery spoke about their work, they generally did so without reference to theories or to a description of content; instead, they told stories of their own lives, experiences and pleasures…'[158] Sharing a common socio-cultural background and vision of the world, they grew into a somewhat insular group set apart from both their peers and a larger audience. As a consequence of this seclusion and over emphasis on the local, opportunities to expand their aesthetic beyond the local context of Buenos Aires were hindered, leaving Argentine art outside the discussions regarding Latin American art's inclusion into the new cultural map of globalization.

Contrary to many Latin American artists who succeeded in increasing their presence and visibility in the international art scene during this decade, as was the case of many contemporary Mexican artists, one of the particularities of the Rojas artists was their anti-internationalist attitude. They were deliberately and, even defiantly, uninterested in the aesthetic tendencies of the international art circuits and its inherent intellectualization and professionalization.[159] In his essay 'Avatars of Art', written as a sort of manifesto and published as an introduction to the first exhibition he curated at the Rojas Gallery, Gumier Maier explicitly established his opposition towards certain aspects that he considered as negative within the local art scene:

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[157] Rodrigo Alonso, 'Crónicas en technicolor', n/p.
[158] I. Katzenstein, 'Avatars of Art in the Argentina of the 1990s', p. 36.
[159] Inés Katzenstein, 'Un paso al costado. Arte y globalización en la Argentina', *Proyecto Trama* [website], July 2001, Sala de Lectura, <www.proyectotrama.org>, accessed 18 September 2011.

The work, as such, aims to sustain itself through a proposal of some sort. Works are appreciated not on face value, but for whatever makes their proposal interesting. The work is only judged as a failed or successful illustration of an intention. Originalities are hatched under the shelter of this law. The important thing is the way in which meaning is produced in a given work.[160]

For the artists linked to the Rojas Gallery, many of whom were self-taught, art's aim was about 'visual enjoyment and delight.'[161] Hence, they were reluctant to the integration of artists into what they considered an increasingly administrative professional and institutional art world. Rather, Gumier Maier envisioned this space, 'as a nurturing platform for the exhibition of works that, in his view, proposed new and original values very much in opposition to those set by recent Argentine art tendencies, as well as by the growing international trend of neo-conceptualism.'[162] This neo-conceptualist tendency was represented in the local art scene by the strategies of many of the young visual artists associated to the Taller de Barracas whose work was highly influenced by these international trends. Interestingly, as I discuss below, many Trama members took part in these workshops, including Fontes herself, who participated as tutor in 1998.

By the mid-1990s, the art associated to the Rojas Gallery had consolidated as the dominant aesthetic model in the local art milieu. Before 1993, however, most artists associated with this space occupied a marginal position in the local art scene exhibiting their works, mostly, in underground bars and cafés. As Gumier Maier clearly stated in his prefatory essay, 'The Rojas', published in the book, *5 años en el Rojas*, published by the UBA in 1994: 'it was hard to get the specialized critics to come to a place that was so far beyond the usual art circles, and so lacking in prestige and promotion at the time.'[163]

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[160] Jorge Gumier Maier, 'Avatars of Art', in Ursula Davila-Villa (ed.), *Recovering Beauty: the 1990s in Buenos Aires*, p. 149.

[161] U. Davila-Villa, op. cit., p. 17.

[162] Ibid, p. 22. The neo-conceptualist trend constitutes a variety of artistic tendencies developed by artists across the globe in the late 1980s through the 1990s to create art that served as a mode of critique, while adopting conceptual traditions from the 1960s and 1970s.

[163] Jorge Gumier Maier, 'The Rojas', in Ursula Davila-Villa (ed.), *Recovering Beauty: the 1990s in Buenos Aires*, p. 151.

As the new aesthetic paradigm moved from the margins to the center of the Argentine art scene, the reception of this new aesthetics became the topic of numerous debates, for critics and artists alike. 'Guarango', 'light' or 'pink' were some of the terms coined to describe an aesthetic model that emphasized decoration, a deliberate use of kitsch, banal objects, pastel colors, and that was decidedly not politically oriented. In his text 'Arte Guarango para la Argentina de Menem', art critic Pierre Restany branded their art as 'guarango' – a word that translates as bad education or bad taste – due to the fact that the work of these artists displayed an attitude that he described as being ordinary and frivolous, well in tune with the 'quotationist' culture that, according to the critic, was so characteristic of the 'Menem style'.[164]

Similarly, in 1992, art critic and art historian, Julio López Anaya, coined the term '*arte light*' ('light art') to refer to the artworks produced by the artists linked to the Rojas Gallery. According to Anaya, their works seemed to exhibit a certain lightness and aesthetic banality, which seemed hedonistic and devoid of any kind of critical input, much less political engagement. 'Light' was a term that had begun to circulate in the context of the neoliberal economy in relation to food and grocery products. Based on the ideas in vogue of postmodern theorists, like Jean Baudrillard, the hypothesis of López Anaya is that these artworks do not refer to 'reality', but to the 'effect' of reality: 'simulations and signs.'[165] Although the term was not originally meant as a pejorative characterization of the Rojas' aesthetic, its (negative) use became commonplace within the art discourse and historiography of the 1990s contributing, in this way, to increased stigmatization and fetichization of this type of art and its associated qualities.

Describing the decorative intentions of the artists – like Shiliro's appropriation of kitsch bourgeois designs, Pombo's play with brightly colored objects, and Gumier Maier's combination of decorative traditions and geometric art – the lightness of the artworks was directly linked to the economic conditions in which the works were

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[164] Pierre Restany, 'Arte argentino de los 90. Arte guarango para la Argentina de Menem', *Lápiz*, 13, No. 116, November 1995, p. 54.

[165] Syd Krochmalny, 'La Kermesse: arte y política en el Rojas', CAIANA, No. 2, August 2013, p. 3.

made, as was revealed in their cheap and humble materials, the work titles and the artist's use of commercial products and repeated references to popular culture. The idea of 'light', however, also pointed to an art that was seemingly effeminate, fragile and weak. The expression '*arte rosa light*' immediately expanded in the art scene associating the artistic production exhibited at the Rojas with homosexuality, or 'arte gay'. In this regard, Davila-Villa has pointed out:

> ...the idea of 'light' insinuated a component of feminity and a levity that bordered on frivolity – qualities that the art by the Rojas Gallery indeed possessed – and not by accident. 'Light' was the expression of a set of attitudes about gender that was unspoken but revealed through their art.[166]

According to Davila-Villa, this group of artists aimed at articulating an alternative aesthetic, one that 'would transcend Argentina's political and artistic past, which had been circumscribed by a repressive military dictatorship.'[167] In this sense, the notion of 'light' and its apparent lack of political intent in the works of the Rojas artists also suggested a festive spirit, a will to live and celebrate after a long period of dictatorial terror and war (The Malvinas War). The work of these artists can be understood as:

> ...an attempt to move beyond the harshness of the dictatorship under whose strictures they were raised – and to move beyond, too, the dreariness of the work that such a world inspired – to express instead a simple *joie de vivre* that had only recently become possible. Hence the decorative quality of much of their art [...] was recognized for what it was: a form of rebellion, an expression of independence, and a call to liberation.[168]

Perhaps because of this attitude that seemed to express a newly found sense of joy over the arrival of democracy and freedom, the work of these artists gained relevance exerting great influence in the social imaginary of the local art milieu at the time. In this regard, Inés Katzenstein has noted:

> As Argentina's art world healed from the wounds inflicted by the repressive dictatorship, and the country's economy began to fall in line with the new coordinates of globalization, the work of the Rojas Gallery artists became especially resonant, relevant, and important.[169]

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[166] U. Davila-Villa, op. cit., p. 37.
[167] Ibid, p. 18.
[168] Ibid, p. 24.
[169] I. Katzenstein, 'Avatars of Art in the Argentina of the 1990s', p. 34.

Ascribed with both positive and negative connotations, the term 'light' became the object of sustained disputes and controversies, not only among critics and the press who misunderstood or lacked the referents to make a more sound interpretation of the works, but within the artistic network of the Rojas itself. While some of them accepted the categorization of 'light', adopting it as part of their artistic identity and subscribing to its positive intended meaning (e.g. the recovery of beauty), others rejected the term adamantly for considering its relation to a different kind of 'politics' (gender politics). The discursive polarization created between an art that was light and frivolous versus a politically engaged one, eventually helped to neutralize and flatten out any micro-political agencies inherent in the works of these artists. In fact, this opposition to political art would constitute one of the most polemic characteristics of the group, one that would resurface time and again.

A Program for Confrontation and Cooperation

As a young artist practicing in Argentina during the 1990s, and returning from a period of artistic training in the Netherlands in 1998, Claudia Fontes found no support in a context that she describes as being 'authoritarian, individualistic, superficial and almost exclusively market-oriented.'[170] In stark contrast with the artistic paradigm consolidated during the previous decade, through Trama, Fontes aimed to collectively form an alternative to the established art scene by bringing artists into contact with one another. Thus, in order to break with this and change the dominant values and conditions of production, artists had to organize differently. In a spirit that resonated with the new social movements and practices of resistance emerging in Argentina at the turn of the century, 'she and her co-initiators wanted to mobilise artists so that their creative spirits could play a role in society.'[171] Trama's final proposal would then

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[170] 'New models for remembering: (Missingbooks) and Trama in conversation", in *Again for Tomorrow*, Royal College of Art, London, 2006, p. 158.
[171] 'Trama offers an alternative to the established art scene', The Power of Culture [website], March 2004, <http://www.krachtvancultuur.nl/en/current/2004/march/trama.html>, para. 3, accessed 15 June 2012.

aim at creating five-year program that would promote an ethics of cooperation among artists.

The concrete opportunity to initiate the project arose in 2000 when the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DOEN) offered financial support through the RAIN network for what was initially called, *El Potrero*. As previously mentioned, this first draft of what would eventually become Trama's project was outlined by Fontes in 1997 when she was participating in a grant for artistic development by Fundación Antorchas at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. DOEN's financial subsidy subsequently facilitated the institutional support of local organizations – namely, Fundación Antorchas and Fundación Espigas – which provided Trama with the legal framework and additional support it needed to operate as a program for artistic cooperation. Interestingly, the initiation of the project was also possible thanks a prize that was awarded to Fontes at the end of 1999 for her sculpture proposal for the Parque de la Memoria, a memorial park built in 1998 in the bank of the Río de la Plata to commemorate the victims of state terrorism during the last military dictatorship. The combination of these incentives would then give Trama the real economic platform with which to start its operation. In this sense, as I will further discuss in Chapter II, the emergence of the project was closely tied to Fontes' personal history and experience.

Having a more stable financial and structural basis, the project would assume its definite shape in 2000 when Fontes invited visual artists Marcelo Grosman, Leonel Luna, and Pablo Ziccarello – all of whom came from different aesthetic, intellectual, and generational backgrounds – to join in the development and implementation of the project. At this point Trama, a program for cooperation and confrontation among artists, was born. After discussing and exchanging ideas with different groups of artists, cultural producers, and institutions, Trama's founding members elaborated a program that would articulate what they understood were the needs of the local artistic environment at the time. That is, instead of creating a program based in Buenos Aires – the capital city and the traditional center of cultural production – in their view what was needed was an open program with a nomadic and mobile character that would facilitate and encourage cross-pollinations and exchanges

between Argentine artists, and between the provinces and other countries; a practice that until then was scarce or non-existent. As is clearly stated in the introduction to Trama's first publication:

> In the late 90s, each one of us initiators of the project had a different vision and experience of the local artistic milieu, but agreed that the context did not satisfy the need for exchange that we artists had. We knew that only through the collective debate of circumstances that affect us individually we would be able to build a platform for research and enrich our artistic practice.[172]

With this in mind, Trama dedicated a large part of the organizing phase to the creation of a fluid network of contacts in four regions of the country; namely, Rosario, Córdoba, Tucumán, and the Province of Buenos Aires.[173] They selected various artists who would act as 'contact person' in each region and organize a series of activities proposed by Trama. The artists involved in this first phase of the project were: Mauro Machado from Rosario; Carlota Beltrame and Marcos Figueroa from San Miguel de Tucumán; and Daniel Besoytaorube and Mario Gemin from Mar del Plata. In general, as they explain, Trama associated with artists who had previous experience generating some kind of initiative in their respective cultural scenes and that could summon other artists 'without embodying any sectarianisms'.[174] In the following years, this incipient network of artists continued to expand organically.

Since its inception, Trama was associated or collaborated with numerous well-known institutions, both in Argentina and abroad. These partners could be classified in the following categories: (1) institutions which would provide structural support (like Antorchas and Espigas); (2) Partner's in Argentina's provinces engaged with the diffusion and application process of Trama's activities as well as with the organization of those activities that the program could propose in their area of influence (paraphrase); (3) Partners in Buenos Aires which offered their spaces, facilities and resources (i.e. print-shop) for documentation and presentations; (4) Partners in the region (Latin America) for artistic and project exchange; and (5) Partners in Asia, Africa

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[172] Trama, *Insights and Context: Confrontation of Speeches, Debates, and Other Attempts at Dialogue in Argentine Contemporary Art*, Editorial Trama, Buenos Aires, 2000, p. 54.
[173] Ibid, p. 55.
[174] Ibid, p. 55.

and Latin America through RAIN, which involved other initiatives that were being generated by alumni of the Rijksakademie.[175]

Throughout its years of operation, Trama was organized by different teams; the most constant of which would include: Marina de Caro, Irene Banchero, Florencia Cacciabue, Flavia da Rin, and Fontes herself. Even though Trama's general management was conducted from Buenos Aires, the activities were designed to take place in different cities all over the country, facilitating in this way the articulation of a flexible and rhizomatic program with a national and international projection. As they contended:

> We set ourselves to make the natural network of interrelations among artists and intellectuals of the Argentine cultural scene visible, fluid and accessible, and also to do so with regional and international cultural scenes, promoting the establishment of different channels of exchange and facilitating cooperation and confrontation among artists.[176]

Cooperation and confrontation were Trama's main lines of action. These were developed through a wide range of activities, such as: meetings, workshops, lectures, public talks, and presentations by visual artists and academics, training in cultural management, as well as collaborative and cultural exchange projects. Emphasizing the combination of theory and practice as basic to artistic development, Trama enabled a platform for research with a horizontal structure that provided informal training to the artistic community. Within this framework, artistic production was regarded as a system of critical reflection and collective thought among peers. Thus, besides functioning as a tool, the main goals of Trama's program were: to strengthen the ties within the local artistic community; to give visibility to the mechanisms that articulate artistic production in the local context; and to legitimize artistic thought in the social and political spheres.[177]

Trama was conceived as a five-year program.[178] Running from 2000 to 2005, in hindsight, it could be argued that the project was characterized by two main phases:

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[175] See: 'Trama: Confrontation and Cooperation Program for Artists' (project proposal – in progress), p. 2-3. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

[176] Trama, *Insights and Context*, p. 55.

[177] Ibid.

[178] For a more comprehensive list of Trama's activities, see: 'Appendix B Chronology of Activities', p. 224.

the first one spanning, roughly, from 2000 to 2002, and the second from 2002 to 2005. During the first phase, Trama's activities were mainly dedicated to the promotion of cooperation amongst artists, analysis and confrontation of art works, and the legitimation of artistic thought and discourse; with main activities taking place in Tucumán, Rosario and Buenos Aires.

The research component of the project was mainly explored through confrontation. That is, a strategy whereby debate and the exchange of ideas where emphasized in a collective setting. During its first year, Trama designed and coordinated two main models of research workshops for artists: (1) 'Workshop for the Analysis of Artworks' and (2) a 'Workshop for the Confrontation of Systems of Construction of Artworks'. Basically, these workshops, organized in 2000, consisted of group discussions directed at the confrontation of artworks, the analysis of art production and the production of critical thinking between artists with different backgrounds (different ages, from different parts of the country), with international guest artists and with people coming from other disciplines or cultural areas, like philosophers, writers, sociologists, historians, etc.

Most specifically, for instance, the 'Workshop for the Analysis of Artworks', in Rosario and Buenos Aires, aimed at providing training to young artists by confronting their work with that of other artists, either from the same generation or a different one, and by using frames of reference different to the local ones.[179] The workshops gathered twelve artists (ten local artists and two from either other countries or cities) for a period of one and a half months. Artists selected for the meeting in Rosario were: Pablo Guiot and Rolando Juárez, both from Tucumán; and Valeria Gericke, Carlos Herrera, Teresa Dauría, Luján Castellani, Sebastián Pinciroli, Rubén Baldemar, Silvia Quiroga, Cecilia Font and Mirta Vignatti, from Rosario. This group of artists were selected by a jury panel constituted by visual artists from the same city: Claudia del Río, Mauro Machado, Daniel García, and María Cristina Pérez.

Artists selected for the Buenos Aires meeting were: Marita Begué, Florencia Cacciabué, Nicolás Domínguez Nacif, Raúl Flores, Oriol Guillén Arruabarrena, Anil Schprejer, Juana Neumann, and Carina Moreira, from Buenos Aires; and Facundo

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[179] 'Trama: Confrontation and Cooperation Program for Artists' (project proposal – in progress), p. 7. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

Ceraso (La Plata), Valeria Gopar, Juliana Iriart, Raúl La Cava (Mar del Plata), and Sandro Pereira (San Miguel de Tucumán) [Fig. 1.20]. In this case, the selecting jury was composed by: Diana Aisenberg, Tulio de Sagastizábal, Pablo Siquier, Mario Gemin, and Claudia del Río.

Three tutor artists were invited to coordinate the debates for each group. These were: Tulio de Sagastizábal (Buenos Aires), Claudia del Río (Rosario), and Lisa Milroy (England), who participated in both workshops. In addition, artists Pia Wergius (Sweden) and Meindert Koelink (the Netherlands) were invited to take part in these two meetings.

Similar to the 'Workshop for the Analysis of Artworks', ten local and two foreign artists participated in the 'Workshop for the Confrontation of Artworks', organized in Buenos Aires. But different to the former one, this workshop would be directed to local, regional, or intercontinental artists with a more or less developed body of work. Lasting for a period of approximately two months, this workshop aimed at strengthening the knowledge of the processes of creation of artworks and the articulation of the construction of artistic thought through a horizontal peer-to-peer structure. The Argentine artists selected for this meeting were: Claudia Martínez from Tucumán, Mónica Millán from Misiones, and Horacio Abram Luján, Ernesto Ballesteros, Claudia Contreras, Marina De Caro, Nora Dobarro, Magdalena Jitrik, Res, and Mónica Van Asperen, from Buenos Aires. Invited through the RAIN network were artists José Ferreira and Marco Paulo Rolla, from Johannesburg (South Africa) and Belo Horizonte (Brazil), respectively [Fig. 1.21]. In this occasion, the jury panel was constituted by: Arturo Carrera (writer), Marcelo Pacheco (art historian, curator), and Horacio Zabala (artist and architect). During this workshop '(e)ach artist had a salon somewhere in the city where he/she presented a conflictive project to discuss with the group', as explained by Trama in their first publication.[180]

Two consecrated artists from the Argentine art scene – Víctor Grippo and León Ferrari – and two well-known foreign artists – Jaroslaw Kozlowski (Poland) and Richard Deacon (England), invited through the connection with the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam or through other international organization linked to Trama – were

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[180] Trama, *Insights and Context*, p. 75.

invited towards the end of the meeting to perform as tutors by analysing and confronting the artists' work.

These meetings were complemented with informal lectures given by the guest artists, both local and from abroad, in different parts of the country. For instance, Richard Deacon and Victor Grippo presented their works and participated in a public debate that took place at the Recoleta Cultural Center (Buenos Aires); while Jaroslaw Kozlowski and León Ferrari presented their works in the same cultural center addressing how the contexts and its particularities affect artistic production [Fig. 1.22].[181] Trama's activities in 2000 would conclude with a public debate organized at the Casona de los Olivera Cultural Center [Fig. 1.23].

During its second phase, which extended from 2002 to 2005, Trama focused on the sustainability of artists' initiatives and the consolidation of connections and exchanges with other like-minded artists and organizations into a network. As I will discuss further below, the social mobilizations and radical events of 2001 exerted great influence in Trama. The pre- and post-crisis context had a significant impact on the development of the project, marking a turning point in its history and setting the tone for the activities and debates that followed. Besides being a moment defined by internal changes in terms of the organizing team, it served as a link between the two phases of the project. While, as previously outlined, Trama's activities were initially focused on the analysis of artworks – where artistic proposals were considered as objects of study and confronted with other projects so as to generate debate and collective thinking –, the precipitation of the crisis and overall collapse of the system steered the efforts towards the practice of *autogestión per se* and projects of cultural management. As pointed out in Trama's website:

> The absence of spaces dedicated to art which could contain the production and the interests of artists made many of them take the initiative to create new public spaces devoted to art. As a consequence, a new cultural map was drawn, which obliged the community to redefine the art system in order to give visibility and impulse to a horizontal production of culture and the search for new links within its parts.[182]

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[181] Trama, *Insights and Context*, p. 55.
[182] 'Workshop for the research in cultural management for artists I', *Proyecto Trama* [website], 2002, <http://www.proyectoTrama.org/00/Trama/ENGLISH/2000-2004/MANAG-I/cultmang.htm>, accessed 5 May 2010.

In response to these changes in the artistic scene, Trama organized a series of workshops for the 'Research in Cultural Management for Artists' in 2002 and 2003, which will be further discussed in Chapter III, with the aim of providing support, acknowledgment, and encouragement to the emerging self-organized artistic initiatives. During this second period, Trama fostered the establishment of a cooperative network of *artistas-gestores* (artists-managers), providing exchanges and training in issues related to cultural management, and stimulating their platforms through connections with the international art milieu and giving visibility to the resulting productions while furthering inter-regional artistic exchanges in Argentina. Furthermore, they focused on giving visibility to the phenomenon through the articulation of a national and international network of artists' initiatives.

From the very first stages, the program prioritized the need to establish and develop different channels for international exchange, which would flow in the axes South-South, South-North and North-South. This objective was fulfilled through Trama's participation in the RAIN network. This connection facilitated the participation of guest artists in Trama's workshops, but also allowed for the possibility of Argentine artists linked to Trama to travel and take part in projects and events in other countries. In so doing, it fostered fruitful intercultural exchanges that were unimaginable prior to the emergence of Trama.[183] By way of example, Claudia Fontes, invited through Trama, participated in the debates 'Visibility and invisibility in contemporary art', organized by CEIA-Centro de Experimentação e Informação de Arte in Belo Horizonte (Brazil) in 2001. In the following year, 2002, artists Tulio de Sagastizábal and Pablo Ziccarello would participate in representation of Trama in the debates organized by RAIN in Jakarta, Indonesia; while artist Adriana Lestido participated – invited through Trama – in the project Violence-Silence and its related activities, organized by Pulse, an artist-run initiative in Durban (South Africa). In 2003, Mariela Scafati, in representation of Trama, participated in the 'Workshop on Photography and Bogolan Painting' organized by Centre Soleil in Bamako (Mali) [Fig. 1.24]. Furthermore, Trama collaborated in 'Cabin baggage', a project by Open Circle

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[183] For a complete list of international exchanges and projects see 'Appendix B Chronology of Activities', p. 225.

for the World Social Forum held in Mumbai (India) and organized in 2004. On this occasion, artist Leo Rocco, a member of Taller Popular de Serigrafía (TPS, or Popular Serigraphy Workshop) was invited to take part of this international event in representation of Trama [Fig. 1.25]. This same year, Trama participated in the international symposium 'InFest: International Artist-Run Culture Conference' celebrated in Vancouver (Canada). It is important to note that the Infest event was one of the first international events focused on artist-run spaces at an international level and Trama was one of the two invited initiatives from Latin America.

As will be further discussed in Chapter III, Trama had a particular interest in reaching out and establishing meaningful connections with other Latin American countries. To this end, Trama's network of artists' initiatives would be extended in the region of Latin America, especially in the second half of its second phase, through contacts made during research trips in South America and through Trama's participation in a series of meetings of independent spaces in Latin America; namely, the Meeting of Independent Contemporary Art Organisations from Latin America and the Caribbean, which Trama co-organized with Duplus in 2003, and *EIEI, Encuentro Internacional de Espacios Independientes* (International Encounter of Independent Spaces), organized in 2005 by Hoffmann's House in Valparaíso (Chile). Thus, through its participation in collaborative projects and international events, Trama began to be conceived more as a network than as a program. As such, as I will discuss in Chapter III, during this second phase the project began to take on a spatial dimension resulting in a network that would extend locally, regionally, and internationally.

Contrary to the art promoted by the *'artistas del Rojas'* in the 1990s, Trama contributed to the professionalization of artists through its programs and activities, by offering a supportive network, and facilitating the conception and production of experimental artworks that did not find place in the mainstream art institutions. The case of artist Magdalena Jitrik, who belonged to the group of artists linked to the Rojas Gallery, is interesting in this regard. In fact, she was co-director (with Gumier Maier) of the space between 1991 and 1993, period in which, as previously mentioned, the Rojas aesthetic was finding its way into the hegemonic art circuit of Buenos Aires. By the end of the 1990s, Jitrik, who had initiated her artistic career as a painter, became

interested in researching Argentina's anarchist history and writings. The influence of this revolutionary past would soon start to manifest in her artistic production (mostly in the titles of her works), although, as she explains, the relationship between the two was rather 'forced' in the beginning.[184] The work '*Ensayo de un Museo Libertario*' ('Rehearsal of an Anarchist Museum'), a project the artist created within the context of the 'Workshop for the Confrontation of Artworks' organized by Trama in the year 2000, constituted a turning point in the artist's career. [Fig. 1.26] The workshop's proposal meant to encourage artists to produce an artwork or project that they would not normally do; 'to create something that would constitute a risk.'[185] As Jitrik recalls, the flexibility of the format and the openness and simplicity of the proposal provided her with the necessary space of freedom to create this work.[186] Taking place in the Federación Libertaria Argentina (Argentine Libertarian Federation), the work consisted in an installation comprising a series of objects of some of the most prominent local members of the movement with historical documents, furniture, paintings, photos, and newspapers belonging to the house, combined with several of her own works (paintings, objects, and silkscreens). Resembling a sort of ephemeral museum about anarchism in Argentina, '*Ensayo de un Museo Libertario*' constituted a 'before and after' in her development as a visual artist. As Jitrik herself has expressed:

> It was during the experience of Trama that all came together in one project: the Museo Libertario, transformed by the decision of adding the 'writings', some paintings from the series 'Revueltas' and the stones, as if it were also part of the house's historical heritage, as if these works had been carried out in it, as if they had always been in it and had a space in that museum.[187]

This experience was important also because it marked a process of increased politicization of her work which would be further radicalized by the social revolts and eruption of the 2001 crisis. This experience would result in Jitrik's involvement in the Taller Popular de Serigrafía which she co-founded in 2002 and with which she would later participate again in Trama's second 'Workshop for Cultural Management' in 2003.

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[184] 'Poéticas Contemporáneas', *Ramona*, 50, May 2005, p. 103.
[185] Magdalena Jitrik, personal interview with the author, 27 November 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Trama, *Insights and Contexts*, p. 80.

The outcome of Jitrik's project, as well as all of Trama's research-related activities (debates, workshops, and presentations) were documented in a series of printed publications, which were conceived as a working tool for the artists' community.[188] As they have stated: 'Although it might be basic to the development of any artistic community, knowledge-sharing was very scarce between peer artists in Argentina 2000.'[189] Hence, with its publications, Trama aimed at socializing resources and information, as well as 'to multiply the cooperation and confrontation of ideas'[190] in the art scene. These publications included descriptive information about the activities, transcription of the debates and public presentations, documentary material (images and photos) of the participants, as well as theoretical texts, written mainly by art historians, sociologists, historians, philosophers and artists, that framed the issues addressed in principle from practice. A number of local researchers, art historians and writers (Ana Longoni, María José Herrera, Sebastián López, Roberto Amigo, etc.), as well as foreigners (José Fernández Vega from Mexico and Gertrude Flentge from the Netherlands, etc.), contributed texts in Trama's publications.

The publications, complemented by research material, would also be organized on Trama's virtual space in order to guarantee the access to artistic professional information within and beyond national borders [Fig. 1.27]. All publications were available online in digital format. Trama's website also included: information about the history, agenda and press material related to Trama and its activities; a database with information on other artists' initiatives in Argentina and abroad; information about collaborative projects and shared initiatives; a reading room with texts produced as part of the activities or commissioned for the printed publications; documentation of all the activities organized; and artists' profiles. An intra-net that acted as a meeting space and work space for artists was also included. Given Trama's aim of valorizing artistic thought and its emphasis on process in artistic practice, the thorough documentation of these processes – both artistic and

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[188] 'Trama: Confrontation and Cooperation Program for Artists' (project proposal – in progress), p. 3. [unpublished document, Trama archive]
[189] Trama, *Insights and Contexts,* p. 53.
[190] Ibid, p. 55.

theoretical – became the culminating moment of visibility of the projects that had been organized.

At the end of the program in 2005, and having created a positive atmosphere of collaboration, the prospect was that Trama would continue to exist as a cooperation network: Trama Network. In this new network, Trama's former team was replaced by a new organizational structure led, mainly, by three artists' initiatives whose members had worked closely to Trama's former team performing organizational, networking and administrative tasks, and taking part in conceptual discussions of the development of the network. These were: El Levante, from Rosario; La Agencia, from Buenos Aires; and Taller H, from Córdoba. Later, these initiatives were joined in their effort by Espacio Vox, from Bahía Blanca and La Baulera, from San Miguel de Tucumán.[191] For a brief period of time, the new team of initiatives engaged in virtual discussions to rethink the objectives, function, and possible activities of Trama Network from 2006 onwards. However, this network did not last long, mainly because of the exhaustion of some of its members and a lack of shared vision among the initiatives involved.

Even though Trama Network did not succeed in its endeavor to give continuation to the network Trama had created throughout its years of operation, they played a crucial role in establishing *autogestión* as a possibility within the Argentine art field. Through all the aforementioned activities and strategies, Trama sought to validate the artists' initiatives culture in Argentina as an expanded field of the artists' practice. Most particularly, it contributed – as I demonstrate in the following chapters – to a series of qualitative transformations within the local art field that were articulated in relation to the social, the subjective and the spatial.

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[191] Trama, 'Report RAIN 2000-2005', n/p. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

Chapter II   *Autogestión*, Ethics, and Aesthetics

This chapter examines how the practice of *autogestión* in Trama fuctioned as a political strategy by responding to specific ethical concerns and the need for more democratic and cooperative configurations within the art field. In the first section, I will discuss how the events linked to the crisis of 2001 influenced the program and confirmed its relevance within the artistic context. I argue that the political in Trama has to be understood, not only in terms of how they decided to position themselves in the field at this particular point of inflection, but also how they prioritized ethics in order to reflect on the values underpinning artistic practice.

In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I elaborate further on the claim that Trama, through its activities and network, validated *autogestión* in Argentina as an expanded field of the artists' practice. I proceed to analyze this by discussing how the notion of the 'expanded field' in the case of Trama needs to be understood in a twofold manner. On the one hand, it points to the expansion of artistic practice per se in terms of the diversity of activities and roles undertaken by contemporary artists, i.e. *artista–gestor* ('artist–manager')[192]. On the other, most importantly perhaps, it draws attention to the expansion of the aesthetic realm whereby the concept of aesthetics is broadened to incorporate its ethical dimension. Understood in this way, ethics become a constitutive or integral aspect of artistic production. As I will argue, Trama aimed at giving visibility to the artists' ethics, and at making these ethics an explicit and deliberate part of artistic practice, the purpose of which was to find a common ground from where a more productive, (self-) reflexive dialogue could take place. Trama's emphasis on the ethical allows us to establish a link of continuity between contemporary practices and those of the avant-gardes at the end of the 1960s and early 1970s in Argentina. By establishing a link between them, in the last

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[192] I use the term 'artist–manager' as translation for *artista-gestor* to be consonant with Trama's use of the term in their publications and website, although, in my view, it doesn't seem to appropriately address the concept in Spanish. Whereas Trama's use of the term *autogestión* was initially linked to the radical climate of social and political struggle during the crisis, from the second phase of the program onwards, the term was increasingly used – sometimes interchangeably – with the related term '*gestión*' (management) as it became incorporated into a wider discourse of cultural production. Nowadays, the most commonly used term would be '*gestor cultural*' (cultural producer or cultural manager).

section of this chapter, I contend that it was through the practice of *autogestión* that the social ethics underlying Trama's project were put into practice.

Autogestión as a Political Strategy

As suggested in Chapter I, the historical juncture that culminated in the crisis of 2001 represented a 'constituent moment'.[193] The unfolding of the events of 19th and 20th December, which were already being felt at the end of the 1990s, 'defied with an appalling immediacy the conditions in which the artistic act appeared.'[194] At this point, it seemed impossible to sustain any discourse based on the autonomy of art. Moreover, during this time all the established ideological foundations were being questioned.[195] Many facts and ideas changed; for instance, the idea of being in the First World and the idea of belonging to Europe – all these ideas were dropped.[196] The discussions emerging at the time would address questions of whether art should be produced outside the (art) system, what the contents of art production should be, what the role of the artist is in society, and who the artist is addressing with his work. There was an urgency to define the 'role of art in a society that [was] in the process of remaking itself.'[197] Within this context, it should come as no surprise that Trama would propose 'artistic practice and its social projection' as the guiding theme for the research and discussions that were to take place in that year's program. Although this theme had been chosen before the eruption of the uprisings of the 19th and 20th, Trama deliberately sought to question the social responsibility of artists and the relevance of their work vis-à-vis the contingency and precariousness of the local context. Argentine sociologist, Christian Ferrer, recalls the social and political climate in the country at the end of 2001 with the following words:

> Argentina was about to explode. The political tensions were incredibly strong. Everyone was aware of the imminence of the moment…Something was about to happen, but no one knew exactly what…[198]

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[193] Trama, 'Organized Urgency', in *Shifting Map, Artists' Platforms and Strategies for Cultural Diversity*, RAIN/NAi Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, p. 86.
[194] Ibid.
[195] A. Wortman, *Entre la política y la gestión de la cultura y el arte*, p. 10.
[196] 'Presentation of Trama by Claudia Fontes', p. 3.
[197] Trama, 'Organized Urgency', p. 86.
[198] Christian Ferrer, personal interview with the author, 3 December 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

This ominous climate, then, provided the backdrop to Trama's second year of activities. Besides participating in the public debates and other related activities organized by Trama that year, Ferrer had been invited to be part of the jury panel for the selection of the workshop's grant holders, alongside Gabriela Massuh, Director of Goethe Institute (Buenos Aires) at the time, and art critic, Eva Grinstein. During the initial phase of the 2001 workshop, Ferrer worked closely with the ten local artists selected as grantees: Sonia Abián, Diana Aisenberg, Florencia Blanco, Claudia del Río, Lucas Ferrari y Leonello Zambón, Sebastián Friedman, Grupo de Arte Callejero, Eduardo Molinari, Santiago Pagés de Arteaga, and Rocío Pérez Armendáriz. His role was to confront the artists' work and provide an analysis and interpretation of the proposals that, in turn, were informed by his own theoretical perspective (historical, political, and sociological). In combining theory and practice, Ferrer's critical viewpoint and academic inquiry as an 'outsider' played an important role in the artists' creative process and constituted a substantial contribution to the development of the works before these were put into practice.

For the course of two months, the artists worked on their individual projects, with the assistance of Trama's coordinators, while discussing and comparing ideas collectively. The proposals ranged from urban interventions to publications and research on specific social themes 'by means of photography, opinion polls and other strategies, as well as working logics from areas as diverse as sociology, advertising, linguistics, anthropology and history.'[199] The work of the local artists would be further enhanced by the presence and exchange of ideas with international artists – Dennis Adams (USA), Ade Darmawan (Indonesia), Andreas Siekmann (Germany) [Fig. 2.1] – invited by Trama to produce work in the framework of the workshop. Darmawan, a visual artist from Indonesia and co-founder of the artist initiative Ruangrupa (Jarkarta), for instance, joined Trama for a period of twenty days to work together with Argentine artist, Oscar Brahim [Fig. 2.2 & 2.3]. As described in Trama's publication of 2001:

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[199] Trama, *Society Imagined in Contemporary Art in Argentina*, 2001, Editorial Trama, Buenos Aires, p. 99.

The way in which Ade works, his interest in urban dynamics, and the references to Situationism in his work made him the perfect workmate for Oscar Brahim. Oscar likes to introduce himself as 'graphic intervenor' rather than as an artist, while supporting his family by driving a taxi. During ten years he worked in the street visually 'attacking' advertising signs, in a clear critical expression towards the symbols of globalization and advertising.[200]

The project proposals of the ten Argentine artists were presented publically during the workshop's closing activities, entitled 'Networks, Contexts, and Territories'. These were followed by presentations from the work of Adams, Siekmann, Darmawan and Brahim, continued with the public presentation of texts by Ferrer, Charles Esche (United Kingdom/Denmark), then director of the Malmo Museum, and philosopher and writer, Reinaldo Laddaga (Rosario/U.S.A.), and concluded with a series of public debates. [Fig. 2.4]

Held from 20ᵗʰ to 24ᵗʰ of November, this final event was highly significant for Trama. The fact that it would, coincidentally, take place a month before the eruption of what has come to be known as the worst crisis in the recent history of Argentina inevitably posed a challenge to some of the works, such as 'Invasión', the urban intervention by Grupo de Arte Callejero discussed earlier, and Sonia Abián's public action, '*El gesto posible*' ('The possible gesture'), whereby the artist walked through the streets wearing shirts with 'broken promises' made by politicians. In one of the messages printed in the shirts, for example, Abián quoted Ramón Puerta's words, anticipating his political promotion (he was the official who finally assumed as provisional president) [Fig. 2.5a & b].[201] The social revolts also heightened the relevance of works like Eduardo Molinari's '*Columna Vertebral*' ('Spinal Cord'), which showed the artist's need 'to fix in the [collective] memory icons of the history of the Argentine workers' struggle' [Fig. 2.6a & b]; or Claudia del Río's '*Blind House'*, where the dysfunctionality of the materials draw attention to the voluntary act of concealing: 'The metaphor activated in the house walled up by clay by can be perceived as an evocation of closing, both threatening and fragile at the same time, interfering with any possibility of entry or exit' [2.7a & b].[202]

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[200] Trama, *Society Imagined in Contemporary Art in Argentina*, p. 100.
[201] Ibid, p. 98.
[202] Ibid.

Paradoxically, the closing of Trama's 2001 workshop took place at the Goethe-Institut, just three blocks away from the Casa Rosada, the pink-colored presidential palace. Roads were blocked and hundreds gathered in protest. While Trama's debates were happening, 'reality was knocking on the door',[203] in Ferrer's words, and the urgency of the moment was not ignored. Although it may have seemed odd at the time that a discussion on the visual arts was being held in such a chaotic political climate, the discussions around the topic of artistic practice and its social projection were nonetheless timely as they provided a crucial frame of reference for the events taking place amidst the insurrection. Bringing together different generations of artists, these debates generated an open space for dialogue in which artists could gather to reflect on the chaos and disquiet of the moment, as well as engage in the questioning of dissenting points of view [Fig. 2.8]. Moreover, this scenario especially stimulated the participation of the audience, who engaged in active, and sometimes conflicting and heated, discussions regarding concepts such as the artwork as epistemological object, the shifting relations between artists and the (art) institution [Christian], the politics of friendship as a value underpinning new forms of social organization, the necessary fluidity of contemporary art institutions [Esche], and resistance,[204] amongst others. Some of these ideas would function as analytical tools, providing useful points of entry to understand this highly politicized moment in recent Argentine history. In particular, as I will further discuss in Chapter III, the debates regarding public space were particularly important for Trama at the time, as the crisis of 2001 implied the recuperation of public space, a space that had been expropriated during the dictatorship era and that was later lost to neoliberal forces during the 1990s. Following philosopher Reinaldo Laddaga, artists' initiatives operating within this context, such as Trama, encouraged the regeneration of public space, creating a space-other where the construction of (counter)power could emerge.

The debates and discussions that took place prior to the explosion of the crisis of December 2001, further politicized Trama's initial objectives and marked an important shift within the project whereby the efforts of Trama's program would be

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[203] Ch. Ferrer, personal interview with the author.
[204] For further discussion on the concept of 'resistance' in the context of Trama, see the section 'From the Production of Knowledge to the Self-Production of the Artist' in Chapter III.

concentrated on the promotion of the practice of *autogestión* within the artistic community. '2001 was...an epiphany', as Fontes has remarked.[205] The urgency and radicalness of the moment confirmed the necessity and relevance of a project based on cooperation and collective action. Invoking the militant ethos of the new social movements and practices that engaged in the search for new modes of organization at the time, the project of Trama 'had to do with direct action, with participation...with taking charge and doing it yourself...', as Fontes asserted in a recent interview.[206] Thus, Trama's 2001 workshop 'Artistic Practice and its Social Projection' was significant, not only because it coincided with the unfolding of the crisis, but because of the ways in which it mirrored and resonated with the wider socio-political context.

Amidst the chaos, and despite the uncertainty, the artists in Trama shared a strong sense of responsibility with regards to the socio-political situation: 'A manner of social organization is over; a new one starts, which we do not know...but we know each one has a leading role in it.'[207] The experience of the crisis interpellated artists, not only as artists, but as subjects and as citizens. The general scene altered the aesthetic and ethical positions of many visual artists who sought different ways of engaging and responding to the urgency of the historical moment.[208] The renewed calling for social responsibility materialized in various forms of solidarity and intensified the artists' need to intervene in the public sphere. The streets became the ultimate stage of participation and experimentation, a complex territory where art, engagement, and politics merged. In her article, 'Arte y protesta: notas sobre prácticas estéticas de oposición', Cecilia Vázquez identifies two particular modalities of artistic practices that took the form of public performances or interventions in public space: 1) groups that opted to politicize or radicalize their productions (such as GAC, TPS or Etcétera (Internacional Errorista) who worked closely with social movements, linking the visual arts with specific political agendas); and 2) groups of artists that, summoned by political groups, worked to aestheticize the arena of the political and to produce

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[205] Claudia Fontes, skype interview with the author, 14 May 2014.
[206] Claudia Fontes, personal interview with the author, 21 August 2012, Brighton, United Kingdom.
[207] Trama, 'Organized Urgency', p. 86.
[208] A. Wortman, *Entre la política y la gestión de la cultura y el arte,* p. 31.

from there an aesthetic reflection.'[209] As Vázquez contended, the proliferation of artists' collectives intervening in public acts of protest clearly marked 'a new inscription in the historical continuum of art and politics.'[210] In other words, quoting Ferrer, in the wake of the crisis, 'the spheres of arts and politics conflated once again.'[211] As such, the debate regarding the place of the political in art, of art in the political, and its mutual reformulations, resurfaced, generating a multiplicity of interpretations, narratives, and debates. In such a climate, questions about the 'autonomy' or the 'politicity' of art were being posed with renewed vigor and urgency, allowing for the reactivation and revision of the dialectics between art and politics. The series of round table discussions organized at the peak of the social and political crisis by artists Tamara Stuby and Esteban Alvarez in 2001-2002 at the Alliance Française-Buenos Aires provide a clear example of the debates pertaining arts and politics that took place at the time. Entitled 'Pensando en voz alta' (Thinking out loud), these round tables addressed issues related to the crisis of the art system such as: collecting, extra-institutional or informal training for artists, the practice of curatorship, alternative art circuits, art criticism, and art history. Another relevant example are the debates 'Rosa Light vs Rosa Luxemburgo', organized in the MALBA in December 2003. Led by artists and critics such as Ernesto Montequín, Roberto Jacoby, Ana Longoni, Magdalena Jitrik, Jorge Gumier Maier, Rosana Fuertes, and Andrea Giunta, these debates also addressed the critical situation of the visual arts in the period post-2001, reviving the old 'light vs. political' debates of the 1990s, and focusing on issues related to the autonomy of art and the increasing politicization of artistic practice exemplified by the numerous artists' collectives and initiatives that were active during this period.

In the context of artists' initiatives, as in the case of Trama, the practice of *autogestión* presuposes an intersection of the spheres of arts and politics in so far as artists demonstrate a strong will and interest in interfering in the public sphere with the aim of affecting the established order from within the aesthetic realm. For Trama,

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[209] Cecilia Vázquez, 'Arte y protesta: notas sobre prácticas estéticas de oposición', in Alabarces, Pablo & Rodríguez, María G. (eds.), *Resistencias y mediaciones. Estudios sobre cultura popular*, Paidós, Buenos Aires, 2008, p. 174. [author's translation]
[210] Ibid, p. 180.
[211] Ch. Ferrer, personal interview with the author.

'every project of self-organization [*gestión*] is from the outset a political project', as artists 'do not take for granted a particular given situation, but construct it; this is construction of power.'[212] The reflections, in retrospect, of Argentine visual artist, Graciela Carnevale, on her own artistic practice shortly after the 2001 crisis seem relevant in this regard:

> I wonder where we stand when we produce: do we produce from the parameters laid down by power or from the recovery of a space of our own, from individual proposals closely related to our history and experience?…Perhaps what we produce is not seen as militant, but as definitely political, insofar as we take politics to be our attitude to life and to other people. I believe this is a time…to accept the aesthetic experience as one of constant questioning.[213]

Carnevale posed this question, 'where do we stand when we produce?', when resuming her artistic career at the end of the 1990s after decades of self-censorship. Carnevale was an important figure of the Argentine avant-garde during the late 1960s and one of the leading members of the collective project *Tucumán Arde*. In spite of its ephemeral character, *Tucumán Arde* represents a paradigmatic moment in the history of Argentine art, as it was one of the most radical manifestations and experiences of the confluence between the artistic avant-garde and the politico-syndicalist vanguard.[214] In this regard, Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman have explained:

> Its uniqueness lies in that for a short time it attempted to merge the two fields [art and politics], in a delimited common ground where the objectives, places, circuits and procedures proper to politics or art were blurred, alternated, and articulated. The confluence of art and politics proposed by *Itinerario del '68* poses a challenge to the conventions of the art institution, canonized aesthetic practices and the presumable limitations of avant-garde experimentation. At the same time, it sets up a way to intervene politically in the historical situation that goes beyond (and against) the place assigned to artists by political forces, which tend to conceive of this relationship in instrumental terms.[215]

According to the authors, what marked a difference between this and the previous, more traditional modes of engagement with 'political art' was its articulation of a new

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[212] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.
[213] G. Carnevale, 'When Silence Talks', para. 24.
[214] The exhibition of *Tucumán Arde* was shown for five days at union headquarters in Rosario, then in Santa Fe, and finally in Buenos Aires, where it was forced to close after just a few hours.
[215] Ana Longoni & Mariano Mestman, 'Tucumán Arde', *ExArgentina* [website], <http://ex-argentina.org/>, accessed 7 June 2011. [author's translation]

way of combining artistic and political praxis. Their turn to political militancy and direct engagement with the struggle caused a collapse in the binary art – politics, as cultural productions became subsumed in politics.

Resuming her artistic practice at the end of the 1990s, Carnevale continued to be engaged in collective activity initiating in 2003, along with artist Mauro Machado, El Levante (an artist initiative in Rosario and a core member of Trama's network). Although the artistic conditions at this time were completely different from those she experienced in the late 1960s and 1970s, for Carnevale both contexts were somehow similar. As she recalls during a presentation of her archive of *Tucumán Arde* in the mid-2000s:

> Because of the crisis of 2001, certain urgencies, certain questions, certain things were happening in society that reminded me of the 60s. But it was not the same society. What reminded me of the 60s was people's mobilisation, the fact that people began to react, mobilize themselves and fight for their own necessities...[216]

According to Carnevale, the context of 2001, defined as it was by profound social mobilizations, generated new cultural and activist practices which, in their attempt at questioning the established notions of art, revealed strong links and parallels with artistic practices of the late 1960s-70s.[217] For instance, as I will discuss in the last section of this chapter, the uncertainty and radicalism of the times demanded a self-reflexive attitude of artistic practice and of the relation between arts and politics. However, the politics at the heart of artistic production at the turn of the century could no longer have the revolutionary sense of heroics of the 1960s. Rather, as Carnevale contended during her participation at Trama's 'Workshop for Cultural Management II' organized in 2003: 'perhaps in our days to seek other spaces and modes of relating to others is what constitutes the political in art.'[218] Thus, the question of 'where do we stand' that precedes the question of 'how to act' is strongly

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[216] 'Questions & answers session', in 'Lia Perjovschi, Graciela Carnevale and Trama: Agency and Archive', tr. Elena Crippa, public discussion organized by Claudia Fontes of Trama in the context of the exhibition *Again for Tomorrow*, 17 March – 9 April 2006, Royal College of Art, London. This transcription is part of the material of Graciela Carnevale's Archivo Grupo de Arte de Vanguardia available at ESCALA, University of Essex, Colchester.

[217] 'Workshop for the research in cultural management for artists II', in Trama, *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 112.

[218] Ibid.

linked to an ethical stance. Here, the ethical becomes political as artists' positioning politically means taking an ethical stance with regards to the socio-historical circumstances and reality that determines their practice and production.

Similarly, this ethico-political position was shared by Trama. The idea of social responsibility in relation to change was fundamental to Trama's *autogestión*. Their understanding of the role of the artist as 'one who acts responsibly and is aware of the social conditions in which he works'[219] was an underlying principle to the 'new societal ethics' they aimed to promote; an ethic that was not only necessary, but indispensable for them to develop the project. The conceptualization of the program itself is the result of this awareness and need for creating and producing art from a different – a more cooperative – standpoint. In the context of Trama, ethics and aesthetics were closely linked. In this sense, Trama can be understood as a political strategy in that its structural organization and activities all responded to or aimed to push forward specific (ethical) issues and objectives. Hence, *autogestión* can be understood here as a strategy for the enactment of political and ethical concerns.

For Fontes, as for many artists engaged in self-led spaces and projects, *autogestión* was understood as a strategy for the preservation of autonomy. This is clearly manifested in the text 'Organized Urgency':

> …some of us artists are concerned with preserving our autonomy through self-management, to do without the authority imposed by critics, theoreticians and institutions historically responsible for colonizing our efforts to radicalize our practice.[220]

Within the context of Trama, *autogestión* would act as a means of empowerment and freedom for artists, whereby they could decide for themselves the different aspects of the production and reception of their work, while affirming their position as self-legitimated agents, bearers of authority, and with the capacity to act and effectively intervene in their own immediate environments. In this sense, Fontes' understanding is closely aligned with Lefebvre's understanding of *autogestión*, as it implies a practice strongly defined by the importance of the individual's participation in the processes that shape their present life and future. Artists' desire for autonomy then becomes

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[219] Trama, *Insights and Context*, p. 56.
[220] Trama, 'Organized Urgency', p. 86.

the attempt to 'give themselves their own law' and, ultimately, their 'own way of inhabiting the institutional structures.'[221]

Through Trama's *autogestión*, the centrality of the institution of art as primary mechanism of valorization and legitimation of artists' work is displaced or called into question. Yet, Trama did not hold an oppositional stance regarding the institutional system of art. Contrary to other artists' initiatives or collectives, it maintained an instrumental relationship with it, benefiting both financially and symbolically from it. They were autonomous, but not independent, since Trama operated under the institutional 'shelter' of Fundación Espigas[222] and, during its years of existence, was sustained by the support of Fundación Antorchas while collaborating with local institutions like Fundación PROA and Instituto Goethe, among others. Moreover, Trama was supported internationally by institutions like the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through RAIN, Rijksakademie Artist Initiatives Network, Stichting DOEN, Prins Claus Fonds, and others. In this respect, Trama held a privileged position with regards to many other self-led initiatives that tend to resort to multiple creative modes of fund-raising in order to be able to initiate and sustain their projects.

Defined as an interdependent program, Trama operated in the somewhat contentious terrain between engagement and autonomy, between the artists' proclamation of self-determination and their dependence on institutional support. In this regard, they have observed:

> Trama is an independent project as decisions made by the artists-organizers maintain autonomy from any imposition which might arise from institutions that support the program and make it possible. Yet it would be more accurate to define the program as an interdependent project. We believe that by defining ourselves as an interdependent project we can better express the fact that, while we do not resign our autonomy and self-determination, we recognize the exchange value involved in working with other projects or institutions and give credit to the support they provide. This way of working, engaging with as many institutions, organizations and individuals as possible, but at a small-scale with each one of them and on a temporary and erratic way, has provided a mobile and flexible structure that allows us to solve structural problems quickly for each activity. [223]

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[221] Brian Holmes, 'Artistic autonomy and the communication society', *Third Text*, Volume 18, Issue 6, 2004, p. 542.

[222] Fundación Espigas is a non-profit organization created in 1993 with the purpose of organizing and maintaining a center for documentation on the History of the Visual Arts in Argentina.

[223] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.

Thus, from its very beginning, Trama sustained, as they themselves proclaimed, a parasitic relationship with existing institutions and organizations, while maintaining freedom of action from both local as well as international sponsors. Far from being cynical, this collaborationist engagement with different private and public institutions, rested on the belief that creating mutually beneficial *alianzas estrategicas* (strategic alliances) or *convenios tacticos* (tactical agreements) was the only way of operating and surviving in precarious cultural contexts, such as that of Argentina. As art critic, Eva Grinstein, noted, this 'parasitic' confluence and collaborations between autonomous collective practices and other cultural institutions and organizations, would later become commonplace to the Argentine art world.[224] This active interaction and collaborations between mainstream institutions and alternative ones, eventually contributed to shaping a more dynamic, complex, and sustainable art scene. Hence, the new ways of artistic organization would also bring about new ways of relating to the art institution, challenging traditional conceptions of distribution and circulation of power, as well as that of the autonomy of art, while enabling the emergence of spontaneous or informal cultural policies.

Although the idea of autonomy points to following one's own laws, in the context of Trama – as will be explained in greater detail below – autonomy was far from implying an individualistic practice. Autonomy in this context presupposes 'the other'; 'the other' is the pre-condition for autonomy. As Fontes proclaimed, 'Only by assuming the political responsibility of creating collectivity shall we earn the opportunity to think of ourselves as free.'[225] Following this assertion, the political dimension of the positioning of the artist lies in the call it makes to 'the other'. The positioning of the artist presupposes 'the other' and modifies him/her at the same time; it seeks to multiply acts of appropriation, solidarity, and a sense of belonging as new vital possibilities within the field.

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[224] Eva Grinstein, 'Confieso que soy un parásito. Creciendo en las grietas del mercado módico y el estado desertor', AICA 2006, <http://www.aica-int.org/spip.php?article329>, accessed 13 March 2012.
[225] Claudia Fontes, 'Trama's Last Paragraphs', 1:1 Mapping, *56a Infoshop Social Centre* [website], March 2006, para. 4, <http://www.56a.org.uk/maptramaparagraph.html>, accessed 13 October 2014.

An Expanded Field of Artistic Practice

Ever since the emergence of avant-garde collective practices in the 1960s and 1970s, the artist's role and identity has been challenged and expanded far beyond the act of individual creation as artists tested and widened the limits of art in all its phases: conception, production, distribution, and reception. Consequently, the paradigm of the individual artist has been deemed obsolete as new practices, new discourses, and new authorial identities continue to emerge from collective and other experimental experiences.

Nowadays, notions like 'artist–producer', 'artist–curator', and 'artist–activist' have become commonplace within the practice of contemporary art. The hybrid identity of artists signal the blurring of the borders of their assumed roles and tasks, and their fluid positioning within the art world, while emphasizing the experimental character of the art field and its ever expanding condition. The increasing engagement of contemporary artists in self-organized endeavours such as, for instance, the administration of exhibition spaces, the organization of discursive or editorial projects, the production of performance or video festivals, and/or experimental pedagogical projects, all point to this ever expanding condition of the field of art. Thus, implicit in the analysis of artistic *autogestión,* is the question of the 'expansion' of artistic practice, the motivation of artists to expand their practice assuming responsibility over aspects not only pertaining to the exhibition, distribution, and reception of their work, but also to all aspects related to the management of projects and spaces, as well as intersubjective relations.

In the context of Trama, the issue of the expansion of artistic practice was raised by Brazilian artist, Ricardo Basbaum, with his concept of the 'etc.–artist' first discussed during the first 'Research Workshop in Cultural Management for Artists' organized in 2002. Artist, theoretician, and an *artista-gestor* himself, Basbaum was invited to participate in the Research Workshop to contribute his experience as co-manager of AGORA (Agency of Artistic Organisms), an independent initiative for contemporary art in Rio de Janeiro (1999–2003). Basbaum's notion of the 'etc.–artist' alludes to his text 'I love etc.–artists' written in response to the project 'The next Documenta should be curated by an artist', curated by Jens Hoffmann in 2002, which

sought to explore – in a rather provocative way – the relationship of contemporary artists to the profession of curating.[226] According to Basbaum:

> When an artist is a full-time artist, we should call her/him an 'artist–artist' when the artist questions the nature and function of her/his role, we should write 'etc.-artist' (so we can imagine several categories: curator–artist, writer–artist, activist–artist, producer–artist, agent–artist, theoretician–artist, therapist–artist, teacher–artist, chemist–artist, etc.).[227]

Following Basbaum, the possibilities of the extension of artistic practice are directly linked to the artists' permanent inquiries into the nature and function of his/her role within the art field. The prefix 'etc.', then, points to the dissolution of the artist's identity into various hybrid artistic–identities, which, in turn, allude to the malleability and complexity of artistic work and how the roles of the artist continue to expand and transform. When the 'etc.–artist' actively questions his/her role and function, distancing from the conventional notion of 'artist–artist', he/she engages in a political exercise. The concept of art is reformulated and artistic practice expands when the artist assumes roles and functions that go beyond those of art-making and production.

The notion of the 'expanded field' in contemporary art history inevitably alludes to Rosalind Krauss' seminal essay from 1979, 'Sculpture in the expanded field'. In this text, Krauss analyzes vanguard sculptural practices of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the work of Richard Serra, Robert Smithson, and Donald Judd. These artists' practices challenged the limits of traditional sculpture and entered into the realms of architecture and landscape through the production of works classified as site constructions, marked sites, earthworks, and axiomatic structures. Krauss explains how the category of sculpture had become 'infinitely malleable', breaking down the modernist notion of sculpture.[228] As she argues, sculpture as a particular artistic medium had developed into an inclusive, expanded field where a new and expanding

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[226] An extract of this text was translated by Francisco Ali-Brouchaud and published in Trama's website as well as in its 2002 publication as a contribution to the first 'Research Workshop on Cultural Management for artists' initiatives' held in 2002. For the original text, see: Ricardo Basbaum, 'I love etc.-artists', The next Documenta should be curated by an artist, *e-flux* [website], January 2002, <http://www.eflux.com/projects/next_doc/ricardo_basbaum.html>, accessed 28 July 2010.
[227] Ibid, para. 2.
[228] Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the expanded field', *October*, Vol. 8, spring 1979, p. 30.

network of 'relations to place [social relations] and space and a new freedom in the treatment of various materials and structures became possible.'[229]

Similar to Krauss' concept of 'the expanded field', Basbaum's 'etc.–artist' is an expression that refers to innovative interrelations and combinations within the art field. However, while Krauss' account is based on an analysis of the artwork in relation to its medium or discipline (that of sculpture), Basbaum's highlights changes or transformations that pertain to the artists' practice per se, therefore activating the subjectivity of the artist. Furthermore, contrary to Krauss' concept of the expanded field, which was defined negatively – (sculpture) is neither this, nor that –, Basbaum's understanding is characterized by its plurality – it can be this, as well as that. 'Artist', as he contends, is a word with multiple layers of meaning, having 'several meanings at the same time.'

Understanding the 'etc.–artist' as a 'further development of the "multimedia–artist" that emerged in the mid-1970s, mixing the Fluxus "intermedia–artist" with the "Conceptual-artist"', Basbaum's concept finds resonance with other terms that have been used in different historical and geographical contexts to refer to similar articulations of artistic practice.[230] For instance, in relation to the alternative artist-run movement that emerged in New York during the 1970s, art historian Grant Kester refers to the 'artists–administrators' for whom it was a common practice to simultaneously assume, along with managerial tasks, a multiplicity of other roles like curator, organizer, researcher, writer, consultant, educator, etc.[231] In the context of Latin America in the early 2000s, independent filmmaker, artist and writer, Humberto Vélez, coined the term 'orchestra–artist', making reference to contemporary artists that assume the responsibility of being initiator, administrator, promoter, and curator all at the same time.[232] There is, however, a substantial difference between these two

[229] Anne Ring Petersen et al*., Contemporary Painting in Context*, Museum Tusculanum Press, Copenhagen, 2010, p. 14.

[230] R. Basbaum, 'I love etc.-artists', para. 4.

[231] Grant Kester, 'Rhetorical Questions: The Alternative Arts Sector and the Imaginary Public', *Art, Activism and Oppositionality: Essays from Afterimage*, Duke University Press, Durham/London, 1998, pp. 103-135.

[232] Humberto Vélez, 'Practical Dreamers: Artists as Initiators and Curators', in *Central Themes: 1st Regional Symposium on Contemporary Central American Artistic Practices and Curatorial Possibilities*, Teor/ética, 2001, pp. 403-408.

categorizations: while the 'artist–administrators' linked to the artist-run movement or alternative scene in New York managed to articulate themselves into an institutional network supported by both public and private patronage, the model of the 'orchestra–artist' is mainly a practical response to the lack of financial support and inadequate conditions for the development of the contemporary visual arts in most Latin American countries. Writer and curator, Michèle Faguet, has eloquently addressed this difference in her text, 'A Brief Account of Two Artist-Run Spaces':

> There is a contradiction implicit in the idea of the alternative or artist-run space as a phenomenon specific to developed countries or contexts in which a highly organized, sophisticated cultural infrastructure is clearly not lacking. One might argue that the very modus operandi of this kind of space – rejection or critique of both the institutional structure and the art market with their respective (often overlapping) processes of legitimation, a spontaneous manner of operating based on immediate material conditions along with a desire to adapt to (and make the most of) limited resources, and perhaps most importantly the mapping out of a self-defined position or space of marginality (in the positive sense of the term) – would find its natural habitat in a 'marginal' context characterized by the presence of dysfunctional institutions and the absence of a real art market. In other words, what is an alternative way of working in one context might be a necessary manner of operating in another.[233]

Faguet's argument reaffirms my previous contention; in Argentina, as well as in most Latin American countries, many artists resort to *autogestión* as a strategy or mode of survival. In contexts with more manifest deficiencies in basic social and cultural areas, artists seep through the interstices of the State, filling the void left by institutional collapse, inadequate educational opportunities, and weak cultural policies.

Well aligned with Basbaum's category of 'etc.–artist', while also echoing that of the 'artist–administrator' and the 'orchestra–artist', such artists were called *artistas–gestores* ('artist–managers') in the context of Trama. The concept of *artistas–gestores* refers to artists who extend their practice to create shared spaces (mostly outside the mainstream circuits of the art system), who aim to produce collective knowledge and discourse, and to socialize this symbolic capital within the local artistic community. According to Trama's own description:

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[233] Michèle Faguet, 'A Brief Account of Two Artist-Run Spaces', *Fillip*, No. 3, summer 2006.

In the majority of cases, these artist–managers play crucial roles to the functioning of the artists' community: in some cases, through the organization of workshops, debates, clinics and visits paid by artists and intellectuals to their cities, they attempt to supplement the flawed art education provided by official institutions; in other cases, they generate spaces for bubbling dialogue where young artists acquire visibility, not only in the light of the legitimized art circuit, but in their own environments: they come to know one another, they start new associations, create interdisciplinary projects and build strategies of incipient cooperation. There are still other cases where they open up communal spaces, unforeseen territories from where to ponder upon the role of the artist in the community he/she belongs to; places from where to pursue the practice of art amid a social reality which, intimidating as it may prove, serves the purpose of stimulating their action as well as of supplying them with a field of action and analysis.[234]

It is clear from this definition that the *artista–gestor* is not only one who embraces a wider framework for art production, but who comes to the fore as a social being and active participant in the collective decisions and experiences of the particular socio-political contexts in which they take place.

The link to the local context is of particular importance in Trama, as shall become evident throughout this study. Even though the *artista–gestor*, is oftentimes an artist who circulates, who is in constant movement within the complex world of globalized art circuits and networks, he/she also maintains strong links to the local social and cultural circuits in which he/she is immersed. Working locally, addressing what is closest to them through a variety of initiaitives, the *artista–gestor* often has to develop certain capacities that go beyond those traditionally associated with the practice of art. These artists that get involved in wider social matters or in the politics of cultural production, can also be considered 'cultural activists' or citizen activists, following art historian, Paloma Blanco. As she contends, the artist 'activist' acts as a mediator in the field of culture; he/she becomes a catalyst for political change.[235] In this sense, the practice of the *artista-gestor* can have an investment, or plays an important role, in the public sphere. As Argentine art historian, Roberto Amigo, has observed:

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[234] Trama, *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 96.
[235] See Paloma Blanco, 'Explorando el terreno', in Jordi Claramonte, Jesús Carrillo, and Marcelo Expósito (eds.), *Modos de hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa*, Ediciones Universidad Salamanca, Spain, 2001, p. 35.

By means of management activities, artists take upon themselves their role in a widened public sphere, becoming intermediaries of society's symbolic assets, which are potentially endangered thanks to the market logic and to the bureaucracy of the State.[236]

It is perhaps for this reason that art critic and curator, Lupe Alvarez, argued in one of Trama's final debates related to theory and artistic practice that artists' initiatives operate instead in an 'expanded *cultural* field'. The 'expanded field', as Alvarez then argued, is a conflicting concept as it is linked to a tradition of negativity and limited to the phenomenon of artistic languages.[237] The expanded cultural field, on the other hand, is not only a changing and interconnected space, but a complex space in constant flux, in which new knowledge emerges and, thus, where various aspects of the field of contemporary art converge and intersect.

Even though, nowadays, the concept of *artista-gestor* and the practice of *autogestión* have become commonplace within the Argentine cultural milieu, at the turn of the millenium, these practices failed to find representation or support within traditional art circuits, i.e. museums and the art market. During this period, as mentioned in Chapter I, art institutions responded almost exclusively to the imperatives of the neoliberal market and, thus, showed little or no interest in artworks or artistic practices that deviated from the legitimated formalist, individualistic, and self-referential aesthetics consolidated during the 1990s. As a consequence, this homogenizing trend overshadowed and neglected the work of many artists whose work found limited or no visibility within the official art circuit, as Argentine curator Rodrigo Alonso noted.[238] Similarly, visual artist and Trama participant, Magdalena Jitrik, confirmed this claim by commenting that, in the mid-1990s, artists that were not supported by the mainstream art system 'did not exist'.[239] As I discuss further in Chapter III, through the legitimation of the figure of the *artista-gestor* and the practice

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[236] R. Amigo, 'Untitled', p. 127.

[237] I refer to the debate 'Theory and artistic practice: The theoretical construction around the phenomenon of artists' organizations', organized on the 4 November 2005 within the context of *Trama: El Encuentro*. The panel was constituted by Lupe Alvarez, Rodrigo Quijano, Claudia Paim, and Virginia Pérez-Ratton, and moderated by Rafael Cipollini.

[238] Rodrigo Alonso, 'Reactivando la Esfera Pública', *Lucera* 3, Rosario, spring 2003.

[239] Magdalena Jitrik, 'La presión para un cambio en las artes visuales? Espacios, curadores y circuitos alternativos', in Esteban Álvarez & Tamara Stuby (eds.)*, Pensando en voz alta: ciclos de mesas redondas sobre temas de actualidad en las artes visuales*, Buenos Aires 2001–2002, p. 84, <http://www.elbasilisco.com/pensando.pdf>, accessed 18 August 2012.

of *autogestión*, Trama contributed to the creation of a parallel system of validation of artistic practice. Based on horizontal relationships and cooperation, the artist positioned himself/herself as a legitimating figure within a system based on an ethic of peer recognition.

The rise of the *artista-gestor* and the proliferation of independent artist-led spaces was fundamental in the decentralization of the art circuit. The wide array of artist-initiated platforms, projects, and experimental strategies developed during this period to disseminate and circulate art production to wider audiences destabilized and called into question, as a consequence, the centrality of the official circuits as sole legitimating mechanisms or guarantors of the autheticity and value of artists' work. As a result, a new scenario emerged in the art field which became more one of self-affirmation and enunciation for artists operating at the margins of the hegemonic circuits of the art system (i.e. Buenos Aires). Of particular importance here is the greater mobilization and visibility gained by artists based in the provinces. In the last years, Alonso observes, a great number of art spaces have flourished outside the capital with programs completely different to those from Buenos Aires:

> Some of the focal points of production nowadays are not in Buenos Aires. They are in Rosario, Córdoba, Tucumán, Mar del Plata or Mendoza, but also in Misiones, Santa Cruz or Bahía Blanca. The magnitude of these centres is probably unprecedented in the artistic history of our country. [240]

The fundamental role artists' initiatives played in the development and diversification of contemporary art scenes outside the confines of Buenos Aires is further developed in Chapter III. Notwithstanding this, it is important to mention here that it was Fundación Antorchas, and not Trama, who initiated this modality of interchange and dialogue, connecting artists and cultural producers from the provinces outside of Buenos Aires. Based on international models, Fundación Antorchas (1985–2005) was a private non-profit foundation that sought to promote cultural heritage, research and education in the fields of science, culture and social development. Américo Castilla, the director of the cultural division since 1992, initiated an active and generous program to support the development of contemporary art production and artistic training for young visual artists (mainly between 1997–2004). Up till then,

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[240] R. Alonso, 'Reactivando la Esfera Pública', para. 15.

most of the financial support provided by Antorchas was granted to artists from Buenos Aires. Castilla reverted this scheme through the creation of grants and workshops – the '*clínicas'*, as previously mentioned in Chapter I – that sought to provide the opportunity for young artists to develop their work, increasing the level and quality of their art productions. Contrary to many other prizes and the *salones* (e.g. Salón Nacional de Artes Visuales) that provide financial subsidy on the basis of the artist's trajectory or a finished product/artwork, Antorchas would promote artistic projects lasting over the course of one year, encouraging artistic management, organization and reflection on creative processes.[241]

As Castilla observed in a recent interview, by the mid 1990s, Antorchas would acknowledge the fact that 'the potential of artistic production was greater than the resources allocated to the administration of such potency.'[242] Thus, it became important to address the fact that artists needed to be capable of managing (*gestionar*) their own production, albeit their programs were oriented mainly to art training and production. In this sense, Antorchas can be cited as the precursor to Trama's project and network, as it generated some of the conditions of possibility (i.e. interprovincial exchanges, innovative artistic training, financial support) for Trama to emerge and to consolidate a nation-wide network of artists' initiatives. Interestingly, many of the artists linked to Trama were involved in the programs organized by Antorchas, mostly as grantees or as tutors. Such is the case of Fontes herself: Antorchas awarded Fontes grants to develop her practice at the Taller de Barracas (1994-1995) in Buenos Aires and to be a resident artist at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten (1996-97) in Amsterdam. She later performed as tutor in some of Antorchas' workshops for the analysis of artistic production in the provinces at the end of the 1990s. Pablo Ziccarello, one of Trama's founding members and a visual artist from Buenos Aires, would also conduct an artistic residency at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten with a grant received by Fundación Antorchas (2003). Carlota Beltrame, a visual artist from Tucumán, participated in the Taller de Barracas (1994) with a grant from Antorchas. She met Fontes on this program and later became closely involved in the projects Trama organized in Tucumán. For

[241] R. Alonso, 'Arte argentino actual'.
[242] Américo Castilla, personal interview with author, 29 November 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

intance, she was co-organizer of the project '*Contextos*' in 2002, which I briefly discuss below. Moreover, she was one of Trama's grantees at the 'Workshop on Cultural Management for Artists' in 2002. Visual artista, Tulio de Sagastizábal, recieved a grant from Antorchas to participate in the Beca Kuitca in the 1990s and later participated as tutor in Trama's worshops in 2000 and 2005. In 2000, artist Sandro Pereira, also from Tucumán, participated in Trama's '*Taller de confrontación de obras*' in 2000. That same year, he won Antorcha's '*Premio Estímulo a la Creación Artística*'. Roxana Ramos, a visual artist from Salta, was selected by Fundacion Antorchas to participate in the '*Encuentros de análisis y producción de obras*' in Tucumán (2001) and later in Salta (2003). She also participated in Trama's '*Taller de investigación sobre producción artística y contextos de creación*', which took place in Tucumán in 2002. In addition, as will be discussed in Chapter III, some of these artists would eventually create their own initaitives or become associated with one of them, such as in the case of Pablo Guiot, Roxana Ramos, Sandro Pereira, and Carlota Beltrame, among others.

Ever since it was created, Trama lived up to its aim of encouraging a national network of *artistas-gestores* through the organization and support of mobile activities in various cities and regions in the country. Each of these activities and events was carefully organized in conjunction with local organizations and teams of artists to meet the specific needs of each particular context. Trama capitalized on the experience and opportunities generated by Antorchas and expanded them by, for instance, inviting renowned artists from abroad, mainly Europe and the United States. This was important as it provided an opportunity for young artists from the provinces to work and engage in peer to peer dialogue with more experienced artists that could provide a different perspective and confront the works from different angles.

In this way, the expansion of artistic practice, and the cultural field in general, not only had to do with the proliferation of artistic *autogestión*, but also with the emergence of new environments or platforms for the development of a more critical, reflexive, and profesional art practice and discourse. In the context of Trama, the practice of *autogestión* provided artists with a way of expanding their capacity for action and agency in a context were action was severely circumscribed, while renewing the commitment of the artist and the ability to act in the public sphere.

In the context of Trama, the concept of an 'expanded field' also carried another quite significant connotation. The expansion refers not so much to an extension, but to what they consider to be an aspect intrinsic to the work of art; that is, the ethical. In this case, the ethical is not something that is located outside of the aesthetic process; it is neither dialectically opposed, nor dissociated from the aesthetic, but constitutes an integral part. In fact, ethics is inextricable from the process of artistic creation and, as such, is a consistent part of the artist's self. There is an ethics underlying every project of artistic *autogestión*; however, this ethic is not homogeneous but contingent to each project's objectives. In Trama, the ethical as an expansion of the aesthetic takes place as the work of art is created in relation to 'the other', in so far as the work is the result of the artist's capacity to project him/herself in relation to 'the other'. This understanding highlights the visual arts as a social practice, as it concerns the artist in social relationships with others, rather than in isolation. This ethico-political position is clearly manifested in the following statement:

> Some artists only find some sense in their practice standing in the place of the other, projecting themselves, so to speak. They imagine themselves in the place of the other, which inevitably leads to building a shared space.[243]

The ethical here, as I explain in detail below, needs to be understood as part of an intersubjective process strongly based on ideas of social responsibility, where the 'I' cannot be dissociated from the social and historical conditions of its existence. More specifically, the question of responsibility cannot be thought of in isolation from 'the other'.

The fact that the main goals and objectives of the project clearly intersected the field of the social allows us to trace a link between Trama and other contemporary art practices which take social relations as artistic matter.[244] It should come as no surprise, then, that the ethical is at the center of the discourse when it comes to the discussion and analysis of art practices whose goal is to facilitate intersubjective

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[243] Trama, 'Epilogue', *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 96.
[244] For example, practices related to socially-engaged art, relational aesthetics, community art, participatory art, connective aesthetics, littoral art, and dialogical aesthetics.

interaction, to produce or encourage new social bonds, to invent new models of sociability or conviviality, or to create experimental – and, oftentimes, transient – communities. What differentiates Trama from these other practices, however, is the specific relation between ethics and aesthetics. Whereas, in most socially-engaged or participatory art projects, the discussion of the ethical tends to be circumscribed to the relation between the work and the audience (reception phase), Trama focused on the link between ethics and aesthetics in the process of art making. This implies a more holistic view of artistic practice, where the emphasis is placed on the critical interrogation of the ethical stance of the artist in the process of production.

Since the recent 'ethical turn' in the field of cultural production, contemporary art has been subjected to inquiry regarding the ethical virtues of artworks. The philosopher, Peter Dews, has described this 'ethical turn' as a moment in which 'questions of conscience and obligation, of recognition and respect, of justice and law, which, not so long ago, would have been dismissed as the residue of an outdated humanism, have returned...'[245] However implicit or unthematized, ethical concerns and problematics are never absent from artworks. Whether artists make use of animals (Eduardo Kac) or human body parts (Teresa Margolles) as part of experimental art projects; pay unemployed workers a minimum wage to sit inside cardboard boxes for hours (Santiago Sierra); subject participants to 'possible public humiliation and bodily injury'[246] (Marina Abramović); serve trays of cocaine to gallery audiences (Tania Bruguera); or self-inflict pain or self-mutilate themselves (Regina José Galindo); when it comes to ethics, the attention in art discourse is most often given to moral aspects of art and art criticism.

Thus, the discourse of ethics in relation to aesthetics tends to be limited to the evaluation of art on the basis of how the audience responds to, or perceives, a particular artwork, its capacity to provoke dismay, scandal, or the extent to which it succeeds in transgressing social codes or established morals or laws. Consequently, within artistic discourse, ethics all too often tends to be conflated with morals; so

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[245] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso Books, London/New York, 2012, p. 25.

[246] Grant Kester, 'Galatea's Gaze: Ethics, Spectacle and Participation', in Elizabeth Hamilton (ed.), *Engagement Party: Social Practice at MOCA 2008-2012*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 2013, pp. 30.

much so that the terms tend to be used rather interchangeably. As Jacques Rancière contends,

> Ethics…is viewed as a general instance of normativity that enables one to judge the validity of practices and discourses operating in the particular spheres of judgment and action. Understood in this way, the ethical turn would mean that politics or art are increasingly subjected today to moral judgments about the validity of their principles and the consequences of their practices.[247]

This kind of understanding of ethics – focused on the ethical failings of the works or the ethical responsibilities of the audience – would seem to limit the analysis and discussion of the relation between ethics and aesthetics to the reception and consumption of art. To my understanding, assuming the point of reception, rather than the point of production, as an analytical vantage point, obscures the complexity of ethical considerations in certain projects and how these could be further understood within particular contexts. Such is the case in the context of Trama.

The question of ethics within Trama pertained not so much to the content of the artwork produced, but to the assumptions or presuppositions that underlie its creation. This understanding of the role of ethics brings attention to the initial stages of art making; that is to say, to the conceptualization or gestation of the work of art. This implies a shift in focus from the artwork in its objectified form to its cognitive process of creation. As Marina de Caro, visual artist and Trama co-organizer, attested: 'we concieve the idea of an artwork, not as an end in itself or a final product, but as that (object or action) which allows for the production of knowledge, and to exert reflection and debate.'[248] Here, ethical inquiries are transferred to thought processes in art making, to how artists – through the creation of artworks – learn to apprehend and relate to the world around them.

The workshops and activities Trama organized, especially during their first years of operation, sought to follow this logic. For instance, the meetings held in 2000 for the 'Confrontation of Artworks' (Buenos Aires) and the 'Analysis of Artworks'

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[247] Jacques Rancière, 'The Ethical Turn of Aesthetics and Politics', in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. tr. Steven Corcoran, Continuum Books, London/New York, 2010, p. 184.
[248] Marina De Caro, *'Presentación de Trama', in Duplus, El pez, la bicicleta y la máquina de escribir: un libro sobre el encuentro de espacios y grupos de arte independientes de América Latina y el Caribe*, Fundación PROA, Buenos Aires, 2005, p. 48.

(Buenos Aires and Rosario), which I briefly described in Chapter I, were organized so that local artists could analyze the process of construction of their works through critical discussions among themselves and with more experienced local, as well as foreign, artists. Based on the strategies of confrontation and cooperation, these discussions aimed at deconstructing the creative process and unveiling the motivations and intentions of the artists through a thorough process of questioning and self-reflection.

Within this framework, and in spite of the negative connotations the word in itself might carry, confrontation was considered as a learning tool. It was based on the principle that challenging ideas, practices, and concepts can bring to the surface or highlight meaningful differences, values or aspects that are hidden or taken for granted. Hence, the idea of confrontation in Trama was understood to be productive, and indeed essential to a process of self-reflection regarding the production and critical analysis of works. Confrontation and cooperation became strategies for the development of artistic practice in relation to 'the other', a collective process that acted as a means to generate bonds and to create community. Interestingly, it was cooperation, rather than confrontation, which was seen as a subversive practice within the Argentine context, becoming the topic of much discussion. As Fontes recalls during a presentation of Trama at the Royal Academy of Art in London:

> In that moment it was more controversial to talk about cooperation than to talk about confrontation in Argentina. Maybe here the word confrontation sounds a little bit harsh, while for us it was a very common word, while saying cooperation was a source of distrust, and generated suspicions around the reasons for desiring to be together.[249]

Hence, in a scene dominated by distrust and lack of solidarity, creating a context based on cooperation became fundamental to Trama. Through the processes of confrontation and cooperation, the project aimed at facilitating an atmosphere in which artists would feel more comfortable discussing their motivations for making art with their peers.[250]

Another strategy through which Trama sought to radicalize the processes of reflection and discussion within the Argentine art scene, was through the

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[249] 'Presentation of Trama by Claudia Fontes', p. 3.
[250] Ibid.

confrontation of artists from dissimilar backgrounds and contexts. This important component was at the base of most of the workshops and collaborative projects organized by Trama, especially during the first period of the program. Although the content of these events was not predetermined, Trama proposed some guidelines, specifically those related to the exchange and confrontation of contexts: local artists would participate in each event, along with artists from other cities, artists from abroad, or professionals from disciplines other than the visual arts. Given the lack of opportunities for artistic exchange available in Argentina at the beginning of the 2000s, these workshops and events provided an open space in which different or opposing ideas could be taken into account in a process of productive dialogue. As Juana Neumann, visual artist and grantee of the workshop 'Analysis of Art Production' (Buenos Aires, 2000), asserted:

> Trama proposes a space for dialogue and exchange among artists in a place where the recognition of the context itself is much needed... All the artists I know come from different contexts. Their ways of producing their work are also different because it is inevitably related to the mode of distribution and circulation of each context. By confronting the different contexts I can start to recognize my own and incorporate it in my practice...[251]

Underlying these workshops, then, was the belief that confrontation and cooperation with peer projects emerging in contexts of similar geopolitical characteristics could potentially enrich and deepen common questions.[252] As could be expected though, the problem of 'translation' was a recurrent one, posing a challenge to the artists involved in these collaborations. Trama's concern was how to integrate these visiting artists in the projects and dynamics that were being produced in the local context:

> Through workshops and collective projects we have explored the difficulty of 'translating' the signs that construe the artwork, or the thinking displayed when confronting each other. To make this confrontation effective we assured the presence of at least one 'foreign' participant at each activity of Trama to cause this tension. These 'foreign' visitors are not necessarily artists coming from other countries; in many cases they are simply artists from other cities in the country, or participants who put forward their points of view from other disciplines. Their role is to underline involuntarily with their questions, observations and projects the identity of the visiting context as an external constituent element, as a *witness*.[253]

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[251] Trama, *Insights and Contexts*, p. 75.
[252] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.
[253] Trama, 'Organized urgency', pp. 86-87.

An example of this is *'Contexto'* ('Context'), a project of cooperation and artistic exchange carried out in the cities of San Miguel de Tucumán (Argentina) and Veracruz (Mexico) between 2002 and 2004. Organized by Trama within the framework of RAIN – the network of artists' initiatives of which Trama was a member –, this collaborative project was developed in several stages. As explained in their 2002 publication: This project took the shape of a collaborative chain between pairs of artists. Following the suggested research theme, the relationship between context and text, each participating artist was meant to fulfill two roles: as an assistant and host in his/her own city to a guest artist who develops his/her project, and as a guest artist invited to make his own project assisted by a local artist in another city.[254] The first stage of *'Contexto'* consisted in the staging of *'Punto de Vista'* ('Point of View'), a collaboration between Dutch artist, Germaine Kruip, and Argentine artist, Jorge Gutiérrez. La Baulera, a theater group directed by Gutiérrez, also participated in the project which took place in San Miguel de Tucumán, a city in the north of Argentina, in 2002.[255] In this case, the Argentine artists worked with Kruip to translate 'Point of View', a performance piece she had already enacted in cities like Amsterdam and Oslo, into the particular context of Tucumán. In addition, this artistic collaboration was accompanied by the theoretical support of Argentine philosopher, Jorge Lovisolo, who participated in the project as 'reader' of the context – a witness – in charge of providing 'a framework for theoretical reflection.'[256]

The performance-situation proposed by the artists was, in principle, quite simple. It consisted of a walk around Plaza de la Independencia (Independence Square), the city's main square, while the members of La Baulera enacted different characters that typically inhabit the square. Meanwhile photographic records of this action were entrusted to various photographers who were also unaware of what might happen or who the actors were. Coincidentally, during the days of the performance, there was also a public demonstration carried out by Town Hall employees who, chained to one another, walked round and around the Plaza. Rather

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[254] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 117.
[255] The overall coordination of the event was overseen by Claudia Fontes and Carlota Beltrame.
[256] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 118.

than competing with the public manifestation, Kruip and Gutiérrez cleverly added it to the performance [Fig. 2.9a, b & c]. Carlota Beltrame, artist from Tucumán and co-organizer of the event along with Fontes, described the performance in the following words:

> Today we're going back to work at the square. Germain and Jorge walk around and take a look at the work done by the members of La Baulera, giving them minimal instructions. They do not act, but simply work on characters they have previously detected and that are typical of the square. This is how they underscore the square's own natural features, without making any additions. For example, Ezequiel lies down on a bench 'to sleep', Maxi 'reads' a book, Chechi folds her clothes over and over again, Gelly will be late and in a hurry and, as a spectator, will take the announced walk after the others, looking for things that, all at once, are very difficult to notice or very easy to find.[257]

During the course of this collective action, Kruip would drew attention to 'points of tension in the daily scene so as to bring about an ambiguous kind of reading.'[258] In a spirit close to that of psychogeography,[259] by interfering in the everyday environment of Tucumán's main plaza, the artist's intention was to arouse a certain degree of uneasiness with the aim of breaking the routine of the urban spectators (the passersby): 'the abrupt irruption of something unforeseeable and unusual.'[260] Thus, for Kruip the real authors of the performance were the spectators who, induced by the actions of the artists, were encouraged to look at the same things they would see normally, but under a new light. In this sense, the performance explored the tensions that surfaced between 'fiction and reality', as Gutiérrez explained.[261] While the people of Tucumán are used to witnessing political-performative actions and demonstrations by anonymous people in the city's main square on a daily basis, the fact that '*Punto de Vista*' took place immediately after the explosion of the 2001 crisis granted this public action a deeper symbolic significance.[262] Conditioned by the specificities of the historical moment – post-crisis Argentina –, this performance carried stronger political

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[257] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 121.

[258] Ibid, p. 120.

[259] A practice strongly linked to the Situationist International, psychogeography can be defined as an approach to geography that emphasizes playfulness and 'drifting' around urban environments.

[260] Ibid, p. 119.

[261] Jorge Gutiérrez, 'Independence Square is not what it seems', in Trama, *Society Imagined*, p. 122.

[262] Ibid, p. 123.

undertones than in the previous cities where it had been staged, as Gertrude Flentge, former director of the RAIN network, has noted.[263]

This seemingly simple action triggered significant, as well as complex, issues that were of great interest for Trama. For instance, it raised a series of relevant questions, such as: What is the relationship between text and context? What is the role of translation within visual language? And, how can artists account for cultural differences in the process of creation of intercultural artistic projects? Although a proper discussion of these issues, and of the subsequent stages of the 'Contexto' project, exceed the analysis I intend to elaborate here, I would like to highlight the role of the witness in these projects and its importance in Trama as part of an artistic methodology/strategy based on confrontation and cooperation:

> We are truly excited by the idea of an artist assisting another artist, especially in a project that places context in the foreground as an effective way to confront ideas and exchange values during the construction process of a piece of work.

> Every artist, while assisting another project, will be responsible for transmitting references to his/her own environment at several levels simultaneously, starting from the most basic one – that is, from providing the necessary structure for the project – to the most complex level, which will consist in providing assistance so that the proposed piece of work is conceptually effective. He/she will have to get involved in the guest artists' thought structure by attempting to confront it with the logic of his/her own context. He/she will take upon himself/herself the unique role of a translator of his/her context from an intimate, privileged position...Thus, the traditional concept of authorship is challenged by artistic realization while the circumstances under which an artistic event is produced are questioned...

> If we consider the [context as text] as an accumulation of peculiar and contingent references affecting one context in particular; if, on the other hand, the narrator of that text is the host artist inviting readers to some sort of exchange and if the reader is the guest artist, then this project will enable us to start analyzing how competent we are in reading our own context and how much of it we manage to translate when faced with a system of references that are different from that which gives sense to our work and make it possible.[264]

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[263] 'Trama offers an alternative to the established art scene', para. 4.
[264] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, pp. 117-118.

Described by philosopher and writer, Reinaldo Laddaga, as 'participants who, at the same time, stand as witnesses and witnesses, who at the same time, participate',[265] the guest artists played a very important role in the framework of Trama. These foreign artists not only served the purpose of enriching the creative process and artistic experience of the artists involved. The discussion of the issues that were raised in the process of conceptualization and creation of the works, provided an opportunity for the Argentine artists to get to know and define themselves better. According to the testimony of visual artist, Marina de Caro, who participated in the workshop on the 'Confrontation of Artworks' in 2000, and afterwards became part of Trama's organizing team:

> Artists who came from outside our context, acted as a stimulus for questioning and redefining ideas. When enlarging the circulation of works of art, its field of meaning also gets extended. There lies the importance of these works of confrontation; a work of art grows when facing a situation that differs from its natural stimulus.[266]

As de Caro further observed, the production of 'works of art' was the ultimate 'goal' of artists in this time period.[267] Trama inverted this operation by generating a network in which questioning and reflection is recovered as the central axis of artistic production. Emphasizing the critical and reflexive process linked to the construction of artworks, rather than the work of art as a finished product, Trama subverted the hegemonic logic underlying artistic production in Argentina at the time. In so doing, Trama played an important role in the (informal) formation of many of the young artists that participated in the events (i.e. Marina de Caro, Pablo Guiot, Sandro Pereira, etc.). Although the project did not have an explicit pedagogical imperative, implicit in its objectives was a critique of the art education system. According to Trama, art education in Argentina had usually been characterized by a vertical scheme, whereby the '*maestro*', a well-established and legitimized artist, imparted his experience and provided advice based on his own subjective view to young artists eager to belong to the same legitimized circle. This view – strategically isolated from

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[265] Reinaldo Laddaga, 'Reparations', in Trama, *Society imagined in contemporary art in Argentina*, p. 130.
[266] Trama, *Insights and Context*, p. 77.
[267] Ibid, p. 77.

that of its peers – limited the possibilities of development of the artwork and interrupted, or abolished altogether, any chance of dialogue by separating the work from that which motivates its emergence, the context.[268]

The lack of exchange and critical discussion in art production, in combination with the fact that the analysis of artworks and art education in general, was characterized, almost entirely, by a discourse that followed market and commodity values generated a discursive gap between the artwork and 'the actions of the artist as a citizen', as Fontes argued.[269] Thus, by analysing the intentionality of the projects prior to their implementation, what Trama did was to give visibility to the artists' ethics, and to make these ethics an explicit and deliberate part of artistic practice. Regarding the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, founding member Pablo Ziccarello explains: 'Trama conjoined art practice with the artist's ethic…it demonstrated that when artists act within the (art) field, their ethics is put into play. And, thus, this ethic can be subjected to confrontation.'[270]

Thus, the workshops for confrontation and analysis of artworks sought to question the subjective (ethical) position of the artists in order to challenge or problematize the values underpinning the production of art (i.e. capitalistic/market values) and to bring to the fore the contradictions between the work and the actions of the artist. Such an exercise, intended to create an open space for reflection and dialogue, while highlighting the complexity and variety of the contemporary artistic practices of the time. During these workshops, ethics occupied the foreground of analysis, despite the fact that it would usually occupy the background of production. It can be understood as an exercise of self-criticism whereby in 'questioning the other, you question yourself.'[271] The objective of these ethical reflections were, then, not to exert judgments of moral value, but to find a common ground from where a more productive and (self)reflexive dialogue could take place. Following Brian Holmes, the aim was to find a 'shared horizon' that is so fundamental to self-organized activity;

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[268] See, Trama's presentation in 'La formación de los artistas', Encuentro en el Goethe, *Ramona 29-30*, January/February 2003, p. 33.
[269] C. Fontes, skype interview with the author, 2 August 2013.
[270] P. Ziccarello, personal interview with the author.
[271] C. Fontes, personal interview with the author, 21 August 2012.

that which gives 'the members of a group the capacity to recognize each other as existing within the same referential universe…'[272]

In the context of Trama, to find this shared horizon, to engage in a process of collective reflection, to create collective thought, implied the recognition of 'the other'; to assume an ethical position with regard to others and themselves. As Fontes asserted:

> A common language inevitably arises in cooperation. Each party brings with their actions a distinct translation of this common language that expresses the shared place. This shared reality and the language inaugurated by it can only exist by the promise of the intimate recognition of the needs of the other. This recognition is, in the end, a mirror of difference itself. For this reflection to occur there must be a suspension of identity. It is only at this point, where the moment of learning and sharing can occur…[273]

The theoretical underpinnings of the ethical in Trama are based on the ideas expounded by psychologist and former president of Amnesty International Argentina, Thierry Iplicjian, in a text entitled 'Hacia la construcción del otro' ('Towards the Construction of the Other').[274] This presentation, given in Buenos Aires in 1997 as part of a seminar on human rights organized by Amnesty International, addressed the situation of the resolution of conflict in contemporary Argentine society, a society strongly governed by a mercantilist ethic (*ética mercantilista*). As he contends, 'what prevails in our societies is the mercantilist ethic. That is, the resolution of conflict based on a cost-benefit calculation that confers market value on objects, as well as actions.'[275] Following Iplicjian, then, we must rethink the problem of human rights from a different ethical standpoint.

In order to understand this, as he explains, it is necessary to understand the complexity of the social field, of the relations established between subjects and power. However, any discussion pertaining to social relations, power, conflict, and

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[272] Brian Holmes, 'Network, swarm, microstructure', *Multitudes*, 2006, para. 6, <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Network-swarm-microstructure>, accessed 19 January 2011.
[273] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.
[274] Thierry Iplicjian, 'Hacia la construcción del otro', public presentation at 1er 'Seminario Taller sobre Educación en Derechos Humanos', organized by Amnesty International Argentina & Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos, Buenos Aires, 19–20 April 1997, <http://www.derechos.org/koaga/viii/1/iplicjian.html>, accessed 2 October 2012. [This and all subsequent translations of this text have been translated by the author.]
[275] Ibid.

ethics, any discussion about the violation of human rights in the context of Argentina, cannot take place without taking into account what the Uruguayan psychoanalyst, Marcelo Viñar, has called *patrimonio mortífero* (legacy of death). That is to say, the legacy of the dictatorship, genocide, and state terrorism that has conditioned Argentine society over the last four decades. As I will futher discuss in Chapter III, this traumatic experience, which in many ways still haunts the collective memory of the Argentine people, has also left a strong mark on the practice and production of contemporary art in Argentina.

According to Iplicjian, the issue of the violation of human rights in the Argentine context has to be understood as a breaking of ties of identification with the other.[276] In terms of social relations, this implies an order where *I am* in relation to the other, as Iplicjian contends: 'Without an *other* to name me, I cannot be.'[277] So, according to Iplicijan, the perception of the other is a fundamental problem in the way in which social relations develop. Within this framework, the ethical suggests a horizon of resolution in the ever-conflicting social relations set between subjects. For Iplicjian, then, what is relevant in the question of ethics is not so much the result of an act, but the values that are at stake in the *mise en scène* of such an act.

In order to explain how individuals deal with the 'legacy of death' in a consumer-driven society like Argentina, Iplicjian outlines a classification of three different subject-positions – the Tourist, the Idiot, and the Citizen – and discusses how individuals relate to, or alternate between these taking as a parameter their behaviour towards the other in society. According to such a classification, the Tourist lacks the necessary codes to decipher the situation in which he/she is immersed. He/she limits him/herself to the consumption of sensations, mostly filtered by the media. The Tourist recognizes the existence of the other, but is unable to abolish the distance which separates him from the other. Thus, he/she adopts a voyeuristic position against the violation of human rights. The Idiot, is the one who avoids getting involved with social issues; one who is indifferent to the issues affecting other human beings. The problem of the Idiot, Iplicjian contends, lies in the absolute break of ties with the other. Subscribing to the values of the market, where value is conferred

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[276] T. Iplicjian, 'Hacia la construcción del otro', para. 4.
[277] Ibid.

based on utility (use value), for the Idiot, the other is nothing more than a thing, an object. According to the author, this position is dangerous, since the rupture of the social bond attacks the very center of what is understood as humanity. The only subject, then, capable of generating a stream of empathy based on the recognition of the other and, therefore, the only one able to abolish the distance with the other, is the Citizen. Since one of the main characteristics of the Citizen is his/her understanding of the social condition itself, as Iplicjian contends, no matter how different the other is, the Citizen recognizes him/her as such. That is, he/she takes into consideration the fact that the other is a Citizen, just like himself, and in this way recognizes a common, shared identity between himself and the other. The Citizen accepts his responsibility with regards to society, acknowledging him/herself as part of the social web. This is where ethics plays its role.

Although Iplicjian's ideas might seem somewhat prescriptive, particularly when it comes to his categorization of the different types of subjects, according to Fontes, the overview of the Argentine society he described in his text was not far removed from the reality of the artistic environment at the end of the 1990s. At that time, she argued, artistic practice tended to be governed by market values, such as: competence, individualism, and branding.[278] Hence, in a context where the mercantilist ethic prevailed, recognizing the other as a subject and 'abolishing the distance (emotional and, therefore, political) that separated them from the other',[279] was a crucial pre-condition for the development of a collective project and network based on cooperation.

The need to emphasize ethics instead of aesthetics in Trama responded first and foremost to Fontes' own personal concern and intention of subverting the values that dominated artistic production in Argentina during the 1990s; a motivation that was similarly shared by many of her peers. The ideas expounded by Iplicjian in his text 'Towards the Construction of the Other', then, resonated with Fontes, guiding both her individual artistic practice as well as her collective engagement in Trama. In fact, as Fontes explained in my interview with her, it was during the development of her project entitled '*Reconstrucción del retrato de Pablo Míguez*' ('*Reconstruction of the*

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[278] C. Fontes, skype interview with the author, 14 May 2014.
[279] Ibid.

Portrait of Pablo Míguez') that she came across Iplicjian's text. Moreover, as Fontes noted, the conceptualization and creation of this sculpture happened in tandem to her involvement in Trama.[280] As I previously mentioned, the project of Trama was enabled, in part, by the prize Fontes won for her *'Reconstrucción…'* proposal in 1999. Hence, as the artist acknowledged, Iplicjian's subject classification proved to be very useful – both for her individual as well as collective work – as it helped her to understand her position as an artist in that particular social context.

Fontes' *'Reconstrucción…'* was one of the eight proposals selected in the international sculpture competition celebrated in 1999 to commemorate the civilians kidnapped and disappeared during the last military dictatorship in Argentina. The winning projects would form part of the sculpture park at Parque de la Memoria, a memorial situated by the Río de la Plata where many of the bodies tortured during the dictatorship were dumped during the infamous *'vuelos de la muerte'* or 'death flights', a habitual practice under the military dictatorship in Argentina whereby tortured or dead bodies of victims were pushed into the Río de la Plata to drown, thus making their retrieval almost impossible.

According to Fontes' description, this project was based on 'reconstructing – by the means of a sculpture – a possible image of Pablo Míguez, an adolescent who was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by the last military government at the age of fourteen.'[281] The outcome is a human-size sculpture made out of stainless steel polished like a mirror which has been installed on the waters of the Río de la Plata, in front of the lookout where the Monument to the Victims of State Terrorism ends [Fig. 2.10]. The figure is standing with its back to the spectator, thus it is he/she who has to reconstruct his face. The sculpture's polished surface reflects its surroundings and makes the image more or less visible in the landscape, depending on the weather conditions and the time of day.[282] Fontes has written in relation to this sculpture that:

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[280] C. Fontes, interview with author, Brighton, United Kingdom, August 2012.
[281] Claudia Fontes, 'Invisible Evidences. Towards the Appearance of the Other', *Proyecto Trama* [website], <http://www.proyectotrama.org/00/trama/ENGLISH/2000-2004/clauceia.htm />, accessed 6 June 2012.
[282] Claudia Fontes, 'Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Míguez', *Claudia Fontes* [website] <http://www.claudiafontes.com/work/Reconstruction-Pablo-Miguez-portrait/>, accessed 10 February 2014.

My proposal for Parque de la Memoria was based then on an attempt to reconstruct one of the multiple possible portraits of Pablo Míguez, one of approximately 500 children kidnapped with his/her parents during the military dictatorship…

This attempt at reconstructing an image became an exercise in collective memory building, in which Pablo's relatives, friends and 13 year old children took part. In exercising the right to memory, we tried all together to dismantle said perverse semantics [of the dictatorship] and give evidence to a fact [that of the disappeared], which unfortunately is still widely denied.[283]

Meant to be located in a public space for commemoration, the monumental character of the piece emanates, not from its physicality, but from the artists' intention of reconstructing the boy's image.[284] Interestingly, Fontes did not know Pablo personally. Yet she chose him because, were he to have lived, he would have been the same age as her. As the artist has acknowledged: 'I don't have any personal relationship with him or his story, except for the one I decided to have by rescuing his image.'[285] In this regard, it could be argued that the artists' decision to choose Pablo for this sculptural project is based on what Grant Kester denotes as 'empathetic identification', a knowledge grounded in our capacity 'to think outside our own lived experience and establish a more compassionate relationship with others.'[286] This mode of identification is also reflected in Fontes' belief that 'history should be made out of personal links of solidarity and commitment.'[287] So, while the sculpture is figurative and specific, it also acts as an abstract or symbolic homage to the kidnapped-missing people during the 'dirty war'.

As we can see, both aspects of Fontes' practice, the individual and the collective, relate in their own way to certain topics that are important for Fontes; namely, the politics of memory and the relationship between ethics and aesthetics through the recognition of the other. However, it could be argued that, if with the *'Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Míguez'*, Fontes aimed at the *restitution* of the image as *substitution* for the missing body – in this particular case, Pablo's body –,

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[283] Claudia Fontes, 'Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Míguez'.

[284] C. Fontes, 'Invisible Evidences', n/p.

[285] Ibid.

[286] Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2004, p. 150.

[287] Vikki Bell, *The Art of Post-Dictatorship: Ethics and Aesthetics in Transitional Argentina*, Routledge, Abingdon/New York, 2014, p. 95.

with Trama, and its endeavour of creating other ways of sociability, based on horizontal relationships and cooperation, the artist sought to contribute to the restitution of the collective body. However, unlike Fontes' sculpture, Trama did not *represent* the other. Rather, it sought to produce or generate other modes of collective thinking and doing. It involved the realization of a social act (giving visibility to the artist's ethic and facilitating a process of recognition of the other), opening up, in this way, the possibility for the transformation and reconfiguration of the social reality within the context.

Enacting Ethics

Trama's deliberate aim of (re)connecting ethics with aesthetics allows us to establish a link of continuity between Trama and the avant-garde practices in Argentina during the second half of the twentieth century, especially with the radical and political art of the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Notwithstanding this, I contend that Trama's particular way of understanding and articulating the relation between ethics and aesthetics would seem to contrast with that of the avant-gardes, revealing the different understandings of the role of the artist and artistic practice in their respective time periods.

The reason for choosing this particular generation for comparison responds to the fact that it served as a clear point of reference for Trama. Fontes, as well as other artists linked to Trama (like Graciela Carnevale, as previously mentioned), concurred on the fact that combining ethics with aesthetics, like visual artists did during the late 1960s, was somehow absent or, at least, disappearing from the art scene by the end of the 1990s. As Fontes commented, 'the generation of the 1960s was a very noble generation…their way of making art in relation to ethics is something that is disappearing…'[288] For this reason, Víctor Grippo (1936–2002) and León Ferrari (1920–2013), two emblematic Argentine artists well-known for their ethical commitment during the 1960s and 1970s, were carefully selected to participate in the 'Meeting for Confrontation of Artworks' and related debates that took place in Buenos Aires in the

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[288] C. Fontes, skype interview with the author, 14 May 2014.

year 2000. As has been mentioned in Chapter I, as part of these Meetings, Grippo and Ferrari would perform as mentors, confronting and questioning the artworks or proposals of the participating artists. Moreover, they were summoned to give a public presentation in which they would discuss their respective *oeuvres* and the methods used in the construction of their artworks [Fig. 2.11a & b]. As I discuss below, both Grippo and Ferrari were representative, each in their distinct way, of the typology of the artist engaged with his/her context; that is, with the socio-political reality of the times. Given the chaos and violence that prevailed in Argentina during the 1960s and 1970s, these were decades in which the ethical could hardly be separated from the aesthetic, and this interrelation was clearly evinced in the work of both Grippo and Ferrari. As Fontes recalls, 'their presence (at these events) was symbolic of this history of ethics and aesthetics' in the Argentine art context.[289] Thus, through their participation, Trama intended to appeal to these values and transmit them to the younger generation of artists.

In 'Más allá del radicalismo político', art critic, Jorge López Anaya, commenting on Grippo's work, asserted that 'ethics and aesthetics are at the center of the discourse of this artist who never dissociates art from life.'[290] Grippo was a member of *Grupo de los Trece*, a group formed in 1971 by artists associated to the CAyC (Centro de Arte y Comunicación, or Center of Art and Communication), including Jorge Glusberg, Luis F. Benedit, Jacques Bedel, Alfredo Portillos, and González Mir, among others. He was also a representative of the current of conceptual art inaugurated in Buenos Aires under the name of *Arte de Sistemas* (Systems Art), the term coined by Glusberg for the different artistic approaches that were developed by the CayC during the 1970s.[291] Throughout this decade, Grippo sustatined an intense artistic activity alongside the *Grupo* exploring the relation between art-science, art-technology, and

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[289] C. Fontes, skype interview with the author, 14 May 2014.

[290] Jorge López Anaya, 'Más allá del radicalismo político', in *Ritos de fin de siglo. Arte argentino y vanguardia internacional*, Emecé Editores, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 194. [author's translation]

[291] *Arte de Sistemas* was the title of an exhibition held in Buenos Aires in the Museo de Arte Moderno in 1971. According to this concept, the works of art are understood as *sistemas de signos* [sign systems], which, in turn, can respond to different *códigos* [codes]: political, ecological, conceptual, and cybernetic, among others. Thus, beyond the diversity of meanings that are proposed in each work, what is maintained in all of them is their nature of being a system. This implies, at the production level, the possibility of a certain serialization, or a multiplication of the works, as well as the relevance of the creative process, which is privileged over the finished product.

art-information. Incorporating domestic objects or working tools into his artworks, as well as precarious materials or elements from nature – like potatoes, beans or bread –, Grippo produced a body of work characterized by utopia and humanism, as has been described by Argentine art historian, Ana Longoni: 'His poetic (or utopia?) liberates art from the narrow and restricted boundaries of its autonomy to expand into everyday life.'[292] Within the context of political upheaval and military dictatorships of the late 1960s and 1970s, Grippo aimed at producing an art that would be ethical. That is, capable of transforming the consciousness of man and, in this way, of changing social reality. Thus, much of his work involved this concept of awareness/consciousness, but also transformation in the broadest sense. The artist would deploy natural and living materials in order to show this process of transformation. An example of this is his series *Analogías (Analogies)* [Fig. 2.12], a series of installation works in which, through certain scientific approaches, he sought to provoke or stimulate the consciousness of the viewer. In most of these works, he used potatoes as a basic material – a type of food of Latin American origin used in daily life – connected to electrodes (electric wires) and a voltmeter in order to measure the energy/electricity generated by the potatoes. The idea was to establish an analogy between the functions of the vegetable and human consciousness. In so doing, in these works he combined 'metaphorical elements with objective (scientific) findings and ethical concerns', as he himself explained.[293] Establishing an analogy between the potato and consciousness, this work exemplifies how his aesthetic-ethics dissolve into social life. This quality was further achieved through the 'defamiliarization' of objects, a technique that consists in presenting common things in an unfamiliar or strange way, in order to enhance perception of the familiar.

Another example which analyzes this specific transaction (the transfer of an everyday object in a given environment to another) is '*Construcción de un horno popular para hacer pan*' ('*Construction of a Popular Bread Oven*') [Fig. 2.13]. In

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[292] Ana Longoni, 'Víctor Grippo: una poética, una utopía', in Marcelo Pacheco et al., *Víctor Grippo. Una retrospectiva. Obras 1971-2001* [exhibition catalogue], Malba - Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, 2004, p. 18. [author's translation]

[293] Víctor Grippo, 'El arte es sobre todo una situación', in Marcelo Pacheco et al., *Víctor Grippo. Una retrospectiva. Obras 1971-2001* [exhibition catalogue], Malba - Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, 2004, p. 169.

September 1972, Grippo along with Jorge Gamarra and A. Rossi, an artist and a rural worker, respectively, built a traditional oven with mud bricks in the public square Roberto Arlt located in the center of Buenos Aires. During the days of the exhibition, entitled 'Arte e ideología, CAyC al aire libre' ('Art and Ideology, CAyC in the Open Air'),[294] the artists prepared bread and distributed it to the public. Similar to his *Analogies* series, in this work energy transformed matter: elements such as flour, yeast, and water, in their interaction with fire, transmuted into something else, in this case, bread. Regarding the process of defamiliarization in relation to this artwork, Longoni has observed:

> This work proposes a series of contrasts deriving from the relocation of an artifact from the countryside to the city. An artisanal activity is placed in the middle of an industrial centre; rustic elements coexist with the modern city; a fragment of everyday life is out of context, ['deshabituado']. The producer, the means of production, and the final product are simultaneously part of the scene. But, fundamentally, its the processes (of construction of an oven, and of making bread) which become visible.[295]

Taking place on the 23rd of September, just a month after the Trelew massacre,[296] the 'Arte e ideología' event aimed at 'winning the streets' and generating an encounter with 'the people of Buenos Aires' by exhibiting its works outside 'the elitist museums and galleries.'[297] In so doing, the artists turned the streets, albeit momentarily, from a space of conflict occupied by the guerrilla and the military, to a space of artistic experimentation and sociality. Even so, contrary to many of the works marked by a sense of urgency and political denunciation, Grippo's work invoked the idea of social exchange, of community. By sharing the bread that had just been baked, in an oven that had just been constructed, the artists emphasized the idea of art as process,

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[294] With the participation of around sixty artists as well as theater, performance, and music groups, this public event ran parallel to 'Arte de sistemas II' at the CAyC and the Museo de Arte Moderno of Buenos Aires. The exhibition was shut down by authorities a few days later.

[295] Ana Longoni, 'El arte, cuando la violencia tomó la calle. Apuntes para una estética de la violencia', p. 5, <http://blogs.macba.cat/pei/files/2011/01/caia-2001.pdf>, accessed 9 October 2014. [author's translation]

[296] After attempting to flee, sixteen imprisoned political prisoners, militants of different Peronist and Left organizations, were executed by the conservative military government in a prison in Trelew, Patagonia.

[297] Jorge Glusberg, 'Arte e Ideología en CAyC al Aire Libre' [exhibition brochure], Centro de Arte y Comunicación (CAyC), Buenos Aires, 1972.

rather than the finished product.[298] Moreover, the act of 'feeding' the other is a gesture that speaks of generosity, love, and conviviality.[299] Through the creation of a popular bread oven, the artists socialized not only the bread itself, but also knowledge, the '*oficio*' or technique (how to make a brick oven), and memory. This work clearly exemplifies the humanist utopia Grippo envisaged, where the ultimate justification of art is ethical and tends to the collective good.

Similar to Grippo, the ethical also underlied the critical body of work of León Ferrari. Considered one of the most renowned avant-garde artists in Argentina, Ferrari stood out not only for his prolific artistic production – including sculptures, drawings, objects, *'(manu)escritos'*, collages, installations, artists' books, assemblages, as well as collective and collaborative works –, but also for his civic and ethical practice. Critical of the elites and in stark opposition to authoritarianism, his work was a clear manifestation of the relationship between poetry and politics, and between ethics and aesthetics. Because of his fervent critique of the Catholic Church as a system of social control and the 'savage' capitalism of the West, Ferrari was considered by critics and theorists of art as a 'political' artist representative of the 'ideological conceptualism' current in Latin American art.[300] His infamous piece, '*La civilización occidental y cristiana*' (1965), in which a US bomber is represented with a *santería* Christ figure, is only one of many in which the artist denounces the injustices of the world he lived in, particularly the ties between the Church and State [Fig. 2.14]. With the intention of posing a stark critique to the role of the United States in the Vietnam War, Ferrari proposed this work – which was accompanied by the phrase 'The problem is the old problem of mixing art with politics' – along with three additional pieces for the Di Tella prize in 1965. The director of the institution, Jorge Romero Brest, refused to include '*La civilización occidental y cristiana*' in the show

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[298] A. Longoni, 'Victor Grippo: Una Poética, Una Utopía', p. 19.

[299] Jorge López Anaya, 'Lo cotidiano y lo universal', *La Nación*, <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/184795-lo-cotidiano-y-lo-universal>, accessed 4 November 2013.

[300] Zanna Gilbert in her text 'Ideological Conceptualism and Latin America: Politics, Neoprimitivism and Consumption', argues that 'the term 'ideological conceptualism' has recently been posited to redefine the perception of Latin American art internationally. This recognition of a specifically Latin American conceptualism promotes the underacknowledged contribution of artists of the region to modernism and conceptual art.' See: Zanna Gilbert, 'Ideological Conceptualism and Latin America: Politics, Neoprimitivism and Consumption', *re·bus – a journal of art history and theory*, Issue 4, winter 2009.

alleging that it offended the 'religious sensibility' of the staff and audience of the Torcuato Di Tella Institute.[301] Ferrari found himself in a sort of dilemma:

> …either to take the path of the visual arts, which indicated or demanded the withdrawal [of the artwork] and denounce censorship, or the path of politics, [which followed] my initial purpose of exposing there something about Vietnam, instead of the freedom proclaimed by the US bombers.[302]

In the end, Ferrari withdrew '*La civilización occidental y cristiana*', but still privileged the political act by exhibiting the three other pieces he had sent which, although less controversial in their aesthetics, still followed the same thematic and objective. In choosing to exhibit these works in the most important avant-garde institution, the artist generated a critical gesture that would have political resonance in the artistic environment. This act of denuciation, not only confirmed Ferrari's commitment to his ideals, but it constituted a significant landmark in the process of politicization of the Argentine avant-garde artists that would reach its hight in 1968.[303]

Throughout his life, Ferrari was actively engaged in the struggle for the defense of human rights, especially from the mid-1970s onwards. In spite of being subjected to censorship and threat during the dictatorship era, he demanded a more just and ethical world with his work: 'Much of Ferrari's work from this period arguably constitutes so many attempts to fulfil that wish to express the horror of State violence, to record, respond and to confront it', as sociologist Vikki Bell has noted.[304] In 1976, at the beginning of the dictatorship, Ferrari created '*Nosotros no sabíamos*' ('*We did not know*'), a series of collages in which he denounced the torture and crimes committed by the military during this period [Fig. 2.15]. The collages were prepared during his exile in Brazil, where he had to flee with his family after his son's abduction.[305] The series consisted of the compilation of press clippings from different Argentine newspapers published throughout 1976. These newspaper clippings 'told

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[301] A. Giunta, *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política*, p. 277.

[302] A. Longoni, *Vanguardia y Revolución*, p. 36. [author's translation]

[303] Ibid.

[304] V. Bell, op. cit., p. 46.

[305] Ariel Ferrari, son of León and Alicia Ferrari, was kidnapped by the Argentine military dictatorship in February 26, 1977; according to testimonies, he arrived dead to a clandestine detention camp of the ESMA (Escuela Superior de Mecánica de la Armada) [Navy School of Advanced Studies in Mechanics]. Ferrari and his family lived in exile in Brazil for 15 years.

of the mutilated and bound cadavers that were washing up in the Uruguayan banks of the Río de la Plata, or had been found in the streets of several Argentine cities, their bodies bullet-ridden or showing signs of torture.'[306] The clippings also included information regarding the refugees in embassies, children seeking their parents, etc.[307] As sociologist Vikki Bell has pointed out: 'Gathering these clippings and displaying them as art, as Ferrari did, holds up the evidence to those who would later say *"nosotros no sabíamos"*.'[308] As previously noted, given the economic and political turmoil and unrest Argentina experienced in the early 1970s, many Argentines applauded military rule when it arrived or, at least, did not stake out a clearly anti-military position. Thus, with this series, Ferrari makes a double critique: against the military, but also against the citizens who, in his view, were in one way or another also complicit with the regime. Blurring 'the limits between the ethics and aesthetics'[309], in this work, Ferrari aimed to confront and challenge those subjects who pretended to ignore the repressive and abusive military actions against civilians; those who, according to Iplicjian's subject typologies, would act like the Idiot or the Tourist.

By focusing on examples from these two artists, representatives of the avant-garde of the 1960s-70s, I do not mean to imply that the ethical was absent from the artistic production in the period post-dictatorship (from the late 1970s, through the return to democracy in 1980s, and Menem's neoliberal era in 1990s). As art historian Viviana Usubiaga reminds us, the transition period from the cruellest dictatorial regime in Argentine history to the re-establishment of democracy combined a number of heterogeneous and disparate aesthetic and cultural productions. The experience of terror and forced silence was depicted through a pictorial approach that very often seemed 'impulsive, desperate, melancholic and austere.'[310] At the same time, there was a need 'to put into action the words and body, and to make visible the latter, in

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[306] V. Bell, op. cit., p. 46.

[307] Luigi Patruno, 'Estéticas del disenso. Desapariciones, exilios y políticas de la visibilidad', *Letral*, Issue 6, 2011, p. 117.

[308] V. Bell, op. cit., p. 46.

[309] Andrea Díaz Mattei, 'León Ferrari. In Memoriam', *InterArtive* [website], <http://interartive.org/2013/11/leon-ferrari-in-memoriam/#sthash.o1IIonDr.dpuf>, accessed 17 March 2014.

[310] María Guillermina Fressoli, 'Extrañamiento, despolitización y memoria social en el arte argentino de inicios de los 80', *Nómadas. Revista Crítica de Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2013, p. 7.

order to mark its absence.'[311] Hence, while the decade of the 1980s saw the return to painting (strongly influenced by *transavantguard* or neoexpressionist movements), it also gave way to performative actions and artistic expressions that, in close alignment with the new struggle for the defence of human rights, sought to make visible the genocide perpetrated by the State. The urban performances and interventions of groups like Escombros or C.A.Pa.Ta.Co (Colectivo de Arte Participativo Tarifa Común) are a clear example of this. However, the most emblematic of the visual manifestations in the public space at the time was that of *El Siluetazo* [Fig. 2.16a & b]. This practice, which was initiated on the 21st September 1983 (during the period of dictatorship) as part of the *III Marcha de Resistencia* organized by the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (Mothers of the Disappeared), consisted in the creation of thousands of human-sized silhouettes sketched on paper and then pasted on walls, trees or columns around the city. Initiated by visual artists Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel, and carried out in conjunction with the *Madres* as well as other artists and activists, this collective action constituted a powerful visual resource that – driven by the participation of the multitudes – gave visibility to the absent bodies of the *desaparecidos*.[312] Public actions and manifestations such as this one, that sought to visually elaborate the collective memory after the last dictatorship, demonstrate how the political convictions and engagement of the artists of the 1960s-1970s was replaced by an ethics based on the elaboration of a social consciousness. Taking part in the new political and cultural climate pro-democracy of the 1980s in Argentina, the artist was seen as an amplifier of the collective conscience, as art historian María José Herrera has suggested.[313]

With regards to the art of the 1990s, despite the fact that critics, such as López Anaya, have considered that ethics were seemingly divorced from the aesthetic during this decade, more recently, several authors have provided arguments that challenge this claim. For instance, according to artist and sociologist, Syd Krochmalny, the aesthetic proposal of *El Rojas* championed by Gumier Maier stood in opposition

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[311] Viviana Usubiaga, *Imágenes inestables: artes visuales, dictadura y democracia en Argentina*, Edhasa, Buenos Aires, 2012, p. 19. [author's translation]

[312] Ana Longoni & Gustavo Bruzzone (eds.), *El Siluetazo*, Adriana Hidalgo Editora, Buenos Aires, 2008, p. 7.

[313] María José Herrera, 'Gestión y discurso', p. 106.

to that of the 1980s which sought to represent the social and political issues of the dictatorship and the aperture to democracy through expressive gestures, matter, and a dark palette. This opposition – an aesthetic practice linked to the idea of 'beauty', 'enjoyment', and 'pleasure' that is closer to inventiveness than to the subjectivity of the artist of the previous decade – highlighted an aesthetic difference that, in turn, presupposed an ethical distance:

> This aesthetic difference is an ethical difference that is founded on a Marxist and semiotic reading of reality that highlights the mode of production of meaning in the work of art rather than the representation of political events. Here, the political is present in the production of the artwork rather than in the representation, in the selection of materials (low-cost, industrial, jewellery, plastic, polystyrene) and on how they are used/worked (artisanal production…embroidery, collage).[314]

As Krochmalny has contended, the political in this art production is brought into play through the ethics of the materials, rather than in the images represented. Similarly, art historian María Laura Rosa has discussed the ethical in relation to the way artists approached the issue of gender during this decade.[315] As Rosa claims, some of the artists producing so-called *arte light* or *arte rosa* ('pink art', alluding to the sexual preference of the artists) the during the 1990s meant to address a different set of problematics; that is, the issue of homosexuality and AIDS, a pandemic that had a strong impact on the artistic community since several artists – such as Liliana Maresca, Omar Schiliro, Feliciano Centurión, and Alejandro Kuropatwa – died of AIDS- related illnesses during this period.[316] The Rojas Gallery provided artists with a space where they could openly discuss and express issues pertaining to gender and sexual identity, which until then had been silenced or repressed. In so doing, they not only took an (ethical) stance with regard to private life and the space of intimacy – which is no less political –, but they 'became a crucial part of the struggle to define an openly gay identity in the context of Argentine conservatism.'[317]

A more thorough analysis would certainly provide further arguments regarding the ethical in the art production of previous decades. However, it is the

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[314] S. Krochmalny, 'La Kermesse', p. 2. [author's translation]
[315] María Laura Rosa, 'Un territorio dislocado', *Ramona*, 87, December 2008, p. 34.
[316] I. Katzenstein, 'Avatars of Art in the Argentina of the 1990s', p. 42.
[317] U. Davila-Villa, op. cit., p. 28.

strong similarities in terms of the socio-political contexts, as well as the engagement, motivations, and political imperatives of the artists in these two decades (1970s and 2000s) that makes for a relevant comparison in this study. Far from an attempt at offering an exhaustive account of artistic production during the two decades in question, in what follows, I propose some points of convergence between these practices in order to establish a possible comparison or 'reading' of the links and differences between these two key moments in the history of contemporary art in Argentina. The first point of convergence worthy of mention pertains to the socio-political context. In both instances, artists were operating within a horizon of extreme political radicalization, namely the military *coup d'état* and the establishment of the dictatorship 'Estatuto de la Revolución Argentina' (Statute of the Argentine Revolution) in 1966. During this period, General Juan Carlos Onganía assumed presidency and Congress was dissolved, as well as collective labor agreements.[318] There was widespread repression and censure, and all political activities were prohibited. This was followed by the popular uprisings known as *El Cordobazo* in 1969, which inaugurated a wave of social protests and intensification of political violence that ended with the military *coup* and dictatorship of 1976. A few decades later, with *El Argentinazo* that took place in late December 2001, the country witnessed the worst state violence since its return to democracy in 1983. Thousands of people took to the streets openly challenging the state of siege imposed by the government and engaging in different forms of social mobilization all over the country: barricading, lootings, riots, assemblies, roadbloacks, *cacerolazos*, and marches. It is estimated that around 30 people were killed and 4,500 were injured or detained.[319] Although this violent repression would only last for two days (19th and 20th), the legacy of the crisis would have long lasting consequences for Argentines. As a result of the chaos and sense of urgency, both historical moments translated in the radicalization of artistic thought and artistic mobilization. Artists assumed a militant attitude, and displayed a

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[318] Juan Carlos Onganía (1914–1995) was a military and Argentine politician who served as president of the Republic between 1966 and 1970, after leading the *coup* that ousted President Arturo Umberto Illia.

[319] C. Levey, D. Ozarow & C. Wylde (eds.), op. cit., p. 6.

strong engagement with regards to their respective socio-political milieux, albeit it manifested in very distinct ways.

Marked by crisis as they were, in both periods, the function of art and the role of the artist in society were interrogated. This critical consciousness was strongly linked to experimentation in art production, a production that absorbed the political, and stirred collective action, self-organization, and participation. Moreover, both in the context of the avant-gardes as well as that of artists' initiatives like Trama, the artists devised alternative platforms outside the mainstream art institutions in which to exhibit, disseminate and socialize their ideas and projects. As Graciela Carnevale contended, 'finding ourselves unable to show our work and express our ideas in the places designed for this purpose, we sought alternative spaces.'[320] However, while the actions of the avant-garde artists of the late 1960s-70s clearly displayed an anti-establishment attitude, a deliberate and radical desire to break with the institution of art and its bourgeois values, Trama did not pose a direct critique to the art institutions. Instead, they operated in conjunction with them. In spite of the need to operate outside the established art circuit, in the context of Trama, the discussion was not so much whether to operate from within or outside the institutional framework, but about how – and in which terms – these collaborations would take place. In addition, the issue of legitimacy of the artist as a political actor was central to the avant-garde artists of the 1970s, as well as for those linked to Trama, although the means to achieve this was markedly different in both moments.

There is a significant difference in terms of the political and the social role of art in both cases. For artists' initiatives such as Trama, rather than trying to change society, the political had to do with designing new modes of conviviality or, in Charles Esche's words, with articulating 'modest proposals'; that is, making use 'of existing objects, conditions, situations and manipulate the elements into different, more aspirational or purposeful configurations.'[321] Thus, for Trama, art's political or social role no longer shared the revolutionary sense of heroics or messianic objectives as it did for the avant-gardes. Art production at the turn of the century was not guided by

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[320] G. Carnevale, 'When Silence Talks', para. 10.
[321] Ch. Esche, *Modest Proposals*, p. 16.

leftist or ideological values linked to a project of revolution like it did in the late 1960s-1970s. But perhaps one of the most evident differences between artistic practices in these two historical moments had to do with the role that violence played in relation to art's capacity to effect change in society. While confrontation was a strategy common to both artistic contexts, the way it was exercised was diametrically opposite in each case. Aesthetic creation was understood as collective and violent – including ways of acting common to political militancy, such as sabotage, kidnapping and clandestine actions – doing away with the mythic figure of the individual artist and the passive character traditionally associated with art. The 'new art' proposed by the avant-garde in the late 1960s would display the same aggression and violence that prevailed in the streets at the time:

> To be violent is to dominate and destroy the old ways of a [type of] art sustained on individual property and on the individual enjoyment of a unique work of art. This disruption consists now of actions that create new contents: [actions] which destroy the official cultural system by opposing it with a subversive culture that integrates transformation and creates an art that is truly revolutionary.[322]

While for the avant-gardes confrontation was polemical and decidedly violent, in Trama, as I have been discussing in this chapter, it acquired a reflexive-discursive character. There was no intention of making political denunciations (even less violent disruptions) but rather to bring about a positivity, a strategy to generate a common ground that would facilitate productive dialogue and cooperation. Even so, beyond the obvious differences between one case and the other, there is, nevertheless, a common denominator between the two; namely, the understanding of artistic practice as a vector capable of influencing the conditions of existence.

This brings us back to the issue of the ethical. As I have elaborated thus far, for Trama, as well as for the avant-gardes, the ethical and the aesthetic were consciously regarded as constitutive aspects of artistic production. However, the way the ethical was understood in both cases is significantly different. While, for the avant-gardes the ethical was *represented* in the artwork, in the context of Trama, the ethical was

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[322] 'Tucumán Arde', declaration by María Teresa Gramuglio and Nicolás Rosa in relation to the exhibition in Rosario, November 1968. See: Andrea Giunta, *Escribir las imágenes. Ensayos sobre arte argentino y latinoamericano*, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Buenos Aires, 2011, p. 136. [author's translation]

enacted or *put into play*, rather than represented. In what follows, I allude to two particular examples related to each case – the avant-gardes and Trama – in an attempt to make this differentiation explicit.

In August 1968, a group of radical artists and intellectuals gathered in the *Primer Encuentro Nacional de Arte de Vanguardia*, not to carry out a work of art or to organize an exhibition, but to evaluate where they stood and what direction they should take in order to direct their efforts *vis à vis* the political situation of the times. As explained in the meeting's program, presented by Juan Pablo Renzi (with the consensus of the Rosario artists, at least), the object of this debate was to articulate a theory that specifically oriented and clarified their future field of action.[323] They agreed on a new perspective: the search for 'a new field,' 'a new function,' and 'new materials that would carry out that function', in order to reach 'a new expression that will produce the ideological conscience of the artist within its structure.'[324] The foundations for the 'new' aesthetics were laid down in the document entitled 'La obra de arte como producto de la relación conciencia ética–conciencia estética' ('The Work of Art as Product of the Ethical Consciousness–Aesthetic Consciousness Relationship'),[325] which provided the theoretical basis for the discussions at the *Encuentro Nacional*… As the title clearly manifests, the 'new' work of art they were proposing would be the product of the relation between an ethical and an aesthetic conscience. As such, it would necessarily reflect the conscious relation between these two. Thus, some of these 'political' artworks would be characterized by the direct transposition of the political issues in question into the aesthetic realm, revealing in this way their conscious ethical intentions.

This consciousness was clearly manifested in the radical anti-institutional political artworks and actions of 1968, which incorporated risk and violence as aesthetic materials, known as '*Itinerario del 68*': Eduardo Ruano's action at the *Ver y Estimar* Prize, the actions at the Ciclo de Arte Experimental (Series of Experimental Art) in Rosario, Pablo Suarez's refusal to participate in the exhibition *Experiencias '68*

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[323] Juan Pablo Renzi, 'The work of art as product of the ethical consciousness-aesthetic consciousness relationship', August 1968, tr. Marguerite Feitlowitz, Archivo Grupo de Arte de Vanguardia of Graciela Carnevale, ESCALA, University of Essex, Colchester.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Ibid.

(Experiences '68), the boycott of the Braque Prize, and the action that spoiled Romero Brest's lecture at the *Amigos del Arte* club. The culmination of this series of events and actions that marked the process of politicization and radicalization of the visual arts in 1968 was most clearly expressed in the work of *Tucumán Arde* [Fig. 2.17a].

Organized between August and December 1968 by a group of artists from Rosario and Buenos Aires, as well as intellectuals from various cultural fields, *Tucumán Arde* sought to manifest the rupture with the artistic institutions and the traditional modes of artistic production.[326] In association with the *Confederación General de Trabajadores* (General Confederation of Argentine Workers), they created a collective work denouncing the distressing situation of the workers in Tucumán after the State shutdown of the sugar mills there. *Tucumán Arde* aimed at creating a counter-information circuit 'with the purpose of bringing to the public eye the real state of affairs that the administration was concealing from the people.'[327] This project culminated in an exhibition held in Rosario's CGTA headquarters under the name of 'Primera Bienal de Arte de Vanguardia' (First Avant-garde Art Biennial) [Fig. 2.17b]. Among the works exhibited were photographs, recordings, slides, writings, short films, as well as other material and information that revealed the critical social situation. A successive exhibition was organized later in the CGTA of Buenos Aires, but it was banned by the National Government, the dictatorial government of General Onganía, as previously mentioned [Fig. 2.17c & d]. More than 30 years later, Carnevale would sum up the project in the following way:

> It was meant to question art as well as the establishment. It showed a group of artists who, having become aware of the conditions under which they had been working, implemented a proposal to operate change. Their new awareness led to questioning the role of the artist in society, the institutional spaces reserved for art, the purpose of a work of art, its form and content. It also led to consider some sort of correspondence between art and life that could help revisit the practice of art from a position of ethical conscience.[328]

As Ana Longoni has noted, the experience of *Tucumán Arde* constituted at the time the largest collective attempt in the articulation of artistic experimentation and

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[326] Some of its leading members were Graciela Carnevale, León Ferrari, Roberto Jacoby and Norberto Puzzolo.
[327] G. Carnevale, 'When Silence Talks', para. 10.
[328] Ibid, para. 13.

political action; that is, art's most effective contribution to the revolutionary process.[329]

In the case of Trama, the best example of how ethics were enacted is the project itself and the fact that a group of artists, with a shared perspective and shared desires, decided to organize themselves and to create a program of cooperation between artists that aimed at fostering more horizontal and democratic relations within the artistic scene. Here, the ethical did not materialize into any artwork per se, but it was enacted in the process of confrontation and cooperation. Therefore, it was relational and performative, emerging in the intersubjective processes of exchange and dialogue within the context of the project. As I have already elaborated, in Trama, the concept of ethics is strongly linked to that of social responsibility. At the heart of this understanding of ethics is a concern about someone other than themselves, and their own desires and self-interests. In this sense, the project relied on a political economy based on generosity, which was articulated through the recognition of the other and a politics of caring. This caring-for investment was a guiding principle in the program and the way it was constructed. With the aim of 'looking after those to whom artistic work is addressed',[330] Trama was created to benefit the wider artistic community, rather than for the personal benefit of the organizing members. In fact, with a few exceptions, none of the them participated in the workshops or events they organized. Thus, based in a deeply rooted sense of recognition and trust in the other (whether neighbour, a group of friends, fellow artists, an audience that will be invented if it is not real, and new artists-to-come), the events and activities organized within the project were meant to translate into an identification process with colleagues and audiences alike.

This mode of social and affective interrelations fostered by Trama through its practice of *autogestión* crystalized into a social ethics that was replicated and continued resonating in the artistic scene even after the project ended. This idea of social ethics is further elaborated in Chapter III in relation to Lefebvre's concept of 'societal ethics'; but, for our purpose here, suffice it to say that it was best exemplified by the surprise party organized for Trama at the end of *Trama: El Encuentro*. At the

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[329] A. Longoni, *Vanguardia y Revolución*, p. 65.
[330] Trama, *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 97.

end of this massive event, some of the artists' initiatives that participated in the conference organized a suprise party at Fundación PROA, one of the main private art insititutions dedicated to the dissemination of contemporary art in Argentina. The artist Valeria Conte MacDonell and Tomás Campbell – two of the main organizers of the party who participated on Trama's final event with their initiative, Enbarro, in San Martín de los Andes – thought that the best way to end a week of intense discussions and debates was with music and the communion generated by food.[331] In only three days, the initiatives spontaneously coordinated the space, resources, music dj, and food to throw a party for hundreds of people. As Conte recalls: 'it [the party] generated a lot of union between all the artists involved...many bonds were created in that meeting...they still remain to this day and have been key in our career.'[332] Following Conte's testimony, it could be said that the activity organized by Trama propitiated what Victor Turner would call a *spontaneous communitas*, the transient experience of togetherness.[333] Although this anecdote might seem trivial, the gesture clearly synthesized and made manifest the goals that Trama had set for the project. As Fontes expressed: 'it [the surprise party] put into play the lessons in self-organization, the collective spirit, and the sense of community and belonging based on cooperation that Trama sought to promote in its five years of operation.'[334]

As these examples show, in the case of Trama, as well as in that of the late 1960s avant-garde, ethics and aesthetics were inextricably related. To my understanding, the difference lies in where the emphasis or focus is placed in both instances with regards to the art work and how it is conceived. In spite of the strong emphasis on experimentation and an insistence on doing away with aesthetic contemplation through, for instance, the dematerialization of art, the avant-garde artists still subscribed to the idea of the artwork. Even if their aesthetic proposals sought question traditional conceptions of the 'work of art', the notion was still operative, just as much as the exhibition format was maintained (albeit in its anti-bienial characterization). Hence, the artwork had to be created in the function of a

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[331] Valeria Conte MacDonell, virtual conversation with the author, 17 November 2014.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, 1974, pp. 273-4.
[334] C. Fontes, email interview with author, 14 May 2014.

specific political ideology resulting in some kind of material end product, be that an installation, an action, a public artwork, or a more relational and ephemeral work. This radical work would respond to the question posed by Renzi in 1968: How can this newly acquired (ethico-political) consciousness be translated or represented in the work of art? ('¿De que manera realizaremos artísticamente la conciencia adquirida?').[335] In contrast, Trama insisted on the value of the confrontation of the creative process as fundamental to knowledge production. Here, rather than on ideology, art focuses on the social process of exchange: '…art practice had to do with the process, with confrontation of processes and debates about it, rather than about results.'[336] In the case of Trama, the emphasis would be placed on the process of confrontation of the artist's ethics. Following Renzi, the question posed by Trama, then, would be: How can the artist's ethics be recreated or acted out in the process of the creation of the work? In epistemological terms, this signals a shift from the (art) object, as a product with particular aesthetic qualities or an artistic medium, to the actual process of artistic production (thought process developed collectively, in relation with the other). As Grant Kester frames it, this represents a 'shift from an aesthetic discourse centered primarily on questions of visual signification to one concerned with the generative experience of collective interaction.'[337]

Furthermore, there is a significant difference in the role of the ethical in each case. In the case of the avant-gardes, the ethical worked as the codification of political ideology, and so the function of ethics was to state, reinforce, and represent these particular political beliefs (i.e. art in the service of the revolution, violence as an aesthetic means, the concept of 'total art', etc.). In contrast, while ethics was a precondition for the foundation of the project, as noted above, in Trama, its visibility was made possible by the fact that it was put into practice. In other words, if, in the late 1960s and 1970s, radical artists aimed at creating a 'new' work of art that would *represent* their ethical and ideological consciousness, in Trama, the artist's ethic is enacted and, in this process, it is *put into play* rather than *represented*. This enactment

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[335] J.P. Renzi, op. cit.
[336] 'Presentation of Trama by Claudia Fontes', p. 5.
[337] Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, Duke University Press, Durham/London, 2011, p. 24.

makes visible the performativity of ethics in the process of open, critical and intersubjective dialogue.

So, how can the relation between ethics and aesthetics be understood within the broader framework of *autogestión*? *Autogestión* was the strategy through which Trama conjoined the ethical and the aesthetic, and socialized these values as symbolic capital within its networks and the broader local artistic scene. In the context of Trama, the practice of *autogestión* becomes a collective endeavour with political and ethical dimensions. The ethical becomes 'the ground upon which political action might be attempted.'[338]

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[338] Nicolas Ridout, *Theater and Ethics*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, p. 66.

Chapter III   The Politics of *Autogestión*

The practice of *autogestión* proliferated throughout Argentina in the period of the crisis since it proved to be an effective strategy to solve basic economic and survival needs, such as the provision of food, work, and healthcare. The urgency of the events of the crisis led to the exploration of new practical and productive possibilities. In a context of increasing precarity and unemployment, these self-organized projects were driven as alternatives to the failure of the market economy. As sociologist, Héctor Palomino, suggests, the political dimension of these undertakings consists precisely in their capacity to provide original solutions outside the institutionalized economic system.[339]

Equally marked by this sense of urgency, artists' initiatives such as Trama sought to 'imagine, test and discuss new ways of collective social and productive organization'[340] in order to tackle different issues or needs associated with their practice. As they expressed in their text, 'Organized Urgency':

> We believe that if we may acquire any specific knowledge in artistic practice in Argentina in 2002, it is this urgency know-how. A sort of permanently precipitated phenomenological reduction stimulates us and obliges us to take decisions at a speed and with a flexibility of thought that only a critical state of survival can bring about. In Trama we think that the work of art is the key to acceding this knowledge, and that the processes and questions this work brings with it become the specific tools to imagine desirable means of construction of collectivity.[341]

At this point of inflection, visual artists deployed different strategies to intervene in the socio-political context, and to modify and 'master their conditions of existence', as Lefebvre would put it. Some artists intervened with their artworks and others – like those associated with Trama – through their extended practice. The politicity of *autogestión* in this case lies in its production of ideas, values, and symbolic constructions that operated and extended beyond art production. Thus, in order to

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[339] Héctor Palomino, 'La Argentina Hoy: los movimientos sociales', *Revista Herramienta*, Issue 27, October 2004, para. 3, <http://www.herramienta.com.ar/revista-herramienta-n-27/la-argentina-hoy-los-movimientos-sociales>, accessed 8 November 2014.
[340] 'Organized Urgency', *Shifting Map*, p. 86.
[341] Ibid, p. 87.

understand Trama's political potential we must understand not only what the project was about, but the conditions that it generated or contributed to generating.

The new social movements promoted the politicization of civil society by formulating self-organized projects that focused on the radical change of social relations; re-appropriating public space and organizing spontaneously into networks; and activating new subjectivities responsible and capable of redefining their place within society.[342] Similarly, as I discuss below, Trama resonated with the wider social framework, as the practice of *autogestión* implied new processes of subjectivation, new modes of sociability, as well as the production of a counter-space and the articulation of an artists' initiatives network.

The political in Trama unfolded in a similar manner to these parallel and interrelated socio-political processes and, as such, must necessarily be understood in relation to them. Besides responding to specific ethical concerns, I contend that Trama also operated as a political strategy by acting simultaneously in the registers of the social, the subjective, and the spatial. Although, for the sake of clarity, I discuss each of these registers separately in what follows, it is important to note that these processes are not dissociated from one another but, rather, closely linked and interrelated.

In this chapter, then, I rely on Lefebvre's broader view of *autogestión*, emphasizing – equally – the social, the subjective, and the spatial in his framework, as well as its productive potential to guide my analysis. As I will discuss, through the practice of *autogestión*, Trama proposes ways of seeing and modes of doing that are different to those established by the hegemonic cultural model. By discussing Trama and the social movements in relation to Lefebvre's terms – 'new societal ethics', 'the revalorization of subjectivity' and 'territorial *autogestion*' –, I will examine how they create a new sort of value production, breaking with alienation and producing alternative modes of capitalist relationships to production.

Tracing links between the case of Trama and the wider social framework enables an analysis of artistic strategies in relation to broader processes and situations

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[342] Héctor Palomino et al., 'La política y lo político en los movimientos sociales en Argentina', p. 1, <http://www.insumisos.com/lecturasinsumisas/La%20politica%20y%20lo%20politico%20en%20los%20movimientos%20sociales.pdf>, accessed 19 November 2014.

that condition artistic practice, but which are, all too often, disregarded. Moreover, it implies an attempt at doing away with more traditional perspectives that tend to limit the politicity of art to textual references, or its explicit political or social claims, in favor of a different kind of politicity or potentiality of artistic practice; that is, an attempt at revaluing the processes that shape the political dimension of artistic practice which are not visibly representable.

New Societal Ethics

The ever-renewed enactment of *autogestión* implies not only the redistribution and socialization of means of production, but it also brings about a change in social (power) relations. By challenging the hegemony of capitalist social relations, *autogestión* implies a qualitative transformation of social life. Thus, one of the main objectives of Lefebvre's anti-statist project of *autogestión* is to strengthen the 'associative ties' in civil society.[343] To this end, Lefebvre argued in favor of an understanding of *autogestión* that would not be limited to the administration of economic matters, but that implied the education of society. The practice of *autogestión* presupposes a 'social pedagogy'[344] within everyday life that points, as Elden and Brenner have stated, 'beyond the extant and toward alternative futures grounded in more progressive, democratic, and egalitarian ways of organizing space, time and social relations.'[345]

According to Lefebvre, inclusive or alternative social relations could potentially transform the dominant political culture.[346] This idea is inherent to Lefebvre's understanding of *autogestión*, but it was also developed through a reworking of the concept of citizenship. Although the notion of citizenship had been implicit in Lefebvre's writings since *The Right to the City* (1968), it became more explicit in his

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[343] Henri Lefebvre, 'Comments on a New State Form' (1979), p. 135.
[344] H. Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*, p. 121.
[345] N. Brenner & S. Elden, *State, Space, World*, p. 39.
[346] Liette Gilbert & Mustafa Dikeç, 'Right to the city: politics of citizenship', in Kanishka Goonewardena et al., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, Routledge, New York/London, 2008, p. 259.

later works, where he argued for a new citizenship linked to a new societal ethics.[347] In his text, 'From the Social Pact to the Contract of Citizenship' (1990), he connected his ideas on *autogestión* to what he called 'a new contract of citizenship'. In the preface to *Du Contrat de Citoyenneté*, this new contract is defined in the following terms:

> The New Citizenship can be defined, for each individual and for each social group, as a possibility (as a right) to recognize and master (individually and collectively) its own conditions of existence (material and intellectual), and this simultaneously as a political actor, as a producer, as a citizen-user consumer, in its place of residence, its city and its region, its professional and non-work related activities, as well as in its nation and in the world.[348]

Lefebvre's understanding of 'new citizenship' is grounded on a rethinking of rights, among which is the right to *autogestión*, as well as the right to difference, the right to information, and the right to the city.[349] However, Lefebvre's understanding of citizens' rights differs significantly from the conception of rights as formal juridical rights granted by the (liberal-democratic) state, i.e. the right to vote (right of representation). As Liette Gilbert and Mustafa Dikeç explain:

> Acknowledging the global transformations redefining political and economic systems, Lefebvre insists on the redefinition of new relations of dependence and interdependence which not only challenge the meaning of representative democracy but emphasize the multiple and often contradictory identities and sense of belonging now characterizing the globalized citizens. Citizens are no longer strictly defined in terms of family, origin, or place with a rather direct and simple claim of representation. Their diverse identities and affiliations reposition the question of citizenship in political, as well as ethical and philosophical terms.[350]

Lefebvre's new contract of citizenship aims at 'something much more politically revolutionary.'[351] Following Mark Purcell's interpretation, the changes evoked by

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[347] The emphasis on rights and citizenship appears in fewer places; namely, *Le Manifeste Differentialiste* (1970) and *Du Contrat de Citoyenneté* (1990), written in collaboration with the group of young researchers and activists who became known as the Groupe de Navarrenx.

[348] L. Gilbert & M. Dikeç, op. cit., p. 260.

[349] According to Lefebvre, the new rights of the citizen are: the right to information, the right to free expression, the right to culture, the right to difference (equality), the right to self-management, the right to the city, and the right to services.

[350] L. Gilbert & M. Dikeç, op. cit., p. 260.

[351] Mark Purcell, 'The right to the city: the struggle for democracy in the urban public realm', *Policy & Politics,* Vol. 43, Issue 3, 2013, p. 316.

these new citizens' rights cannot in any sense be contained within the traditional idea of rights offered by the state. These rights will not be granted from above. Rather, they will be defined and redefined from below, by the people, 'through political action and social relations.'[352] As Lefebvre argued, 'citizenship occurs not from a granting of rights by the authority, but in a dynamic possibility offered to individuals of inscribe themselves into the movement of collectivity...'[353]

Rather than an end goal, then, Lefebvre's new citizen rights are proposed as a beginning, as a point of departure, as 'a political opening statement...from which we begin a generalized struggle for a thoroughgoing renewal of political life.'[354] In Lefebvre's words:

> The political contract will form no more than a starting-point for initiatives, ideas, even interpretations. It is not a dogmatic text. What is important is that around this idea –stipulated, contractual citizenship– a renewal of political life should take place, but which transcends ideologies so that new forces could come into action, uniting and exerting pressure on the established order...[355]

Thus, the new contract of citizenship (revision of the rights of citizens) has 'profound practical and political implications for the ways in which individuals participate in the processes that affect their lives.'[356]

The definition of 'new citizenship' above calls attention to how similar this conceptualization is to Lefebvre's definition of *autogestión*. Recalling *autogestión*, 'the new contract is a way for people to begin to become active, to struggle to take control over the conditions of their existence, and to begin to manage those conditions for themselves.'[357] Lefebvre's social contract implies that individuals become political actors which, in turn, can enable the emergence of 'new relationships between individuals and the state, as well as between individuals themselves.'[358] Like *autogestión*, Lefebvre's rights, then, must be understood as both ethical and political projects. Both the idea of new citizenship and the practice of

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[352] L. Gilbert & M. Dikeç, op. cit., p. 259.
[353] S. Bitter & H. Weber, *Autogestion or Henri Lefebvre in New Belgrade*, p. 16.
[354] M. Purcell, 'The right to the city', pp. 316-317.
[355] Henri Lefebvre, 'From the Social Pact to the Contract of Citizenship', in Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas & Eleonore Kofman (eds.), *Henry Lefebvre: Key Writings*, Continuum Books, New York/London, 2003, p. 253.
[356] L. Gilbert & M. Dikeç, op. cit., p. 260.
[357] M. Purcell, 'The right to the city', p. 317.
[358] L. Gilbert & M. Dikeç, op. cit., p. 260.

autogestión emphasize the active participation of the citizen in the public realm/urban life. As the mass of people come to realize their own power, and demonstrate to themselves that they are capable of managing their own affairs, they move towards the horizon of democracy. In this way, the new contract of citizenship would come to complement Lefebvre's political project in relation to the struggle for democracy. As I previously discussed in Chapter I, the struggle for *autogestión* is, according to Lefebvre, ultimately a struggle for democracy. Hence, as people come to realize their own capacity for managing their social and material production, 'the state apparatus begins to appear increasingly less necessary, and it progressively withers away [...] capitalist social relations of exploitation and domination also progressively wither away.' This new social and political contract – which includes the right to *autogestión* – then, implies the potential for a new societal ethics; that is, an ethics cultivated on new ways of living and on the common creation of new, more democratic social relations and the sharing of space.

Towards Social Recomposition

In the context of Argentina, the political awakening of the people during the popular insurrection of 2001 prompted a rediscovery and re-appropriation of their own power, a power that had been expropriated by the state and by capitalist institutions. As I identified in the first chapter, one of the main characteristics of the new social movements that emerged in Argentina during this period was the new forms of sociability that they created and promoted. Although many – if not most – of the collective energies and concerns that sparked the social protests have now faded or completely disappeared,[359] following Lefebvre, it could be argued that an emergence of a new societal ethics in which citizens enacted their rights based on new social

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[359] Over time, many of these movements and the network they created stopped functioning, some movements continued while others formed a loose network. Nevertheless, these early rebellions remain significant because they represent, in the memory and imagination of Argentines, the rejection of systems of representation, in favor of direct action and other forms of democracy. The years after the rebellion have witnessed a significant decrease in the organization of, and participation in, neighborhood assemblies. Many dozens are still active, but this is much less than the hundreds that instantly emerged.

relationships and political action took place during this time. Understood in these terms, this framework is useful in understanding the collective efforts at reshaping social life linked to the myriad of projects of *autogestión* that proliferated in Argentina during, and after, December 2001.

While the instances of *autogestión* that arose before and during the crisis responded, primarily, to the need of individuals in economic terms, the impact that these autonomous engagements had at the social level has been widely acknowledged. As several authors suggest, the development of experiences of solidarity and cooperation – mainly led by the new social movements – reflected the efforts to rebuild the social ties in Argentina, undermined by years of neoliberalism.[360] As Colectivo Situaciones expressed, 'a process of production of social bonds has taken place, in the last years, on the *neighborhood* territory.'[361] 'Social bond', here, can be understood as the link in social relations that enables a sense of belonging to a common entity. Generally, the State assumed this function. As the system of representative democracy (linked to the notion of nation-State) collapsed, the state no longer had the capacity to sustain the social bonds. Consolidated as a model of political domination, the neoliberal regime restricted the participation of individuals, reducing their intervention and participation in collective decision-making and promoting the decolectivization of its citizens. Moreover, the new economic order managed to erode social relationships through the commodification of social bonds, as the figure of the consumer replaced that of the citizen. In this regard, Argentine philosopher, José Fernández Vega, explains:

> Many of our bonds have been destroyed by the neo-liberal privatisation, which, in some way or other, affected our countries in the last few decades. The privatising wave implied something else than the transferring of public enterprises to private owners and the rooting of a discourse that, in the name of common sense, stated that the market was the only effective manager, while the public sphere could only yield loss, inefficacy and misuse. What I call privatisation in a broad sense led to life being constricted to the private space, to people living in isolation, to the dissolution of social groups, to the convolution of the self and to the 'desertification' of fields where political participation and social integration used to take place. It also implied the

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[360] These ideas have been sustained by authors such as Maristella Svampa, Héctor Palomino, Colectivo Situaciones, and Marina Sitrin.

[361] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 169. [emphasis in original]

spread of fear of the other (strengthened by mediatic panic that disseminates an atmosphere of total urban insecurity), and of individual phobias that took on an almost epidemic quality. Ultimately, it drove people to sink into their own subjective poverty, into the domestic field, into the encapsulation of the individual watching a screen, whether on the TV or on a computer.[362]

Thus, the radical domination by the forces of the market undermined any possibility of building a society based on reciprocity and solidarity, or of creating a community built on the basis of common values, beyond individual interest and competition.

In a context like Argentina, characterized by high social decomposition and a tendency to social fragmentation, the economic collapse of 2001 had serious consequences. Society was severely affected by the acute recession and the economic and financial restrictions. This situation, in turn, resulted in an increase of insecurity, social exclusion, and the breaking of social bonds. Rather than a means for social change, social struggle became, primarily, a means for survival. However, beyond economic conditions, the goal was towards the construction of a better life and future.

As the people manifested their will to establish forms of sovereignty over their own resources and possibilities by mastering their conditions of existence, to use Lefebvre's words, transformations were generated at the social level. This revealed, as Svampa noted, 'a complicated dialectic between processes of social decomposition and recomposition.'[363] Social fragmentation at the same time opened the question of alternative forms of sociability.[364] For instance, the roadblocks or *piqueteros* represented a modality of struggle that brought together 'unemployed workers seeking to solve problems connected to their own existence.' They reorganized themselves 'on a territorial basis in extended zones in which the hardest battle is against the dissolution of the social bond.'[365] Similarly, the neigborhood assemblies expressed the emergence of a new social protagonism that was political and social at the same time. As Svampa notes, the assemblies carried the promise of the creation

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[362] José Fernández Vega, 'Aesthetic alternatives and social bonds in today's Latin American areas', in Trama, *The Network as a common place: Strategies for participation and cooperation in artistic projects in Argentina*, Editorial Trama, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 137.

[363] M. Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente*, p. 13.

[364] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 35.

[365] Ibid, p. 95.

of new spaces of solidarity and trust from which they could rebuild the social ties that had been eroded and commodified after a decade of neo-liberalism.[366] Following Svampa, the diverse forms of resistance, of counterpower, exercised by the people that sought to potentiate new social relationships, can be understood, not only as a reactive response to the crisis, but as a wager for the renewal of social ties.

Calling into question the power of representation of the institutional system, the slogan 'Que se vayan todos, que no quede ni uno solo' ('All of them must go, not a single one should remain') had a strong destituent character. It announced the end of all contracts: political, economic, social.[367] The new forms of organization created new ways of being, both individual and social, and implied the beginning of breaks with capitalist modes of production. As Sitrin contends:

> They were not just collectively organizing productive life to cover basic needs, but were also creating new relationships to production and in the process creating a new set of values relationships- ones that push and break with the rules of capitalist forms of production.[368]

The crisis caused a break, a rupture. 'This rupture needs to be understood as a break in ways of doing things, as a shift in people's imaginations from which new social relationships emerge', relationships that, as Sitrin tries to explain, are autonomous from forms of institutional power.[369] The question of rupture, then, also needs to be understood as 'an opening for new social relationships.'[370] She used the term 'horizontality', which is not only a way of describing new forms of decision-making, but new ways of relating to others. According to Sitrin's definition of the term:

> *Horizontalidad* does not just imply a flat plane for organizing, or non-hierarchical relationships in which people no longer make decisions for others. It is a positive word that implies the use of direct democracy and the striving for consensus, processes in which everyone is heard and new relationships are created. *Horizontalidad* is a new way of relating, based in affective politics...It is a break with vertical ways of organizing and relating, and a break that is an opening.[371]

Through *horizontalidad*, people began to build new relationships based on equality, trust and mutual respect, which also generated a sense of collective responsibility.

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[366] M. Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente*, pp. 266-267.
[367] Ibid, p. 268.
[368] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 125.
[369] Ibid, p. 40.
[370] Ibid, p. 16.
[371] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, pp. 8-9.

These forms of resistance challenged the model of citizenship associated with the capitalist-neoliberal system, that of the consumer, in favor of one that allowed for civic engagement. In the absence of any mediation from either the political system or the market, the search for new forms of conviviality became the object of collective action. At least temporarily, the interest of the citizens was displaced from individual matters to the social fabric. The efforts 'to reconstruct forms of solidarity gave a new meaning to the term citizenry: it was no longer exercised through representatives, but directly, on an everyday basis.'[372]

New Modes of Cooperation in the Arts

Like the many individuals and social movements that organized and engaged in the creation of new modes of sociability and networks of solidarity, I argue that Trama advanced a new societal ethic within the art field by fostering a culture of cooperation among artists and artists' initiatives. They were not alone. As events unfolded and the issue of art's social role resurfaced, many visual artists engaged in a wide diversity of projects that sought, in their own distinct ways, to respond to the urgency of the moment, devising new and different forms of social relations (e.g. Proyecto Venus and the *escraches*). At the social level, Trama contributed to the regeneration of social bonds by imagining inclusive modes for the construction of collectivity and creating a common, public space through meetings and encounters which brought together people from different backgrounds, generations, disciplines, and cultures. As I discuss below in the section focused on 'territorial *autogestion*', the creation of space was central to Trama's *autogestión*. By facilitating 'a space of encounters for artists', they encouraged 'a national and international network of artists and *artistas-gestores* that facilitated 'horizontal bonds of exchange and cooperation.'[373] These spaces of collective encounters generated different intersubjective experiences, from intellectual debates and confrontation, to intercultural forms of exchange, to virtual work meetings, to more festive instances. As the anecdote of the surprise party

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[372] A. Giunta, 'Post-crisis', p. 111.
[373] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 114.

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organized for Trama at the end of *Trama: El Encuentro* in 2005 suggests, the social and affective relationships fostered by Trama through its practice of *autogestión* contributed to the consolidation of a culture of cooperation and horizontal relations within the art field, articulated in the form of a widespread network of artists' initiatives, which continues to find resonances to this day.

The notion of 'network' in contemporary art was extensively discussed during one of the debates at the 'Meeting of Independent Contemporary Art Organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean' which, as discussed below, was organized by Duplus and Trama in 2003. Besides the usual operational or practical function of networks (i.e. communication, circulation, and exchange of information), Argentine philosopher, José Fernández Vega, pointed out the alternative aspect of networks addressing their aesthetic and social functions. In his text, 'Aesthetic Alternatives and Social Bonds in Today's Latin American Art', he contends:

> There is a peculiar function inherent to art – not exclusively, though – that has never been as important – or rather, as pressingly necessary – as it is today. This function might be defined as social and aesthetic at once... It would give shape to a special kind of *political* art that intends to reconstruct social spaces and bonds among people.[374]

For Fernández Vega, these networks had the capacity to catalyse bonds among those who would come close to them. This social function of networks in art, as he contends, could enable a different way of life, one opposed to 'neoliberalism's amputated sociability'.[375] In this way, he points out that these networks are most significant for they regard art 'as regenerative of ties that were torn up by politics.'[376] This social function of building up bonds for Fernández Vega also constitutes an aesthetic function. He links the social to the aesthetic through the element of visibility. As he explains:

> The social element is quite obvious, since establishing relationships among people seems to be, clearly enough, a social function. The aesthetic aspect is given by its strong determination to achieve visibility, by its defence of forms that are offered to the eye (where the visual arts are concerned), and by its aspiration to imagine a way of creating society through these forms. In this

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[374] J. Fernández Vega, op. cit., p. 137.
[375] Ibid, p. 138.
[376] J. Fernández Vega, op. cit., p. 137.

sense, art fulfils a utopian function that can also, on a limited scale, produce effects on reality.[377]

Following Fernández Vega, I would argue that the new societal ethics advanced by Trama's network had both a social and an aesthetic role. Perhaps, to an extent, this might seem obvious, and the same could easily be argued for the social movements. This was, after all, a moment of intense social creativity, as I have previously discussed in Chapter I. In what follows, however, I will outline explicitly how these social and aesthetic elements were played out in Trama.

As I elaborated in Chapter II, the recognition of the other (recognizing oneself in the other, trusting the other) was an underlying principle in the social ethic enacted by Trama. This was understood as necessary in the creation of a common, shared imaginary that could enable the possibility of cooperation and regeneration of the social bonds within the art sphere at the time. Whereas many artists' collectives tend to be based on friendship, it could be said that the social relations within Trama's network were first and foremost based on trust and respect. The affective element of friendship is not a characteristic endemic to all artists' initiatives; albeit, in Trama, it was present in many relations that existed since the beginning of the project and that emerged during the activities that were organized.

The issue of friendship or affection emerged in various occasions in Trama's debates. For instance, during the debates organized in 2001, Christian Ferrer acknowledged friendship and affection as values motivating the new forms of social organization in the cultural scene emerging at the beginning of 2000s.[378] In 2003, this subject was debated among the artists and theorists, including Fernández Vega, during the discussions held at the 'Meeting of Independent Contemporary Art Organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean'.[379] Although there was certainly, to varying degrees, an affective element present in the social relations established within the network, friendship was not necessarily the cohesive element in Trama. In other

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[377] J. Fernández Vega, op. cit., p. 138.
[378] Trama, *Society imagined in contemporary art in Argentina*, p. 99.
[379] See, for instance: J. Fernández Vega, 'Aesthetic Alternatives and Social Bonds in Today's Latin American Art', p. 138; also, 'Redes de artistas y el arte como red', in Duplus, *El pez, la bicicleta y la máquina de escribir*, p. 94.

words, the organizational structure of Trama was not exclusively or primarily based on a 'politics of friendship',[380] but on common concerns, common interests and needs, and a common trust shared by its members: trust between themselves and trust in the relevance of the project. For grantee and Trama coordinator, Marina de Caro, Trama's network was based on respect, rather than affection, 'respect in dissent, respect in the other, in the work of the other, and respect in the project...the project was necessary...'[381] This respect for the other, then, enabled of the basis for trust between artists within the network.

In the context of Trama, respect was also linked to the horizontal social relations they endorsed. 'Horizontality', was a term that for some of the participating artists in the project, like de Caro, was somewhat problematic because of its connotation of equality. However, horizontality, as Fontes explained, was based, not so much on equality, but on the recognition of the capacities and strengths of each of the members and participants. Similar to how it operated within the social movements, horizontality in Trama aimed at fostering non-hierarchical relations, and to break with the vertical modes of relations – a legacy of Peronism – that were so pervasive in Argentine society and politics. The division of tasks were assigned according to the capacities and strengths of each person. It rested on the principle that everyone had equal opportunities to participate and contribute to the project. Hence, the annual agenda of activities resulted from the combination of ideas of everyone involved. As Fontes has asserted:

> We all had the same opportunities to propose ideas and participate. We were not equal because we all had different experiences and abilities, and I think this was very clear for everyone. The power for decision-making, then, was commensurate to the responsibilities that each member was prepared to assume.[382]

Fostering horizontal modes of social interaction was one of the ways in which Trama sought to facilitate a more democratic mode of social relations within the art scene. Fontes defines democracy in the context of Argentina as 'an everyday exploration and

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[380] *Tecnologías de la amistad* or 'Politics of friendship' was a term used to address the issue of social relationships within artists' collectives and initiatives. For more information on this topic, see: Syd Krochmalny & Roberto Jacoby (eds.), *Tecnologías de la Amistad*, Ramona, 69, April 2007.
[381] Marina de Caro, personal interview with the author, 28 November 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
[382] C. Fontes, email interview with author, 10 December 2014.

choice, a daily negotiation with reality, rather than an ideal, a promise or an established and unquestionable status quo.'[383] Interestingly, Fontes' understanding of democracy evokes, to an extent, that of Lefebvre, as being, not a condition to be achieved, but a political orientation that guides social action. Hence, in the context of Trama, to democratize the art scene implied, not only breaking with the dominant values of individualism and competence that characterized the scene, but also 'establishing unexpected connections between generations and facts that otherwise were missing.'[384] For this reason, Trama's activities aimed at creating a space that could facilitate or set up the possibility for dialogue among artists from very different artistic, intellectual, generational, and even cultural backgrounds, but with certain common concerns across their practices. However, if, as Lefebvre argued, the practice of *autogestión* is a site of struggle that generates its own tensions and contradictions, the case of Trama was no exception. Whereas, on the one hand, the project was meant to respond to the necessity of a more open, inclusive, and horizontal structuring of the artistic community they belonged to, on the other, it could be argued that these intentions were challenged by the mechanisms they deployed for the selection of the participants. While they used the method of 'open calls', intended to have a national scope, and to be therefore inclusive, the applications submitted would be evaluated by a jury panel composed of art historians, art critics, museum directors, or academics. So, while the intention was to ensure the 'participation of all artists' beyond the personal opinion imposed by artists-organizers or 'the logical constraints imposed by the small community of artists',[385] relying on a jury panel for the selection of the participants was a strategy no different from those used in the mainstream art system they tried to question (prizes, etc.). Trama members were well aware of this limitation and, thus, tried to devise different strategies of participation:

> …the selection of participants by jury is not a system that leaves us satisfied, because it is still arbitrary. With this concern is that we opened on our website this year a bank of projects, in which any artist can upload a project for collaboration, sharing, support, etc. For Trama this bank will be an invaluable source of information on trends and concerns that the arts community needs

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[383] 'New models for remembering', p. 156.
[384] Ibid, p. 158.
[385] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.

to investigate, as well as a place of visibility that will allow us to contact artists we did not know so they can participate in our activities.'[386]

Another way Trama intended to democratize the art scene was by directly addressing different modes of social fragmentation and exclusion that pervaded the artistic realm. Since its inception, Trama addressed a gap in the social context which was the result of Argentina's specific historical, economic and socio-political circumstances. Thus, the creation of Trama's project was also partly motivated by the necessity felt by Fontes and other members to bridge two generations of artists: the ones that lived through the dictatorship, most of whom were their mentors (e.g. León Ferrari and Víctor Grippo) and those that grew up during Menem's era of neoliberal politics (those they were teaching). In Fontes' words:

> …I belong to an age group that is linked to two different generations: the generation that started conceptual art in Argentina…that was very politically engaged, and a younger generation, the children of the 1990s, who did not have any concern about politics. I belong to a generation in the middle, the generation of the Malvinas war- the Falklands war. I grew up during the dictatorship in Argentina, but then experienced the emergence of democracy as it came back.[387]

This generation, as Mónica Girón explains, began to 'build' over the ruins of the past, with a huge, collective sense of frustration, pain, absence, self-censored memories, and anger. It is a generation that is almost completely missing the previous one.[388] Thus, one of the main drives for Fontes and other Trama members – who were more or less from the same generation – was to organize a project that would promote an ethics of cooperation so as to address this generational gap. Addressing this condition of social fragmentation can be understood as a way of dealing with the past, with the *patrimonio mortífero*, the legacy of the traces of the past in the present.

This ethical imperative in Trama – the creation of new social relations and reconstruction of social bonds – was highly linked to a politics of visibility, to create a (public) space where such visibility could take place. This objective needs to be understood in relation to both the dominant ethos of individualism and competence

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[386] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.
[387] 'Presentation of Trama by Claudia Fontes', p. 3.
[388] Monica Girón, 'Antídotos contra el miedo al fracaso', presented at the public presentation of Trama's projects in 2000 and 2001 at the Instituto Goethe, Buenos Aires. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

within the art world, and society at large, as well as in relation to the devastating effects that the last military dictatorship had on the social fabric of Argentina. As previously discussed, the dictatorship 'was a brutal and intentional ripping apart of society…trust was broken and replaced with danger, fear, pain, and stolen memories…'[389] During this period, old forms of terror – like political imprisonment and persecution, abduction, torture, and murder – where actualized, while massive forced disappearance of people was instituted by the military junta as the main repressive strategy. Regarding this unprecedented modality, Luigi Patruno has noted:

> The imprisonment of political dissidents was not enough to destroy the multiple forms of resistance; it was directly followed by physical annihilation perpetrated clandestinely, a strategy that allowed the oppressors to avoid international accusations, to exercise torture without limits and legal control, while concealing the traces of the crimes… The eradication of bodies promoted the forgetting of those absent, prevented the recognition of dissent, denied the possibility of processing the loss, delayed the right to remember, blurred the singular identities of the abducted and limited the possibility of denunciation through the destruction of proof.[390]

More than 30,000 people were 'disappeared'; they no longer existed in society as there were no bodies, graves, or physical traces left. In her book *Poder y Desaparición*, Pilar Calveiro, victim and survivor of state terrorism during the dictatorship, describes this immaterial condition of the disappeared:

> …when a person disappears, vanishes, leaving no evidence of his life or his death. There is no body of the victim or the crime. There may be witnesses to the abduction and presupposition of subsequent murder, but there is no material body to give testimony to the fact. [391]

Indeed, as Claudia Feld, an Argentine scholar who has specialized in the topic of social memory, has noted, 'in Argentina no documentary images have been found that can account for the conditions of captivity and clandestine murders.'[392] This lack of proof or visual documentation, in combination with the impunity of the government, might also explain why the omnipresence of the *desaparecidos* still haunts, as a 'ghostly

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[389] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 40.
[390] L. Patruno, 'Estéticas del disenso', p. 112. [author's translation]
[391] P. Calveiro, op. cit., p. 26. [author's translation]
[392] Claudia Feld, 'Imagen, memoria y desaparición. Una reflexión sobre los diversos soportes audiovisuales de la memoria', *Aletheia*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2010, para. 1. [author's translation]

matter',[393] the collective memory of the Argentine people. Consequently, in Argentina, as in many other Latin American countries affected by dictatorships, the production of images that can account for the visualization of the past, that can make visible the act of disappearance – an act that by definition consists in the subtraction of the image[394] – has been a constant practice in the elaboration of memory. Images have played a paramount role in the representation of genocide and many other crimes against humanity, as well as in the process of mourning and condemnation of dictatorial terror.

Like Fontes' aim in the '*Reconstruction of the Portrait of Pablo Míguez*', which I considered in Chapter II, many artistic strategies and modes of symbolic production have attempted to respond to this corporeal absence. For instance, by making the body the privileged site of representation. Furthermore, while a variety of audiovisual techniques – like film and television – have been commonly used in Argentina for the recording and materialization of memory and the creation of new meanings regarding the past, photographs and silhouettes have probably been the most paradigmatic creative strategies in the process of restitution of the missing bodies. *El Siluetazo* is probably the most well-known of these, but the campaign '*Déle una mano a los desaparecidos*' and las 'Marchas de Máscaras Blancas' constitute a few of the many demonstrations and personal and collective interventions that have sought to 'bring back' the absent body during recent decades, to render the invisible visible. Developed by artists, the Mothers (*Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*), and other relatives and activists within the human rights movement, the use of photographs, silhouettes and other visual dispositifs 'managed to register in the realm of the visible, representations of the *desaparecidos* with a decisive political scope.'[395]

The effects of the dictatorship in the social body are undeniable. The culture of terror and silence continues to be engrained in Argentine society, even after the re-establishment of democracy in 1983. This is evinced by the tendency 'to silence'

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[393] See: Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008.

[394] C. Feld, op. cit., para. 3.

[395] *Perder la Forma Humana. Una imagen sísmica de los años ochenta en América Latina*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, 2012, p. 103.

and 'to make invisible' that continues to exist within society.[396] Underlying Trama's project of cooperation, then, was an attempt at breaking with the habit to deny the other, an attempt at breaking with the status quo attitude of '*no te metas*' ('do not get involved') or '*de esto no se habla*' ('do not talk about this'), a language legacy of the dictatorship that is still present in contemporary society. As Fontes recalls:

> ...it is an endemic habit in Argentine society to deny the other's work, ideas and even existence, and this is not a privilege of dictators, this is a common usage in everyday life in Argentina. Trama tried to break through this habit in the artists' community by being very caring in the construction of social relations and dynamics, bringing to the fore examples in our history of art that were for us undeniably solid and significant in their ethics and practice.[397]

As outlined in Chapter I, Trama aimed to give visibility to those artists whose practice, for one reason or another, had not yet been legitimized or acknowledged within the hegemonic discourse of art history in Argentina. To this end, Trama made possible a laboratory-like platform where artists from different contexts and generations, but with certain common concerns, could meet each other and engage in conversation about their practice; something that was uncommon in the field. According to Fontes:

> I had to create a context in which I could talk with whoever I wanted, of whatever I was longing for. Therefore, we looked for ways of giving visibility and establishing unexpected connections between generations and facts that otherwise were missing.[398]

Based on the principles and values of horizontality, responsibility, cooperation, and collective action, Trama devised an alternative visual and conceptual dispositif that sought to spark future potentialities and unexpected connections. By being inclusive and opening other channels of communication, Trama enabled the possibility for the emergence of 'new cooperative modes' and 'unprecedented bonds' within the artistic community.[399] Furthermore, Trama wanted to give visibility to those artists whose practice, for one reason or another, had not yet been legitimized or acknowledged within the hegemonic discourse of art history in Argentina. The challenge for Trama,

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[396] M. Svampa, 'Ciudadanía, estado y globalización. Una mirada desde la Argentina contemporánea', *Maristella Svampa* [website], 2005, <http://www.maristellasvampa.net/archivos/ensayo14.pdf>, accessed 8 November 2014.
[397] 'New models for remembering', p. 158.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 115.

then, was to create an 'alternative dispositif of visibility'[400] and an interpellation that would 'bring to light tangential lines in local art history that werent' being considered at the end of the 90s.'[401] In so doing, as Gabriela Massuh observed in a recent interview, 'Trama's reflections remained close to the crisis of representation, convening artists who had not been represented in the official history of Argentine art or were not the key figures in the art market.'[402]

Visibility as Recognition

In her book, *Everyday Revolutions*, Marina Sitrin, relates how, during the insurrection of the 19th and 20th December, the people that had been 'in the streets *cacerolando* (banging pots) describe finding themselves, finding each other, looking around at one another, introducing themselves, wondering what was next and beginning to ask questions together.'[403] Many referred to this moment as a rupture with the past, a break from the deeply instilled culture of fear and silence. The subsequent emergence of the neighborhood assemblies were a logical consequence of this rupture: 'It was a rupture with not being together. It was the beginning of finding one another, oneself, and of meeting again.'[404] Similar to the public space created by the assemblies, the meetings organized by Trama allowed for this opportunity. The meetings and encounters organized by Trama generated a public space, a space of appearance, bringing people together in dialogue that normally would not meet. As a case in point, Roxana Ramos, a visual artist from Cafayate and based in Salta, and a participant in Trama on several occasions, expressed how the meetings organized by Trama contributed in the articulation of a new map within the art field, as people started to 'get to know each other, and [to] recogniz[e] each other.'[405] As I will further discuss in the next section of this chapter, there were many artists throughout the country that

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[400] Presentation of Trama Network by Mauro Machado for DOEN, Amsterdam, 2006. [unpublished document, Trama archive]
[401] 'New models for remembering', p. 158.
[402] Gabriela Massuh, personal interview with the author, 30 November 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
[403] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, pp. 4-5.
[404] Ibid, p. 2.
[405] Roxana Ramos, personal interview with author, 18 November 2012, Salta, Argentina.

were engaged in artist-initiated projects, but who did not know about the existence of one another. By connecting all these artists and their collective endeavours, Trama made visible the extensive circuit of artists' initiatives to itself.

If, during the dictatorship, 'invisibility' constituted a survival strategy, in the context of Trama, visibility was understood as a form of power, as Pablo Ziccarello has commented.[406] The idea of visibility as recognition, according to Andrea Brighenti, 'is rooted in the idea that visibility confers power.'[407] This is also suggested by Fontes when she asserts, 'As an artist-citizen I would like to be in charge of making the appearance of the other possible, I would like to be responsible for granting visibility to their unique, irreplaceable character.'[408] Fontes' words echo those of Jesús Martín-Barbero, specialist in Cultural Studies, who contests that one of the most evident forms of the exclusion of the citizen today is located precisely in the dispossession of the right to be seen and heard, which is equivalent to existing or 'counting' socially.[409] Thus, within this framework, visibility operated as a field of inscription and social value. Gabriela Massuh, writer and former director of the Instituto Goethe in Buenos Aires, emphasized in a recent interview that 'the arts suffered a great deal after the dictatorship. It took a while for the art field to reconstitute itself, and I believe Trama took part in this reconstitution.'[410]

More than promoting democracy, Trama's attempt at creating more democratic and horizontal relations can be understood as an enacted democracy. Through this enactment, artists take part in the struggle 'towards the horizon of democracy'. By positioning him-/herself in relation to the other, and giving visibility to these new social configurations based on trust and respect, the artist is positioning him-/herself as a citizen. Following Iplicjian, as detailed in Chapter II, the artist-citizen is one who accepts and assumes his/her responsibility in relation to society. By recognizing themselves as a constitutive part of the city they inhabit, as part of a wider

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[406] P. Ziccarello, personal interview with the author.

[407] Andrea Brighenti, *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

[408] Claudia Fontes, 'Invisible evidences. Towards the appearance of the Other', *Proyecto Trama* [website], <http://www.proyectotrama.org/00/trama/ENGLISH/2000-2004/clauceia.htm />, accessed 6 June 2012.

[409] Jesús Martín-Barbero, 'Reconfiguraciones comunicativas de lo público', *Anàlisi: quaderns de comunicació i cultura*, 26, 2001, p. 85.

[410] G. Massuh, personal interview with author.

community, they regard themselves as responsible for their role in a shared citizenship, in Lefebvre's terms, which at the same time entails a sense of a shared fate with regards to the future. It is precisely this intentionality and self-awareness that allows their works to have a wider and stronger resonance within the cultural or social arena in which they are produced. As we can see, in the new social ethics put into play by Trama, there is a binding character between the ethical and the political. When the artist recognizes him-/herself as a social actor, a citizen, who must rethink how his/her work integrates with and resonates with the social reality in which it is immersed, the political in art becomes apparent.

New Subjectivities, Legitimation and the Self-Production of Discourse

New Social Protagonism

The process of social recomposition that sought to strengthen the associative ties in Argentina in the period post-2001 was directly linked to the emergence of new subjectivities, new social actors, or, following Colectivo Situaciones, new social protagonists. As this collective contends, another consequence of the rupture of December 2001 was the emergence of a 'new social protagonism': 'the visibilization of a heterogeneous set of forms of social protagonism arose in dissimilar periods and in relation to different problematics and that, until December, were hardly known, taken into account, [or] valorized.'[411] The insurrection accelerated and consolidated the constitution of a new plural political subjectivity from below that had been forming for years through a wide variety of autonomous and organizational experiments.[412] Among these new actors or protagonists were the neighborhood assemblies, the recuperated factories, the *ahorristas*,[413] as well as a remarkable

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[411] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 228.

[412] Ibid, p. 16.

[413] According to Colectivo Situaciones: 'In the 1990s, many petty investors or *ahorristas* created bank accounts in American dollars in the hope that the return of inflation would not alter the value of their savings. After the crisis of December 2001, the banks only offered to return them the same denomination in pesos. For instance, anyone who had 1000 dollars would receive 1000 pesos, which had been devalued to 330 dollars. During the reign of the convertibility regime (1991-2002), the value

number of cultural collectives involving groups of visual artists, filmmakers and video artists, poets, alternative journalists and writers.[414] In fact, culture played a significant role in the social struggles at the time, not only by giving visibility to the protests through its modes of intervention in public space, but by making the conflict and claims intelligible in society.[415] The proliferation of these cultural groups and manifestations revealed, according to Svampa, the extent to which culture can be an axis of reconstruction of individual experience as much as an expression of collective resistance.[416]

This conception of a new subjectivity referred to changes in the positioning and attitudes of individuals, and to the affirmation of subjectivity through direct action, horizontal interdependence, solidarity between groups fighting against repression and the rejection of the increasing commodification of social life. Hence, it referred to a new conception of the individual self that emerged from the new collective sense of being.[417]

These new subjective shifts emphasize the agency of individuals, and their capacity to sustain themselves and to make their own decisions, enunciations, valorizations, interpretations, actions, struggles, and encounters.[418] At the basis of the new political radicalism, or new militant ethos that characterized this new social protagonism, is the revalorization of the autonomy of thought and organization. As Colectivo Situaciones argues:

> Above all, it is based on the feeling of having produced an opening and a way forward that would go beyond existing knowledge and instituted traditions of thought, and the social and the political orders.[419]

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of 1 peso was 1 American dollar. After December 2001 the *ahorristas* became famous for their protests in front of banks, in which they systematically destroyed glass windows and automatic tellers, forcing the banks to replace the windows by steel panels that had to be replaced periodically.' See, *19 & 20*, p. 178.

[414] M. Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente*, p. 276.

[415] C. Vázquez, 'Arte y protesta', p. 170.

[416] M. Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente*, p. 265.

[417] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 11.

[418] Colectivo Situaciones, 'Argentina. A través y más allá de la crisis', para. 15.

[419] Ibid, para. 6.

For this reason, the popular insurrection, based on the *autogestión* of knowledge and resources, is also conceived as 'a revolution of subjective modes of doing.'[420]

In her accounts of the crisis, Marina Sitrin points to the way in which the participants in the social movements spoke of a new subjectivity, conceiving of themselves as protagonists: 'To see oneself as an actor, when historically one has been a silent observer, was also a fundamental break from the past.'[421] In Lefebvrian terms, the struggle of individuals to manage their own affairs for themselves and transform their reality is what constitutes the passage from passive spectators to political actors. Lefebvre's new societal ethics implied, at the same time, changes at the subjective level. After all, as Klaus Ronneberger points out, 'the declared goal of [Lefebvre's] intellectual project was, above all, a "revalorization of subjectivity" and the quest for spaces that allow for autonomy and creativity.'[422] Although Lefebvre's theory of *autogestión* does not engage explicitly with the concept of subjectivity, in his broader humanist Marxist approach he tackles the issue of subjectivity through different concepts like poiesis, praxis, aesthetics, style, or festival. Just as everyday life had been 'colonized' by capitalist forces, in his view, so too was its location (i.e. social space) and its activities (i.e. culture). This alienation – established as a fundamental structure of human practice – manifests as 'a sense of powerlessness in trying to influence the world in which we live; of meaninglessness in our search for guides to conduct and belief; of isolation from others; of estrangement from one's self.'[423] Thus, when individuals actively engage in activities that aim at the (re)appropriation of their lives, when they act as 'autonomous, thinking, feeling individuals able to express their own desires and develop their own style',[424] this marks a shift from passive, alienated subjects to political subjects. It is the emergence of these new empowered subjectivities that makes visible the subjective dimension of the social practice of *autogestión* both in the experience of the social movements, as well as in Trama.

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[420] Ibid, para. 7.

[421] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 8.

[422] K. Ronneberger, 'Henri Lefebvre and urban everyday life: In search of the possible', in Kanishka Goonewardena et al., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre*, Routledge, New York/London, 2008, p. 135.

[423] H. Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p. ix.

[424] Ibid.

Just as new social agents emerged leading the protests, visual artists gained visibility and unprecedented protagonism by linking their practices to collective action. Many of these collective engagements were related to political or social activism or to artists' initiatives based on *autogestión*. As Ana Longoni attests, a renovated strand of artistic activism emerged as many artists, interpellated by the appearance of new collective subjects claiming for radical political change (for instance, Taller Popular de Serigrafía, Argentina Arde, and Grupo de Arte Callejero), gained notoriety by associating their practices to the social movements, and by imagining new ways of relating and intervening in the social and political struggle.[425] At the same time, as Syd Krochmalny has observed, 'the new forms of artistic production and organization generated a process of subjectivation that shaped a particular cultural producer.'[426] That is, a multifaceted or multidimensional artist who not only produces aesthetic objects or experiences, but who engages in various roles, such as mediator, producer, and coordinator of social relations. Recalling Basbaum, this would be analogous to the 'etc.-artist'. In the context of Trama, this new subjectivity was embodied by the *artista-gestor (artist-manager)*.

The practices of artistic activism and artists' initiatives are by no means opposed to each other. Rather, many of these artistic interventions made manifest, in their distinct ways, the positioning of the artists with regards to the socio-political conditions, thus displaying different modes of articulating the relationship between art and politics. They became a distinctive trait of a period that has been characterized by 'the search for autonomy and self-legitimation.'[427] As Krochmalny proposes:

> In conditions of social, economic and political crisis, an autonomous and self-legitimated artistic movement emerged, expanding in a context of social mobilization and appearance of new social actors (1997-2004), and that was eventually validated by the institutional art system (2004-2007).[428]

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[425] A. Longoni, 'Tres coyunturas del activismo artístico en Argentina', p. 44. For further reference, see: Ana Longoni, 'Crossroads for Activist Art', *Third Text*, Vol.22, Issue 5, September 2008, pp. 575-587.
[426] S. Krochmalny, 'Tecnologías de la Amistad', para. 17.
[427] S. Krochmalny, 'Arte en relación', para. 5.
[428] Ibid, para. 18.

Comparable to the many interventions of socially instituted forms of political action that are linked to practices of *autogestión* (ie. roadblocks/*piqueteros*) whose sense of legitimacy was 'self-conferred',[429] within the artistic sphere, the practices made by and for artists – the numerous instances of transmission, production, circulation, and participation – generated an alternative mechanism of legitimation. Thus, through the practice of *autogestión,* artists generated an alternative circuit of validation, which as Krochmalny observes, is a particular characteristic of the phenomenon as it emerged in Argentina in this time period, and hence its distinctiveness. This novel circuit, traced in some spheres of production and circulation in Argentina, did not obliterate the 'traditional' or 'classical' system of legitimation, reserved for official institutions (i.e. museums and the art market) and the agents endorsed by these (i.e. critics and curators), but operated alongside or parallel to it.

An example of these self-validating systems created by artists is *Bola de Nieve* (*Snowball*) created by artist Roberto Jacoby in the early 2000. This project is defined as 'an on-line database and a permanent virtual exhibition that documents the current situation of the Argentinian artistic scene based on the choices of the artists themselves.'[430] *Bola de Nieve* operated through a self-managed curatorial system whereby each artist invited to join the project was able, for their part, to mention or refer ten other peers. In this way, through the addition of names the artistic network would continue growing, according to the sociological technique known as 'snowball'. By transferring the validating role to the artists themselves, the objective of the project was to strengthen the autonomy of the field of the visual arts in Argentina.[431] According to the statement on the website:

> This system sets a difference with the usual methods of selection and exclusion, by transferring the power to outline the artistic field from the gallery owners, art critics and curators to the artists themselves. This configuration goes through generations, styles and institutional spaces, showing the richness and complexity of cultural networks.[432]

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[429] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 72.
[430] See: 'About us', *Bola de Nieve* [website], para. 1, <http://boladenieve.org.ar/en/acerca_de>, accessed 5 May 2014.
[431] Roberto Jacoby, 'Proyecto Bola de Nieve o cómo crecer barranca abajo en épocas heladas', in *Ramona*, 3, June-July 2000, p. 24.
[432] 'About us', *Bola de Nieve* [website], para. 3.

In a similar vein, albeit in a very distinct manner, Trama envisioned a system of legitimation that would emerge from the interrelation between artists. Rather than aiming at legitimating individual artists, as was the case with *Bola de Nieve*, Trama sought to create a system that would validate the thinking process that supports the production of contemporary artists.[433] As discussed in Chapter I, since its inception, the legitimation of artistic discourse was one of Trama's explicit aims: to 'legitimize artistic thought within the social and political sphere.'[434] In the text, 'El saber de la urgencia', written by Fontes and Tulio de Sagastizábal, a visual artist closely linked to Trama, it was observed that 'until Trama's emergence, no other space had appeared with the clear intention of creating a platform for the exchange of knowledge with the aim of producing collective thought and artistic discourse.'[435] Underlying this claim is the revalorization of the figure of the artist as a thinking subject, rather than a mere producer of commodifiable (art) objects. If the practice of *autogestión* is based on the premise that it creates its own conditions of possibility, a reconfiguration of the role of the artist would also require the reconfiguration of the discursive apparatus that supports it. To this end, Trama created a space that would not only focus on the production of artworks, but where artists' projects and ideas could be confronted, and where dialogue and critical reflection could be asserted collectively as basic *modus operandi* of contemporary artistic practice. As a self-managed project, Trama can also be understood, following Lefebvre, as a dispositif for the revalorization of artistic subjectivity: mutual support, cooperation, solidarity, and the production of critical consciousness and knowledge.

Trama's intention was not to question the institution of art necessarily, but to rethink artistic practice, to organize artists in order to establish a different mode of art making. Through its program of activities and events, Trama sought to encourage a different way of talking and thinking about art production and practice, one that would counter that of the mainstream art circuit. To understand this, it is necessary to refer back to the art scene of the 1990s. As I have previously discussed, there seems

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[433] Duplus, *El pez, la bicicleta y la máquina de escribir*, p. 51.

[434] Aldo Ternavasio, 'De-legitimation of oneself', in Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias: Experiences and projects in contemporary Argentine art*, Editorial Trama, Buenos Aires, 2002, p. 142.

[435] See, Trama's presentation in 'La formación de los artistas', Encuentro en el Goethe, *Ramona 29-30*, January/February 2003, p. 33.

to be an overarching understanding that by the end of this decade an exclusive and closed art scene had consolidated in Buenos Aires reaching a hegemonic status. The seemingly monolithic discourse and aesthetic language classified by critics as kitsch, ordinary, intimate, and '*light*' – or symptomatic of an artistic attitude that was deemed as 'lightweight' with regards to both aesthetic and political issues – found its space of validation most prominently in the Centro Cultural Rojas, which came to be promoted by some as 'one of the few places in Buenos Aires where things actually happened during the nineties.'[436] Trama called into question this dominant legitimating system by galvanizing a different work ethic within the art field, a new societal ethics, through the legitimation of artistic thought and artistic initiatives based on *autogestión*. Based on horizontal relations, cooperation, and peer recognition, this legitimation implied the social acknowledgment of artistic work and a view of the artist as a thinking subject, capable of effectively influencing his or her context. The legitimation of artists' initiatives in Trama was conferred through the recognition of artists' projects as a legitimate space or circuit of artistic legitimation and the allocation of funds to enable working tools and resources, facilitating a space where they could meet and discuss their work.[437] As Massuh has remarked, the legitimation encouraged by Trama presupposed that any 'artist could be considered as a possible interlocutor and a subject for cooperation.'[438] In this way, Trama aimed at shifting the logic inherent within the dominant art system by encouraging a completely different artistic culture; that is, one that would be open and inclusive, based on cooperation, rather than competence and that would regard art production as a process to foster critical thinking and the production of knowledge.[439]

I would argue that Trama's power to articulate itself as a dispositif of legitimation, was, to an extent, also based on the fact that the project itself operated from an already legitimated position. In other words, its power to confer validation relied on the fact that the program was, from the outset, institutionally supported

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[436] Rafael Cippolini, 'Apuntes para una aproximación al arte argentino: dinámicas de la legitimación', *Ramona*, 9–10, December 2000–March 2001, p. 17.
[437] C. Fontes, email interview with author, 24 October 2014.
[438] G. Massuh, personal interview with author.
[439] C. Fontes, email interview with author, 24 October 2014.

both internationally and nationally by formal institutions.[440] Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the issue of legitimacy was not necessarily shared by all initiatives involved in Trama's network, especially those operating outside of the cultural center of Buenos Aires. Such was the case, for instance, of La Baulera Centro de Arte Contemporáneo in the city of San Miguel de Tucumán.[441] As suggested by its director, Jorge Gutiérrez, in settings with an underdeveloped art market and cultural infrastructure, the issue of legitimation seem to have been less pressing, albeit they were direct beneficiaries of the legitimation sought and created by Trama.

Within the context of Trama, what was at stake was the relation between knowledge and artistic experience. Thus, it contributed to the legitimation of a conception of artistic practice that would regard art production, not only as the production of artworks, but as an intersection of a set of actions, positionings, and discourses. Contrary to the anti-intellectualism that characterized the *'artistas del Rojas'*, in Trama, both theory and practice were considered as fundamental to the development of knowledge in contemporary artistic practice. These two aspects of artistic practice, as they themselves contend, were considered as 'interdependent and mutually influencing each other.'[442] Through the analysis of artworks, debates, workshops, publications, as well as collaborative and exchange projects, Trama facilitated an informal pedagogical project where the collective production of discourse and critical thinking would be supported by the reflection and dialogue between artists and theorists or academics, such as philosophers, sociologists, and writers. Thus, for Trama the process of legitimation would emerge from the exchange and sharing of horizontal, yet dissenting, perspectives among peers, as well as transversally through the articulation of the visual arts with non-art disciplines or fields of knowledge.

The need to concieve a project where theory and practice would be regarded as 'complimentaty tools' responded to the need to fill a gap in the formal art

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[440] As mentioned in Chapter I, Trama was supported internationally by Dutch institutions like the Rijkscakademie (national art academy), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Stichting DOEN, and Prins Claus Fonds, and locally by institutions like Fundación Antorchas, Fundación Espigas, Fundación PROA, Instituto Goethe, among others.

[441] For more information on La Baulera, see Chapter I, p. 26.

[442] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 115.

education system which, based on the nineteenth-century model of the art academy, was limited to offering a practical or technical formation. Because of this, theory and practice – aspects intrinsic to the practice of contemporary art – had been traditionally disassociated in the Argentine art context. According to Longoni, the aforementioned detachment between theory and practice can be attributed to the – almost exclusively – practical formation of the artists in the art schools and the exclusively theoretical formation of art historians in the universities…'[443] Being exposed to an interdisciplinary framework, and to the questioning of theorists and academics, played an important role in artistic training and in the development of local artistic production, placing it at the level of that in the international art world, as art historian, María José Herrera, has contended.[444] The alternative methodology for artistic formation proposed by Trama was one of a number of artists' initiatives that directly addressed the obsolescence of the educational system of the visual arts at the time. Trama's alternative platform for research and artistic training generated a favorable environment where theory and knowledge emerged from the artist's own practice. In this way, it provided an entire generation of artists with a theoretical and professional framework which originated from the artists themselves.

From the Production of Knowledge to the Self-Production of the Artist

Diana Aisenberg's *Historias del arte: diccionario de certezas e incertidumbres* (Stories of Art: Dictionary of Certainties and Intuitions) [Fig. 3.1] is representative of the kind of artworks or projects that, within Trama's framework, aimed at the collective creation of thought and meaning. The idea for the project originated as a result of a seminar led by Aisenberg at the Centro Cultural Rojas. It was during this seminar, also entitled *Historias del Arte*, that she started to think about the traditional terms used to talk about art and how they are constructed by the art (historical) gaze. The first printed version of this collective project, however, took place during Aisenberg's participation in Trama's 'Research Workshop on Artistic Practice and its Social

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[443] Trama, *Insights and Context*, p. 61.
[444] M. J. Herrera, personal interview with author.

Projection' conducted in Buenos Aires in 2001, as outlined in Chapter II. Composed of a selection of one hundred concepts in Spanish organized in alphabetical order and printed in book form, *Historias del arte* sought to question artistic language and collectively redefine the local discourse of contemporary art.

Using mostly the Internet as a working platform, *Historias del arte* could also be considered a performative project. The action consisted of a request for a definition of a particular word sent via e-mail. The responses to this request were then edited into a digital program and website. The message, intended as an open invitation to 'a quien guste colaborar' ('whoever wants to collaborate'), functioned as a kind of *cadavre exquis,* articulating an extensive and polyvocal network of thought and meaning. It was assembled collaboratively by more than 500 participants from Argentina and abroad and from different fields of knowledge; from art to journalism, to chemistry, mathematics, and many others. All these contributions added to the diversity of the definitions, which included a rich mix of both real and fictional subjective definitions, quotes, rumors, confessions, anecdotes, associations, memoirs, etc.

Historias del arte incited a reflection regarding language *per se* and, more particularly, artistic language. As a means for the construction of a common and transversal vocabulary, it questioned the authority of the dictionary as a resource and apparatus that serves to fix language, the etymology of concepts, and their meanings. In this regard, art historian, Francisco Reyes Palma, commented: '…the authority of specialized knowledge is left aside. That is very important because one of the key points of education is to break with the impossibility of access…'[445] Aisenberg's *Historias del arte* constitutes a kind of 'horizontal' dictionary.[446] In this way, it is both an artistic and a discursive proposal that sought to generate a collective space in which artistic thought and language could be questioned and redefined.

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[445] Francisco Reyes Palma, 'Historias del arte', *Diana Aisenberg* [website], Proyectos Colectivos (Historias del Arte), <http://www.dianaaisenberg.com.ar/index.php?/textos/por-francisco-reyes-palma/>, accessed 3 February 2013.

[446] Jorge Di Paola, in Diana Aisenberg, *Historias del arte*, Adriana Hidalgo Editores, Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 18. [author's translation]

Within the context of Trama's workshop, the concept of the dictionary itself became the object of investigation.[447] It provided a tool for a most needed re-articulation of the local artistic discourse as it constituted an opportunity to reflect and critically rethink the artist's own practice in light of the radical social, political, and cultural issues of the time. Responding to Trama's proposal and to the particular topics suggested by some of the artists that participated in the workshop, new words were added to the dictionary, such as 'artistic practice', 'social projection', 'power', and 'foreigner'. The word 'resistance' was not part of the first version of *Historias del Arte*. Interestingly, it was incorporated by Aisenberg following the contentious discussions it incited during the debates organized by Trama in 2001.[448] As Fontes explained, this word caused a strong reaction in the public because of its associations with the period of the 1970s and its use within the context of the avant-gardes in the era of the dictatorship.[449] By way of example, some of the definitions provided to the concept 'resistance' would include meanings as broad as:

* survival
* memory as resistance
* mainly a leftist word, although it also has strong Peronist connotations
* capital of the Chaco province, Argentina, Southern hemisphere; the city of sculptures
* art as a tool of resistance
* In my view the term 'resistance' should not be thought of only in a strictly negative way. Resistance could also be thought of as a place for the constitution of power… – Reinaldo Laddaga
* resistance to fascism
* a street in Buenos Aires
* to resist is to love
* resistance to change is manifested by artists and critics in the face of avant-garde movements.

Through this collective project, the lexicon utilized within the local art scene was put into question and opened to a more democratic process of construction of knowledge. *Historias del arte* had a tacit pedagogical function while at the same time

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[447] Trama, *Society imagined in contemporary art in Argentina*, p. 16.
[448] C. Fontes, personal interview with author.
[449] For more information on this debate, see: Trama, *Society imagined in contemporary art in Argentina*, pp. 141-146.

it played a role as a collective archive. As Marina de Caro has observed, 'this dictionary functions as a collective archive, everyone who wants to collaborate can contribute what they know, their life, their experiences and anecdotes…'[450]

This collaborative project also meant to recuperate the valorization of reflections, actions and documentation that had been historically censored. As an open container that allowed for a multiplicity of readings, *Historias del arte* allowed room for action by becoming an act of collective enunciation. In so doing, it presupposes a rupture with a past of fear and silence:

> The freedom put into practice with this project promotes the writing as much as the inclusion of these texts in a bigger context. This practice tends to create bridges between the breaks in the accumulation of knowledge that happened in our country due to the military *coup d'etat*, puts concepts into circulation and renames them and becomes a tool for enunciation in opposition to the silence of the dictatorships.[451]

After the printed version launched during Trama's workshop, the project continued morphing, changing formats as well as names in different time periods. Underlying artists' projects such as *Historias del arte* and Trama is the belief that art is not only about art-making, or about the artwork as an end in itself. Creating both a subjective and a social space, both projects foreground the idea of art as a collective process that enables the production of knowledge. By incorporating (self)reflection, artistic practice opens onto the consciousness of its own practical activity. Perhaps this is what visual artist, Andrés Labaké, means when he remarks that to produce art today is to produce critical thinking, 'a different kind of subjectivity.'[452]

Historias del Arte, just like Trama and many other artists' initiatives, exemplify a shift in contemporary artistic practice in Argentina where the artist positions him- or herself as a thinking subject, where the artist is the one reflecting rather than the object of reflection. In Labaké's view, this shift constitutes one of the most significant

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[450] Marina de Caro, 'En un jardín de pensamientos', *Diana Aisenberg* [website], Proyectos Colectivos (Historias del Arte), <http://www.dianaaisenberg.com.ar/index.php?/textos/por--marina-de-caro-en-brasil/>, accessed 3 February 2013.
[451] Trama, *Society imagined in contemporary art in Argentina*, p. 102.
[452] Andrés Labaké, personal interview with author, 7 December 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina. Labaké is current director of the Fondo Nacional de las Artes and the Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti in Buenos Aires.

signs of the reconfiguration of artistic practice in the last decade: 'artists are producing their own discourse…they understood that the production of knowledge is necessarily a collective endeavour.'[453] The determination of artists to become actively engaged in the (self)production of knowledge about their practice, in the *autogestión* of their own discourse, has played an important role in the process of legitimation of artistic thought in the Argentine art field. Furthermore, it works as a reaffirmation of the autonomy of artistic practice, as artists themselves are the ones who regulate their sense of belonging and legitimacy in the field to which they belong to instead of delegating it to the oficial institutions.[454] Within Trama, as I previously argued in Chapter III, this attitude evinces the need of the artist to affirm his or her autonomy, to 'decolonize' artistic practice and speech in Fontes words, bypassing the official mechanisms of mediation, such as the art critics and curators, as sole authorized agents in the validation of artists' work. As Fontes later emphasized:

> We wanted to provide evidence that only us artists are responsible for our context, and that we (artists) could be in charge of the production and distribution of our ideas, without the necessity of mediators dictating a controlled framework.[455]

The re-emergence of the artist as subject rather than object, re-actualizes and revalorizes the idea of the *artist as intellectual*. In this regard, art historian, María José Herrera, explains:

> A reflexive attitude on his practice and on its social insertion places the artist in the position of an intellectual, that is, he becomes an agent for the circulation of shared notions concerning social order in general and the order of his discipline in particular. The intellectual then combines knowledge with explicit social responsibility regarding collective values within the society.[456]

In her text, 'Management and Discourse', Herrera has traced a genealogy of *artistas-gestores* within the modern art history in Argentina and established a link between Trama and avant-garde groups like Tucumán Arde, Centro de Arte y Comunicación - CAyC, Escombros, and others, in which the artists have actively participated and contributed to the self-production of their own discourse. Following Herrera, the

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[453] A. Labaké, personal interview with author.
[454] Ana Longoni, *El deseo nace del derrumbe*, p. 26.
[455] 'New models for remembering', p. 158.
[456] M. J. Herrera, 'Management and discourse', p. 172.

artista-gestor would stand in opposition to the 'anti-intellectual' figure of the artist of the 1990s who would profess that 'beauty doesn't think' (Fabio Kacero) or that art is 'brainless' (Marcelo Pombo); whose work revealed a direct rejection of art theory, of explanation or any conceptual elaboration.[457] In turn, the figure of the *artista-gestor* would be closely linked to that of the militant artist of the 1960-70s – embodied by figures such as Oscar Massota[458] – from which it is separated by the heterogeneity of its theoretical premises and practices.

The collective (self)production of knowledge and discourse, then, is part and parcel of the artists' intent to rethink and create his or her own context. In this way, the (self)production of knowledge also plays a fundamental role in the process of (identity) formation of the artist. How does the production of knowledge relate to the self-production of the artist? The artists' initiative, Duplus, provides a clue when they define what an artist at that time should be:

> How could we define an 'artist'? As the one who can appropriate the current state of things in order to produce his/her own work; in order to produce himself. Thus, practice and thought are one and the same thing. It is not about applying knowledge, but about being able to think about one's own practice; to think about oneself.[459]

Duplus' words bear close resemblance to Lefebvre's productive approach to the practice of *autogestión*. Recalling my argument in Chapter I, for Lefebvre, through the social practice of *autogestión* the subject constitutes itself in active fashion: 'active man creates the human world and through the act of production, produces himself.'[460] By production, Lefebvre means not only the strict economic production of things but also, in broader terms, 'the production of *oeuvres*, the production of knowledge, of institutions, of all that constitutes society.'[461] This sense of production does not entail a separation between material and mental production, but needs to be grasped as both a material and mental process. As Stuart Elden puts it:

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[457] I. Katzenstein, 'Avatars of Art in the Argentina of the 1990s', p. 36.

[458] Argentine artist, Oscar Masotta, has been considered by authors like Beatriz Sarlo as a 'model' of the intellectual in modern times. For more on Masotta, see for example: Ana Longoni & Mario Mestman, 'After Pop, We Dematerialize. Oscar Masotta, Happenings and Media Art at the beginnings of Conceptualism', The Museum of Modern Art (ed.), *Listen, Here, Now. Argentine Art in the Sixties. Writings on the Avant-Garde*, New York, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), 2004, pp. 156-172.

[459] Duplus, *El pez, la bicicleta y la máquina de escribir*, p. 103.

[460] K. Ronneberger, 'Henri Lefebvre and the Question of *Autogestion*', p. 91.

[461] S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, p. 44.

> …our mental interaction with the world, our ordering, generalizing, abstracting, and so on produces the world that we encounter, as much as the physical objects we create. This does not simply mean that we produce reality, but that we produce how we perceive reality.[462]

For Lefebvre, production is not a trivial pursuit: 'the creation that is pursued in the praxis, through the sum of individual acts and existences, and throughout the whole development of history, is the creation of man by himself.'[463] The experiments of counter-power and autonomy proclaimed by the social movements in Argentina are in themselves a way of self-production of experience, as Colectivo Situaciones has contended.[464] In her book, *Everyday Revolutions*, Marina Sitrin, also points to this self-productive element when she argues: 'Not only are communities finding ways to do things themselves, they are recreating themselves in the process.'[465] Similarly, by taking control over the conditions and relations of production, we could argue that the artist creates him- or herself. Through the practice of *autogestión*, the figure of the artist is established as an agent capable of making its own decisions, of forging its own path and, as such, capable of its own self-production. Considering this productive character of *autogestión*, then, can shed light on how artists intervene in the reconfiguration of a particular art scene, by establishing a different relationship with the institutions, eliminating mediations, and creating alternative mechanisms of legitimation within the art field.

'Territorial Autogestion': Space, Contexts, Networks

Crisis, Space, Territory

Closely tied to the emergence and greater visibility of new social relations and new protagonists, the days of 19th and 20th December 2001 were also characterized by the re-appropriation or conformation of (public) space. Amidst a climate of social unrest, a heterogeneous set of mobilized social actors were shaping a new public space.

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[462] S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, p. 44.
[463] Ibid.
[464] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 175.
[465] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, p. 7.

According to Colectivo Situaciones, 'streets, corners, and squares were subjectively reconfigured with the production of new dimensions of public space after years of dreadful advance of the logic of the market.'[466] If, during Menem's government throughout the 1990s, public space had been de-activated (through, for instance, the privatization and gentrification processes linked to corporate activity, the transformation of urban space through real estate projects and shopping centers, and the repression of protests and workers' strikes), the popular insurrection of 2001 enabled the re-activation of the public sphere.

Politics, it seemed, had returned to the streets. In fact, some of the first interventions that demonstrated the will to occupy public space were those of the *piqueteros*, whose struggles began to occupy streets and roads at the end of the 1990s, a few years before the eruption of the crisis. As the slogan 'pickets and pots: the struggle is the same' suggested, those roadblocks would later open the way for manifestations like the popular assemblies.[467] These neighborhood assemblies generated important spaces for exchange, encounter, and discussion between different social sectors that, until then, had been disconnected.[468]

The spatial dimension of the crisis would also be evinced by, for instance, the millions of people with their *cacerolas* protesting in the streets, the recuperation of abandoned factories, and the emergence and multiplication of barter clubs organized into networks throughout the country. As Giunta points out, 'plazas were transformed and public spaces became arenas of barter where basic consumer products were traded.'[469]

The re-appropriation and occupation of public spaces by mobilized social actors gave way to the emergence of a language linked to territory, or territoriality; comprising references such as 'neighborhood', or '*barrio'*, in the case of the assemblies and unemployed organizations, and 'habitat', in the case of the socio-

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[466] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 166.
[467] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 175.
[468] M. Svampa, *La sociedad excluyente*, p. 267.
[469] A. Giunta, 'Post-crisis', p. 111.

environmental assemblies and organizations.[470] In her article, 'Horizontalism and Territory', Marina Sitrin has also acknowledged the centrality of the use of space and the concept of territory within the social movements of the period pre- and post-2001. As one assembly participant described:

> I understand *horizontalidad* in terms of the metaphor of territories, and a way of practicing politics through the construction of territory, it is grounded there, and direct democracy has to do with this. It is like it needs to occupy a space.[471]

As Sitrin notes, the workers in the recuperated workplace movement – organized under the slogan of 'Occupy, Resist, Produce' – speak of the construction of new territories. By this they were referring, not only the fact that they were occupying a space (abandoned factories), but to the ways in which they were recuperating and running the workplaces together, in solidarity with people from the community and other workplaces. A new territory, then, was created not just by the mere fact of taking over the factories, but in how they were being collectively and horizontally self-managed.

The uses of direct action and practices of *autogestión*, according to Sitrin and Sparato, entailed taking over public space so as to be seen and heard.[472] The territorial inscriptions of these practices increased the visibility of the social movements, while allowing for the (re)politicization of public space. These actions reconfigured public space as the site of conflict and political confrontation, contributing, in this way, to the creation of a new language and new territories linked to the social movements.

In her discussions on the territorial dimension of the social movements, Sitrin makes reference to Uruguayan militant and researcher, Raúl Zibechi, who speaks to the importance of territory as places that are rapidly becoming sites, not only of struggle, but of organization involving practices of *autogestión*:

> The real divergence from previous time periods is the creation of territories: the long process of conformation of a social sector that can only be built while constructing spaces to house the differences. Viewed from the popular sectors, from the bottom of our societies, these territories are the product of the roots of different social relations. Life is spread out in its social, cultural,

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[470] M. Svampa, 'La política en las calles: lenguajes de movilización y espacio público en la época contemporánea', in Mirta Zaida Lobato (ed.), *Buenos Aires: manifestación, fiestas y rituales en el siglo XX*, Biblos, Buenos Aires, 2011, p. 243.
[471] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, pp. 174-175.
[472] M. Sitrin & E. Sparato, 'New Languages from New Practices in Argentina', para. 10.

economic, and political totality through initiatives of production, health, education, celebration, and power in these physical spaces.[473]

In *Territorios en resistencia: Cartografía de las periferias urbanas latinoamericanas* (2008), Zibechi futher addresses this issue, noting how in Latin America those from 'below' (e.g. Zapatista Movement) are turning their collective initiatives of survival into spaces of resistance through the construction of territories different to those of the hegemonic system; creating spaces in which non-capitalist social relationships are able to nest.[474]

The territorial aspect has also been highlighted by geographer, Teo Ballvé, who notes the way in which territory and *autogestión* have become conflated in the practice and parlance of many social movements in Latin America. Most importantly, Ballvé acknowledges that many of these movements engage in a praxis of territory in the same sort of 'anti-statist' fashion as Lefebvre does in his theoretical framework of *autogestion*. In this regard, Ballvé contends:

> When radical social movements in Latin America think, talk, and act in terms of 'territory,' which they do constantly, they dialectically marry *autogestion* and the kind of politicization of space described by Lefebvre. In their praxis, territory is a space that is *autogestionado*.[475]

Just as Lefebvre's engagements with state theory and radical politics were in continual relation with the problem of space, so the question of *autogestión* needs to be understood in an explicitly spatialized manner. In his view, an overturning of domination (of the state) by appropriation (of civil society) can be achieved through the *autogestión* of space, a space that 'would be redefined', bringing about 'a conversion and subversion'[476]:

> The reconstruction of the 'low to high' of social space, previously produced from 'high to low', implies general *autogestion*, that is, at the various levels,

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[473] Raúl Zibechi, 'The Revolution of 1968: When Those From Below Said Enough!', *Americas Program [website]*, 3 June 2008, para. 12, <http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/662>, accessed 10 March 2012.

[474] Raúl Zibechi, *Territorios en resistencia: Cartografía política de las periferias urbanas latinoamericanas,* La Vaca Editora, Buenos Aires, 2008.

[475] Teo Ballvé, 'Territory and Autogestion', *Territorial Masquerades* [website], 12 March 2012, para. 5, <http://territorialmasquerades.net/territory-and-autogestion/>, accessed 15 August 2012.

[476] N. Brenner & S. Elden, *State, Space, World*, p. 194.

complementing that of the units and instances of production. Only this way can the socialization of the means of production include the issue of space.[477]

Autogestión as a political project seeking for a radical democratic transformation will necessarily imply, in Lefebvre's view, the appropriation or production of space. Accordingly, emancipatory political tendencies must aim towards the self-management or *autogestión* of space. Here, we see again the productive character inherent in Lefebvre's thinking. As Lefebvre contends, every mode of production produces its own space.[478] Thus, *autogestión*, as a particular mode of production, forges its own – appropriated – space, which will be the precondition for the production of thought and action.

Lefebvre conceptualizes *autogestión*, not merely by involving the individual or an enterprise, but as a conflicting process with distinctive geographical dimensions, 'a territorial mode of governance for communities, towns, and even entire sub-national regions.'[479] Ronneberger synthetizes Lefebvre's spatial perspective in the following way:

> For Lefebvre, decentralized control through grassroots democracy provides the surest guarantee that social demands are related to a specific space in order to ensure that these demands are not rendered intangible and void of meaning. In his view, almost all of the living conditions people experience are linked to particular spaces or are expressed through these spaces. For that reason, Lefebvre had to introduce the idea of *autogestion territoriale* with a spatial reference as a counterweight to state administrative rationality.[480]

Hence, resistance or counter action groups will inevitably tend to 'strengthen or create independent territorial entities capable to some degree of self-management.'[481]

Sitrin discusses the territorial dimension of self-organized social movements as being constructed, not only through the intentional occupation of physical spaces – the recuperation of land upon which to grow crops and build homes, the recuperation of workplaces, and even the weekly assembly meeting on the street

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[477] N. Brenner & S. Elden, *State, Space, World*, p. 193.
[478] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge/Oxford, 1991, p. 31.
[479] N. Brenner & S. Elden, *State, Space, World*, p. p. 29.
[480] K. Ronneberger, 'Henri Lefebvre and the Question of *Autogestion*', p. 110.
[481] H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 382.

corner –, but through the new social relations established among people. As she argues:

> This creation of territory necessitates some form of *autogestion*, or autonomous doing, where within that space the group is making or creating productive, transforming relationships and meeting concrete needs… Taken together, these new relationships and their products create a new concept of territory that goes beyond geographical or political space.[482]

Thus, these territories do not refer only to physical spaces, but to symbolic, socially produced ones. The way the territorial dimension in Sitrin's view embodies social relationships recalls Lefebvre's proposition that 'new social relationships call for a new space.'[483] In fact, space is produced by social forces: 'groups… cannot constitute themselves, or recognize one another, as "subjects" unless they generate (or produce) a space.'[484]

Being permeated with social relations, a space that is *autogestionado* 'is not only supported by social relations, but it is producing and produced by social relations.'[485] A society generates or produces 'an appropriated social space in which it can achieve a form by means of self-representation or self-presentation…'[486] In both Lefebvre's and Sitrin's approach, what is important, then, is not so much the space itself, but the social processes by which it is created. Rather than conceived passively, the space that is *autogestionado* will be actively and consciously perceived, and created by social actors. As such, this process of creation of an appropriated space is endowed with a political character.

Trama and the Production of (Public) Space

In the context of the crisis, the streets became the field of action for many contemporary artists in Argentina. Although these artistic practices multiplied and gained greater visibility in the period post-2001, it is important to note, that many of

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[482] M. Sitrin, *Everyday Revolutions*, pp. 173-174.
[483] H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 59.
[484] Ibid, p. 416.
[485] N. Brenner & S. Elden, *State, Space, World*, p. 186.
[486] H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 34.

them had been active in the previous decades. By way of example, we could cite the public actions carried out during the late 1990s by Grupo Etcétera, or the *escraches* by H.I.J.O.S. (Hijos por la Identidad contra el Olvido y el Silencio) and Grupo de Arte Callejero, which I mentioned in Chapters I and II. Before these, during the 1980s, a number of artists also engaged in urban interventions and performances in close connection to the human rights movement. Such is the case of groups like G.A.S.T.A.R (Grupo de Artistas Socialistas para la Transformación del Arte Revolucionario), which later became C.A.Pa.Ta.Co (Colectivo de Arte Participativo Tarifa Común), as well as Grupo Escombros, which emerged at the end of the decade, in 1988, appropriating the streets as their 'art gallery'. Mainly composed of artists from Buenos Aires and La Plata, Escombros advanced a 'humanist' proposal emphasizing the socio-political reality of the country at the time characterized by crisis and hyperinflation. An example of this is their early work entitled '*Sutura*' ('Stitch') from 1989, which consisted in a 30 meter-long cut in the ground of an abandoned pit – as if it were a long wound – 'stitched' together with a thick rope [Fig. 3.2]. With this work, created within the framework of the project *'Ciudad del Arte'* ('Art City'), which took place in the outskirts of the city of La Plata, Escombros sought to symbolically recompose a society that was falling apart due to a past of terror and economic crises.

Just as the streets had become a support for artists to express themselves in the period post-dictatorship, during the 2001 crisis, 'artists included their performances, actions and imprints in…a situation that reached beyond them', as Giunta has argued.[487] Thus, beyond constituting a crippling threat, the crisis opened up a horizon of possibilities within the art field. This opening was evinced by the 'new spaces, protagonists, proposals, theoretical discussions, re-readings, debates…shifts', and many different modes of artistic participation that took place during this period.[488] In this context, many artists' initiatives based on *autogestión* constituted themselves as spaces for the revitalization of the public sphere. As anthropologist and researcher, Mónica Lacarrieu, noted in one of Trama's final debates entitled 'Artistic Strategies for the Construction of Networks of Collaboration':

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[487] A. Giunta, 'Post-crisis', p. 116.
[488] R. Alonso, 'Reactivando la esfera pública', para. 19.

...the context of the crisis and widespread impoverishment has contributed in the emergence of cultural initiatives, specifically in the field of art, which aim at creating spaces for social transformation, social inclusion and the constitution of a public sphere of political participation.[489]

The fact that many artists' initiatives emerge and operate outside of the official institutional art system means that they need to create a space-other of existence and visibility. The outcome of a politics of *autogestión* is what Lefebvre referred to as 'differential space', a new space, a counter or alternative space that accentuates the differences with regards to the homogenizing and hegemonic space (i.e. that of the capitalist system and the state).[490] As he insisted, this is not a 'socialised space',[491] a space that is predetermined or that exists beforehand as a non-social space. This 'differential space', then, highlights the need for the creation a space-other which will enable a qualitative social transformation.

In the case of Trama, a space-other was produced through *autogestión*; a space where thought and action converged while eliciting a wide variety of synergies, as well as intricacies. Following Lefebvre, it could be argued that Trama constituted a 'differential space', a space that did not exist *de facto*, but that was produced 'by social forces'.[492] Counter to the individualist, isolated, self-referential, and monolithic space characteristic of the art world in the previous decade, Trama created an alternative space, a collective space based on cooperation.

Understood in these terms, Lefebvre's notion of 'differential space' resonates with Reinaldo Laddaga's conception of Trama as a (counter) public space, as a space-other where the construction of power emerges, a power different to that of the state and its institutions. In Trama's debates organized in 2001 as part of the research project on artistic practice and its social projection, Laddaga discussed this by defining

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[489] Mónica Lacarrieu, 'Estrategias para la construcción de redes de colaboración' (transcript of debate), [unpublished document, Trama archive]. The debate was organized within the framework of *Trama: El Encuentro* which took place at the Goethe Institute, Buenos Aires, on 1 November 2005. This debate focused on informal initiatives, practices and artistic strategies that aimed at creating new social dynamics, expand the arts as a field of knowledge and social transformation. The panel was moderated by Christian Ferrer (sociologist, Buenos Aires) and composed by: Julio Lira (artist and sociologist, Brazil), Roberto Jacoby (artist and sociologist, Buenos Aires), Mónica Lacarrieu (anthropologist, Buenos Aires), and Mara Borchardt (from Crear Vale la Pena, Buenos Aires).
[490] H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 52.
[491] Ibid, p. 35.
[492] Ibid.

public space as 'a situation in which there are at least three people who talk who would prefer to include at least, one more.'[493] The context of the crisis triggered the need to rethink the concept of public space beyond its relation to the nation or the state. In formulating this broad and somewhat imprecise definition, Laddaga intended to denaturalize, or to detach the concept of public space from fixed structures or historical interpretations like, for instance, those constituted by the public plaza or the university, spaces traditionally associated with a concept of the national. Based on the discussions during the debate, Laddaga's conception of public space can be understood as a collective or community space, a space for sharing and for dialogue. Creating a counterpower, in Laddaga's view, would entail the creation of a space of power within community structures. However, through 'a double gesture of invitation and insertion',[494] this structure will have the capacity to expand beyond the limits of its own microsystem.

In a context characterized by the withdrawal of the state and within a situation of broken ties, not only between individuals, but 'between individuals and the powers that be', it was 'necessary to imagine other spaces'.[495] According to Laddaga, it was necessary to engage in a process of 'reparation'[496] (of the ruptures) and to take back or re-appropriate public space by creating a different kind of power, of counterpower; in Lefebvrian terms, a 'differential' space. As a collective space that incorporated connective processes, Trama and its network were considered by Laddaga as a public space with the potential to build power and to 'repair', at least partially, some of the ruptures provoked by the economic and socio-political circumstances within the art community in Argentina.

According to Fontes, the discussion regarding public space and its political dimension was particularly significant for Trama at the time. If 'power occupies the

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[493] See: 'Debate held after Laddaga's presentation', in Trama, *Society imagined in contemporary art in Argentina*, p. 136.
[494] Reinaldo Laddaga, 'Reparations', in *Trama Society imagined in contemporary art in Argentina*, p. 131.
[495] Ibid, p. 139.
[496] Laddaga used the term 'reparations': 'each reparation act is an act for the construction of power'. p. 135-136.

space which it generates',[497] to enable a public space for the common good also entails a responsibility. In this regard, Fontes has noted:

> As organizer of Trama, I understood that Trama was a public space that was being constructed collectively, and there is a responsibility that comes with that…as an artist you have to take a stance regarding that responsibility.[498]

How was, then, this 'differential space' produced within Trama? Trama consolidated multiple spaces through the appropriation of public spaces in the city for its different activities, the encounters and meetings for analysis, presentations and debates, its digital platform, its printed publications, and through the network of artists' initiatives and organizations that it helped to consolidate. Hence, the space created by Trama was, at once, collective, symbolic, discursive, open, and flexible.

Trama was not intended to have a centralized visibility; thus, it had no physical space.[499] To occupy a physical space in Buenos Aires would have been against their interest in decentralizing art production, as it had traditionally been monopolized by institutions and agents based in the capital. They were structured in a rhizomatic way, making use of the possibilities, facilities, and installations – either offered or occupied by them – in the most varied spaces in the cities where the events were being organized: alternative art spaces, spaces normally closed to the public in government institutions, private studios of artists who selflessly offer their premises, auditoriums, cultural centers, stock rooms, vacant lots for sale, lecture halls of universities, among others.

Trama's main space for encounter, visibility, and exchange was the website they created in 2002.[500] This virtual platform functioned as a repository for the circulation of information about the participants and the activities organized in Argentina and abroad, as an archive with bibliographic and documentation material, and as a 'data bank', or register where other national and international artist-initiated

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[497] S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, p. 120.
[498] C. Fontes, skype interview with author, 21 May 2014.
[499] Although during 2001 they maintained an office space in the building of Fundación Espigas for administration purposes.
[500] The virtual host was www.proyectotrama.org; currently inactive.

spaces and projects could gain visibility [Fig. 3.3].[501] Following their objective of strengthening South-South relations, most of the website operated in both Spanish and English, facilitating the contact and exchange with other non-Spanish speaking initiatives within the network. Eventually, they also incorporated an intranet, a virtual office space that functioned as a meeting point for the participating artists [Fig. 3.4]. Organized into 'rooms', a specific room for each ongoing project, this workspace was intended as a horizontal platform where the information would be accessible to all participants.[502]

Having a virtual presence in the internet was another strategy through which Trama sought to consolidate a more democratic and inclusive perspective on artistic production. As Trama's web editor, Florencia Cacciabue, pointed out the project's website was meant as a space of encounter.[503] The data bank, register of artists' initiatives, published texts and debates, as well as the virtual work space were all intended to foster exchange (of information, knowledge and relations) within, and beyond, the local artistic community. It facilitated the possibility of interchange between artists, art organizations, and cultural producers from a variety of disciplinary, generational, and geopolitical contexts.

In spite of its democratic aspirations, however, Trama's website was not a completely open source. Particularly, the intranet was not accessible to everyone. Artists would be invited to join the 'work rooms' and access would be given in a 'meritocratic' basis to those who showed genuine commitment to the projects. Thus, the more responsibility and commitment, the more authorship artists could have in the respective projects. In this sense, the space produced would transcend mere participation and production, constituting itself, not only as a space for visibility, but as a space for self-promotion.

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[501] This register of artists' initiatives has functioned as point of reference for other collective projects, such as Proyecto Cara, a project for self-managed art in Argentina, which objective is to map all the artists collectives currently active in Argentina in order to survey the different collective experiences of *gestión cultural* since the beginning of the twenty-first century.
[502] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.
[503] Duplus, *El pez, la bicicleta y la máquina de escribir*, p. 52.

Articulating a National Artists' Initiatives Network

In spite of the fact that Lefebvre does not particularly engage with the concept of networks, I would argue that the idea of networks is implicitly embedded in his theoretical engagements with the production of space and urban space, most particularly. For instance, in *The Production of Space*, he is keen to demonstrate that networks and flows that link and embed things (objects, subjects) are generally more significant than the things themselves:

> Social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of material things and information. Such 'objects' are thus not only things but also relations.[504]

As Stuart Elden notes, the idea of networks also features in his understanding of 'territorial *autogestion'*: 'There are a range of levels of the spatial from the immediate neighbourhood of the local, to the mediations of exchanges, flux, networks, and circuits, to the larger scale of the region or the country.'[505]

In the context of Argentina, the new social movements not only created new territories, but organized in horizontal networks, rather than through political parties or syndicates, as had been previously the case. Many of these networks, which 'emerged around experiments working on health, alternative education and economy, assemblies, occupation of factories, roadblocks, etc.'[506], eventually expanded regionally and nationally. Given their attempt at creating a counter-power, the image of the *network* has been useful to organize and think possible forms of coming together without creating 'centers'. The network, as Colectivo Situaciones points out, was 'the response of the alternative experiences to the question over how to connect dispersion, how to link those people and groups that have been expelled from the central system.'[507]

Similarly, the network developed by Trama made visible a myriad of artists and artists' initiatives operating at the margins, which had not yet been acknowledged or

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[504] H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 77.
[505] S. Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre*, p. 238.
[506] Colectivo Situaciones, *19 & 20*, p. 239.
[507] Ibid, p. 193.

legitimated in their local contexts. As I previously discussed in Chapter II, the *clínicas* and grants for the visual arts launched by Fundación Antorchas at the end of the 1990s were fundamental in the creation of a network of artists at a national level. The exchanges and contacts facilitated by Antorchas set the basis for the new map of relations between artists, curators, and academics from different Argentine cities that emerged in the last decades.[508]

Capitalizing, to an extent, on the soil that Antorchas had begun to fertilize, by mid-2000s Trama had consolidated the first network of artists' initiatives in Argentina [Fig. 3.5]. This network was articulated through (1) different activities which included debates, workshops and meetings for the analysis of artistic production and self-organized projects; (2) an online register of national and international artists' initiatives; (3) several research trips made in South America in 2004; (4) Trama's involvement in the first *Encuentro for Independent Spaces from Latin America and the Caribbean*; as well as through (5) Trama's participation in collaborative projects with other artists' initiatives from the global South through the RAIN network. A new territory was created, not only through the creation of symbolic or discursive spaces, but by the way this space was expanded through the organization into networks; giving way to a reconfiguration of new cartographies, both at local and regional level.

Thus, the space produced by Trama's network had a clear territorial dimension extending nationally throughout the provinces, regionally to other Latin American countries, and internationally through the RAIN network and the many South-South exchanges they promoted. Besides those mentioned in Chapter I, Trama also participated in other internationally-oriented projects and events. For instance, the debates organized by RAIN in Jakarta (Indonesia) in 2002 with the participation of artists Tulio de Sagastizábal and Pablo Ziccarello representing Trama; Claudia Fontes represented Trama in The South Project, a program designed to explore the possibilities of South-South dialogue, which took place at the University of Melbourne (Australia) in July 2004; and Trama's participation with the exhibition of 20 Argentine videos at the KO 1ST Durban Video Festival organized by RAIN's partner initiative,

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[508] A. Giunta, *Poscrisis*, p. 50.

Pulse, in Durban (South Africa) in 2005. Although Trama's role and influence beyond regional borders lies beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to say that the international dimension of Trama was of utmost importance insofar as they can be understood as constituting a new form of 'internationalism'.

If, during the 1990s, Argentine art experienced a withdrawal from the international art scene, as Inés Katzenstein has argued, Trama's explicit interest and efforts to strengthen cultural exchanges constitutes an attempt at opening up channels of communication and exchange between the local art scene and the international art world. It also implies considering how these regional and international exchanges establish or open new directions and possibilities for contemporary art in Argentina that did not exist before. In this sense, Trama could be considered as a forerunner to the series of international artistic residency programs that started to appear after 2001, such as: El Basilisco, a residency program directed by artists Esteban Álvarez, Cristina Schiavi and Tamara Stuby from 2004 to 2009 in the South of Buenos Aires; RIAA (Residencia Internacional de Artistas en Argentina – International Artists' Residency in Argentina), a self-organized artists' residency program initiated in 2006 by Diana Aisenberg, Melina Berkenwald, Marcelo Grosman, Graciela Hasper, and Roberto Jacoby that seeks to promote dialogue and collaboration between international and Argentine artists; and, URRA Art Residencies and Exchanges, a program founded in 2010 dedicated to the promotion of art residencies and cultural exchange projects. In what follows, I will discuss primarily a series of activities that were significant or relevant in the consolidation of Trama's artists' initiatives network, both nationally within Argentina and regionally within the Latin American region.

Although, the idea of working collectively, promoting exchanges and creating a network based on cooperation was one of Trama's main objectives since its inception, it was during the second phase of the project that a more coherent and extensive network of artists' initiatives started to be articulated. This was done through the connection of already existing artists' initiatives, and through the articulation of a diversity of nodes of artistic production active within the national territory that were, likewise, connected to different institutions or para-institutions.

As noted in Trama's third publication: '…over the last few years an increasing number of artists has fortunately decided to create shared spaces: artists take over spaces that were alien to them, extend their practice, and make their projects happen.'[509] However, in spite of their multiplicity, they were atomized. Not only were they disconnected from one another but, for the most part, they were unaware of each other's existence. Consequently, there was hardly any exchange and very little information flowed between them. As Salta-based artist Roxana Ramos pointed out, 'we [were] all talking about the same thing, but separate[ly].'[510] The proliferation of initiatives in the period post-2001 made clear that in order to create a sustainable environment, to sustain that space of legitimation and self-validation it was creating for itself, the best way of proceeding for Trama was to capitalize on the energies of all these other initiatives operating at state level. As they themselves contended, 'we realised that cooperative action did not suffice, but that it was necessary to acknowledge, encourage, and support cooperation among initiatives managed by artists throughout the country.[511] This situation implied a process of recognition that included surveying how many they were, who and what were their needs. Thus, one of Trama's main contributions in this regard was its 'conglomerative effect'.[512] That is, their capacity to acknowledge, articulate, and give visibility to an artists' network based on *autogestión* and cooperation.

Trama encouraged and promoted a network of cooperation among *artistas-gestores* (artists-managers), mainly from 2002 onwards, through a series of activities which included: providing training in issues related to cultural management, fostering exchanges between local initiatives and with the international art milieu, and furthering inter-provincial exchanges between *artistas-gestores* in Argentina. Besides increasing the possibilities for artistic exchange, the network also functioned as a way of acknowledging the self-organizing endeavours that these artists maintained alongside their own individual artistic practice. The network aimed at circulating knowledge and experiences, while providing artists with practical tools that would

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[509] Trama, *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 96.
[510] R. Ramos, personal interview with author.
[511] Trama, *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 97.
[512] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.

help them to become sustainable in time. Ultimately, the promotion of a dynamic and strong network of artists' initiatives was motivated by the objective of developing common strategies and a cultural politics that would be different to the established one.

The two editions of the research 'Workshop on Cultural Management for Artists' Initiatives' organized by Trama emerged from the belief that the impact of these initiatives could be further potentiated if the work carried out by the *artistas-gestores* could be supported by means of research and training activities related to cultural management. Following this guiding principle, the first edition of these workshops was organized in Luján, a city in the Buenos Aires province of Argentina, from the 3rd to 10th December 2002 [Fig. 3.6]. It particularly addressed the significance of independent artist's initiatives operating in a context marked by urgency, and was tailored to suit the concerns and needs of the artists in charge of the organizations. As was usual in Trama's workshops, ten local artists linked to initiatives from Argentina participated in this workshop alongside two artists from abroad. The Argentine artists who attended the workshop were: Francisco Ali Brouchoud from Misiones, curator of the Contemporary Art Museum at the Misiones National University (UNAM); Carlota Beltrame, artist, curator and *artista-gestora* of different projects in Tucumán, and organizer of Trama's activities in the North-West of the country; Sandro Pereira also from Tucumán, *gestor* of the initiative El Ingenio (The Sugar Mill); Carina Cagnolo, artist from Córdoba and *gestora* of Cielo Teórico (Theoretical Heaven); Leo Batistelli, *gestor* of Villa Remanso (Remanso village) and other initiatives in the city of Rosario; Gustavo López from Bahía Blanca represented VOX Space and publications; and Daniel Besoytaorube and Mario Gemin from Mar del Plata, managers of the Contemporary Art International Fund. From Buenos Aires, the participant artists were: Ana Gallardo, curator and manager of art space Lelé de Troya in Palermo Viejo, Marcelo de La Fuente, curator of La Casona de los Olivera, and Santiago García Aramburu, co-manager of project Duplus. In addition, Trama invited two foreign artists who were also self-managing initiatives with similar objectives and in contexts with difficulties comparable to theirs. These were: Greg Streak from South Africa with a project called 'Pulse' and Goddy Leye from Cameroon, with 'The Art

Bakery'. As was the case in other workshops, the aim of combining local and foreign artists was that the confrontation of strategies learned under different circumstances would enrich the exchange of information and would contribute to building a network of collaboration that would enable possible future discussions and collaborations.

Lasting eight days, the workshop was initiated with presentations by special guests, María José Herrera, art historian and curator at the Buenos Aires Museum of Fine Arts, and Ricardo Basbaum, visual artist and manager of Agora, an artist initiative in Rio de Janeiro. Afterwards, for the course of three days, each participant presented their project or initiative, followed by discussions with Sue Williamson, artist, journalist and co-manager of VANSA (network for visual artists in South Africa). During the last days of the workshop, the participating artists and guests discussed more practical issues pertaining to the self-management of cultural initiatives: María José Figuerero, archeologist and researcher, advised the artists on written and oral aspects of project presentations, while Fernando Frydman, university professor and advisor on subjects related to the financing of cultural organizations and projects in Argentina and Latin America, discussed different financial strategies.

Through presentations and debates, the workshop was structured to offer theoretical and practical support in order to provide these artists with tools to afford their aims in a more professional way.[513] Interestingly, throughout the different talks the same issues would come up again and again; among these were: the need for working against conventional systems of art education that do not allow for creative thinking; the need to create libraries or digital archives to rescue past and current art history; and the need for physical infrastructure in which to carry on these activities. Moreover, another concern that was frequently raised had to do with the design of effective strategies to introduce the general public into a sensible and friendly appreciation of contemporary art.[514]

The second 'Workshop on Cultural Management for Artists' Initiatives' was held in Buenos Aires from the 18th to 25th November 2003 [Fig. 3.7]. Similarly, twelve artists linked to different local and foreign initiatives participated: Diego Trejo and

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[513] For more information on this workshop, see: Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, pp. 147-167.
[514] Alina Tortosa, 'Networking in Luján', *Buenos Aires Herald*, 8 December 2002.

Karol Zingali, from Apeiron Zool, and Casa 13, represented by Beatríz Scolamieri, both from Córdoba; Mauro Machado and Graciela Carnevale, visual artists from Rosario and founders of El Levante; Jorge Gutiérrez, director of La Baulera, Centre of Contemporary Art, San Miguel de Tucumán; Amadeo Azar, artist, curator, and one of the creators of MOTP, Mar del Plata; Sebastián Codeseira and Gema Acevedo, on behalf of Proyecto Venus, Start Foundation, Buenos Aires; Julia Masvernat and Dina Roisman, managers of Terraza, Buenos Aires; TPS-Taller Popular de Serigrafía from Buenos Aires; and Cristian Segura, former director of Tandil Museum of Fine Arts and curator and manager of several independent projects also in the city of Tandil. For a period of eight days, the artists gathered, presented their respective initiatives, exchanged information, and compared results and strategies. Three invited guests collaborated and stimulated the discussions: Argentine art historian, Roberto Amigo, acted as moderator of the discussions during the workshop and gave a lecture on issues involving artists' initiatives in the local context; and cultural advisor, Fernando Frydman and Gertrude Flentge, former coordinator of RAIN, offered talks and exercises specifically targeted to question the role and the problems confronted by of the *artista-gestor*.[515]

Among the most significant issues that surfaced during this workshop was the ethical aspects of their operational possibilities. As they have outlined:

> This issue stood out as a constant question for every one of the undertakings discussed. Matters concerning artists' management, the dematerialization of the art system, and the critical questioning of the art system were approached by these organizations from this standpoint. Artists' initiatives were discussed as a way of rethinking a model of cultural distribution. The organization network was discussed as a net of contention for the new discourses springing from art. Insofar as artistic experience proves to be a suitable tool for the construction of people's own narratives and discourses, its potential as an educational model was also considered.[516]

The workshop concluded with a discussion of desirable connections between projects and initiatives and potential strategies that could be implemented to make them possible.

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[515] For more information on this workshop, see: Trama, *The Network as a common place*, p. 113.
[516] Ibid.

In all, these workshops encouraged artists to think and reflect about the practice of *gestión* (management) itself. In essence, these *proyectos de autogestión* were analyzed in a similar fashion to artworks: artists' would have to account for the reasons why were they were proposing such projects, for whom, what was the objective, what methodology they would use, as well as what it meant to assume an (ideological, political, ethical) position with regards to their proposed projects. Through these critical reflections and discussions, these workshops, then, promoted the practice of *autogestión* within the Argentine art field and advanced the production of artistic discourse regarding processes of cultural management. As has been suggested by curator, Pamela Desjardins, by extension of the practice itself, *(auto)gestión* became artistic discourse.[517]

Trama's workshops on cultural management were instrumental in installing the practice of *autogestión* as a mode of (artistic) production fundamental in the development of emerging cultural scenes. This process of awareness or renewed understanding of artistic *autogestión* – which is also closely linked to the new subjective processes developed through collective practices – was highly significant for many artists, especially young artists based in cities with less developed cultural infrastructures. As has been noted by Roxana Ramos – who was also a grantee at Trama's workshop 'Artistic production and contexts of creation' (2002), as well as a participant in the Regional Meetings for the Analysis of Artists' Initiatives (2004) – the workshops on *gestión cultural* played an important role in her artistic development as it encouraged artists to 'think themselves', to reflect about their own practice. The experience in Trama enabled a consciousness of *autogestión* as a distinct element of artistic practice. For the artist, the workshops evinced that artists needed to avail themselves of these tools and that it was not the same to be an artist as to be an *artista-gestor*. In fact, as Ramos contends, these two roles, although they feed from each other, they necessarily need to be differentiated. Artists engaged in *proyectos de gestión* (self-organized projects) should avoid collapsing one role into the other in order to avoid personalizing the projects or initiatives too much, or preclude the

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[517] Pamela Desjardins, 'El artista como gestor y la gestión como discurso artístico', *ASRI (Arte y Sociedad Revista de Investigación)*, Issue 1, February 2012, <http://asri.eumed.net/1/pd.html>, accessed 4 August 2012.

artwork from being permeated by too many external non-aesthetic stimuli.[518] Moreover, the opportunity of associating with other like-minded artists, and recognizing oneself in the other – as Ramos asserted – allowed artists to see themselves as part of a larger *trama*, a web of initiatives that existed, but was unknown to most artists working in the art field. In her view, these collective workshops were very important in the Argentine art scene since they helped artists to build a network based on mutual support, respect, and trust.[519]

The national network of artists' initiatives that was promoted with the research workshops on cultural management for artists in the years 2002 and 2003 was further consolidated through the *'Encuentros de análisis de gestión cultural para iniciativas de artistas emergentes'* (Meetings for the Analysis of Cultural Management for Emerging Artists' Initiatives). These meetings, which took place in 2004, consisted in the organization of a series of encounters of emerging initiatives based on artistic *autogestión* in four different regions of the country: NOA (North-West of Argentina), with its base in Salta [Fig. 3.8]; Center Provinces and Cuyo, with its base in the city of Córdoba; Province of Buenos Aires and Federal Capital, with its base in the city of Bahía Blanca [Fig. 3.9]; and NEA (North-East of Argentina), with its base in Posadas, Misiones. Each region sent approximately 10 participants, five from the city hosting the event and five from nearby provinces, or cities. Carina Cagnolo, Gustavo López, Jorge Gutiérrez, and Daniel Besoytaorube, experienced *artistas-gestores* and participants in Trama's Cultural Management Workshop in 2002, were the appointed tutors at the regional workshops. On this occasion, the participating artists worked in pairs and never in their own region to encourage more horizontal social interactions.[520] The workshop was carried out in three different phases: an initial phase wherein the participating artists presented their projects to the group; followed by a more practical instance whereby the tutors offered advice on the project proposals; and, lastly, a discussion forum where information was exchanged, shared

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[518] Roxana Ramos, 'Foros temáticos de debates emergentes de los Encuentros regionales de análisis de gestión cultural para artistas. Foro temático 5: Relación entre gestión artística y obra de arte'. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

[519] R. Ramos, personal interview with author.

[520] Trama, 'Encuentros de análisis de gestión cultural para iniciativas de artistas emergentes', n/p. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

problems were analyzed, and future strategies were discussed in a collective setting. In a context where communication between artists' initiatives proved haphazard or practically nil, meetings such as this were significant in that they encouraged inter-provincial exchange and collaboration by bringing together emerging initiatives committed to taking upon themselves collective responsibility for their artistic community. In this way, Trama's network was strengthened thanks to the activities that focused on cultural management training, but also through the different collaborative projects and exchanges that it promoted between provinces.

In addition to providing artists with the necessary tools to operate and intervene in their local scenes, Trama's network also encouraged confidence in artistic self-management, increasing consciousness for the need for *autogestión* within the art field, especially in more marginal contexts. A case in point is the city of Tucumán, where many of Trama's activities and workshops took place and where many artists' initiatives have emerged in the past fifteen years, such as La Baulera, El Ingenio, La Punta, Rusia Galería, and Sitios Tangentes, among many others. In 2002, artist and Trama participant, Aldo Ternavasio, coordinated a research workshop, along with artist Carlota Beltrame, which focused on 'Artistic Production and Contexts of Creation' in the city of San Miguel de Tucumán. This workshop was organized in collaboration with artist Sigurdur Gudmundsson from Iceland, who had been invited by the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam.[521] The purpose of this workshop was to facilitate a group discussion on the specific needs posed by a context such as that of Tucumán – a city with many artists, but with a weak infrastructure for the development of contemporary artistic practices – and their influence on the artists' creative process, both at a conceptual, as well as formal level.[522] According to Ternavasio, the workshops and activities promoted by Trama in this city contributed to grounding the idea that artistic production implied *autogestión*: 'in Tucumán, there is no art without *autogestión*.'[523] This assertion can be partly explained due to the withdrawal of the State after the crisis of 2001, but also because the failure of the existing institutional framework in embracing and supporting the new artistic

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[521] For more information, see: Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, pp. 133-142.
[522] Ibid, p. 133.
[523] Aldo Ternavasio, personal interview with author, 16 November 2012, Tucumán, Argentina.

practices and their demands. Within such a context, then, *autogestión* as an emancipatory practice demanded not only the self-organization of the symbolic and discursive universe of the artists, but, by enabling a space of freedom where artists could experiment, it also created the possibility for action, as Ternavasio contended.[524]

Promoting the development of contemporary art in peripheral scenes, artistic *autogestión* became key in the transformation and visibility of artistic production in Argentine cities like Tucumán, but also Mendoza, Córdoba, and Salta, to name a few.[525] In this regard, Andrés Labaké, in his text 'Algunas ciudades y otras historias. Fragmentos y transcripciones. Espacios y grupos de artistas autogestionados', argues:

> Most of these spaces are trying to expand the conformation of communities of artists, to establish links between them and with their social context. They seek to show the value of their own productions and to extend their actions outside of their cities. They have built and [still] build incipient social scenes, in order to give feedback to one another, forming a web of interconnections with groups of other regions, [motivated by] the decision and the attempt to not to depend so much on the validation of the established system.[526]

The possibility of creating and mediating artistic discourse and production by themselves stimulated many young artists – many of which were linked to Trama – to create a physical and symbolic space for experimentation, and the production and circulation of their work; a space non-existent at the time in many smaller art circuits in Argentina.

Based on the testimonies provided by some of the artists which I interviewed for the purposes of this study, it is noteworthy how Trama's project and work ethos served as an incentive for many of the artists involved to give shape to their ideas and to create their own projects. In fact, we could trace a genealogy of artists' initiatives in Argentina that are linked to Trama. For instance, La Baulera, which was initially a theatre group, were encouraged to create a space dedicated to research and the

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[524] A. Ternavasio, personal interview with author.

[525] A. Labaké, 'Algunas ciudades y otras historias. Fragmentos y transcripciones. Espacios y grupos de artistas autogestionados', in *Poéticas contemporáneas: itinerarios en las artes visuales en la Argentina de los 90 al 2010*, Fondo Nacional de las Artes, Buenos Aires, 2010, p. 39. [author's translation]

[526] Ibid, p. 40.

production of contemporary art – La Baulera Centro de Arte Contemporáneo – following their participation in Trama's activities. As artist and director of the space Jorge Gutiérrez has expressed, La Baulera started to associate with other initiatives thanks to Trama: 'Trama consolidated the idea of self-organization within the group.'[527] Another initiative that was directly influenced by Trama was El Ingenio, a project created by a group of visual artists from Tucumán that was active between 2000 and 2003.[528] Trama's influence becomes evident in the objectives of the initiative. As they themselves contend, El Ingenio:

> …aimed to stimulate autonomy of ideas in art at the production level and to generate and develop strategies collectively, as a group that works cooperatively. These strategies should benefit both the group's and the individual creative process, without leaving aside the insertion of artistic issues in Tucuman's community.[529]

In a recent interview, visual artist Sergio Pereira, co-founding member of El Ingenio and one of Trama's grantees in the 'Research Workshop on Cultural Management for Artists' (Luján, 2002), reaffirmed Trama's influence in the creation of their own initiative in Tucumán. According to Pereira's testimony, he is 'greatly indebted to the experience of Trama' insofar as it served as a model for El Ingenio given its organizational structure and cooperative values.[530] Similarly, artist Pablo Guiot, also a founding member of El Ingenio and Trama participant in the workshop for cultural management for artists' initiatives in 2002, acknowledged that Trama's project encouraged and provided them with the inspiration to create their own self-organized space in Tucumán. A few years later, and with the experienced of having been associated to El Ingenio, Guiot founded La Punta, an independent artist-led space that aimed at contributing to the vitality of the artistic scene in Tucumán through different strategies of exhibition, dissemination, and promotion of the work of contemporary local artists, while establishing links with other art circuits, both nationally and

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[527] Jorge Gutiérrez, 'Investigación, producción y gestión artística', *Ramona*, 69, April 2007, p. 50.
[528] Artists participating in El Ingenio were: Pablo Guiot, Sandro Pereira, María Brunet, Rolo Juárez, Geli González, Mariana Ferrari, Fabián Ramos, Marta Fernandez, Martín Guiot, Ana Lía Canal Feijóo, Carolina Paradella, Luciana Guiot, Javier Juárez, Carolina Leal, Luis Carrizo, Andrea Elías, Angela González, Ana Gutiérrez, Magdalena Nazar, Flavia Romano, Raquel Zevallos, Angela González, and Cecilia Córdoba.
[529] Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 165.
[530] Sergio Pereira, personal interview with author, 15 November 2012, Tucumán, Argentina.

internationally.[531] As the artist asserted, the legacy of Trama has been invaluable to the development of the art scene in Tucumán, not only because of the values that it promoted within the artistic community, but because of the way it encouraged and facilitated the circulation of artists, artworks and ideas from the Tucumán province throughout the country.[532]

La Guarda, an independent artist initiative in the city of Salta, is another case in point of those spaces that were strongly influenced by Trama's vision. Founded by artists Roxana Ramos, Ana María Benedetti and Soledad Dahbar, La Guarda emerged at the end of 2004 with the purpose of promoting contemporary artistic production and thought that would address and be rooted in local issues. Like El Ingenio, the similitude in the objectives of this space with those of Trama's program are no coincidence. As Ramos noted in a recent interview, La Guarda is 'a direct descendent of Trama.'[533] In fact, it was through Trama's workshops that Ramos was able to conceptualize and materialize her ideas to create an independent space for the visual arts in Salta. Prior to 2000, Salta's art scene was quite precarious; there were hardly any spaces that would exhibit and promote the development of contemporary artistic practices in a systematic way, as has been noted by Andrea Elías, artist in charge of coordinating Trama's Regional Meetings for the Analysis of Cultural Management in Artists' Initiatives (NOA region) in 2004, and current director of the Museo de Bellas Artes de Salta (MBAS).[534] The recent revisions made to cultural policies, the renovation or inauguration of new cultural institutions, as well as the proliferation of a circuit of independent artist-initiated spaces and projects, have contributed to the transformation of the art scene in Salta during the last fifteen years. Within this context, La Guarda soon established itself as a point of reference for the local exhibition, promotion, and circulation of contemporary art. Alongside initiatives such as Galería de Arte 'A', Kasa Taller, Galería Fedro, Galería Bordó, La Ventolera, and Galería Mamoré, La Guarda became part of a dynamic circuit of self-organized spaces

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[531] The artists involved in La Punta were Pablo Guiot, Pablo Córdoba, Luis Carrizo, Ana Gutiérrez, Marcos Bauzá, Pamela Desjardins, Belén Aguirre, Alfredo Frías, and Sonia Ruiz.

[532] Pablo Guiot, personal interview with author, 17 November 2012, Tucumán, Argentina.

[533] R. Ramos, personal interview with author.

[534] Andrea Elías, 'Descripción Situación Local: Salta, documento Encuentro Regionales de Análisis de Gestión Cultural para Iniciativas de Artistas', 2004. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

that emerged in the city of Salta proposing alternative modes of organization and visibility parallel to the official art circuit. A new mode of legitimation of art was established in combination with the established cultural centers, the gaze shifted inwards: 'This is the first time that Salta emerges in the map of contemporary art in Argentina', as Ramos asserted.[535]

The nation-wide propagation of artists' initiatives based on *autogestión* and the extent of visibility that Trama's network helped them achieve, contributed to the decentralization of artistic and cultural production in Argentina. If Buenos Aires had traditionally constituted the center of cultural life, where artists gained visibility and legitimation, as Marcelo Pachecho and Jorge Gumier Maier affirmed in the catalogue of the exhibition 'Artistas argentinos de los 90', by the mid-2000s, this situation had changed significantly. Undoubtedly, Trama's network contributed to change this centralized perspective while challenging the old center versus periphery debate. By exploring ways of artistic exchange and making possible all kinds of interconnections between artists from different backgrounds and contexts, the binary center-periphery – which for Trama was not ontological, but relative – was, not only questioned, but substituted by the conflation of new synergies, itineraries, and protagonisms. Far from suggesting that Buenos Aires has been replaced as the epicenter of cultural production, in privileging interprovincial artistic exchanges Trama allowed for the questioning of pre-existing power relations highlighting 'the existence of peripheries in the centre and of centres in the periphery.'[536] As Marina de Caro has contended:

> When artists have to travel to Tucumán because that is where the workshop is taking place, Tucumán is the center…That did not exist before…that Tucumán would become the center rather than Buenos Aires, that never happened before…[537]

As a result, the network of heterogeneous independent initiatives operating nationwide made visible a new cultural map in Argentina. After 2005, Buenos Aires was no longer the sole centre towards which visual artists would gravitate in order to

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[535] R. Ramos, personal interview with author.

[536] Juan Pablo Lichtmajer, 'Globalization, periphery and imagined communities', in Trama, *Images, Narratives and Utopias*, p. 124.

[537] M. de Caro, personal interview with author.

produce, exhibit, or disseminate their artworks. The center had shifted and was now unfixed.

Regional Encounters, South-South Exchanges

The process of recognition and visibility that allowed for the articulation of a network of artists' initiatives was expanded regionally as Trama engaged in collaborations and exchanges with initiatives from other Latin American countries. By 2004, Trama decided to continue developing and fostering South-South exchanges which, as previously mentioned, referred to those between Latin America, Africa, and Asia. However, at this point they had decided to stir their efforts to the exchange of knowledge, projects, and references within the Latin American region. Leaving aside the exhaustion that intercultural translation brought with it, their efforts were invested on developing the network regionally, reinforcing existing links between initiatives from different Latin American countries and developing new ones. This objective was achieved mainly through the Meeting for Independent Art Spaces from Latin America and the Caribbean, which Trama co-organized with Duplus in 2003 and a series of research trips to some of Argentina's neighboring countries, especially those in the east and west coasts of the Southern Cone.

The 'Encuentro de espacios de arte independiente de América Latina y el Caribe' (Meeting of Independent Art Spaces from Latin America and the Caribbean) took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina from 28 October to 2 November 2003. Although, the proposal to organize an encounter of independent artistic platforms was originally Duplus' initiative, Trama joined the project early in the gestational process since both groups shared the same objective: the construction of a network to foster cooperation and exchange among artists' initiatives and self-managed art spaces in Argentina, as well as in the broader region of Latin America and the Caribbean.[538] The common view shared by Duplus and Trama stemmed from the 'transformation process' that both initiatives experienced as a consequence of the institutional crisis

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[538] Trama, *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 134.

and the social protests in Argentina towards the end of 2001. The members of Duplus, which – as was briefly mentioned in Chapter I – started operating as an independent, non-profit art space between 2000 and 2002, experienced a renewed social awareness due to the events that took place in late December 2001. The new social scenario, along with the economic and institutional collapse, drove them to reconsider their operational mode regarding curatorship, practices, politics, and local artistic thought and discourse. Likewise, as I have emphasised throughout this study, although Trama had envisaged working within a network since their early days, also saw their activities and objectives politicized in the aftermath of the 2001 crisis.

The '*Encuentro de espacios de arte independiente*' was divided into two stages. The first consisted in a four-day workshop held at Fundación PROA in Buenos Aires designed specifically for the seven invited projects, including: Trama (Argentina), Duplus (Argentina) [Fig. 3.10], Espacio Aglutinador (Cuba), Espacio La Rebeca (Colombia), Galería Metropolitana (Chile), Hoffmann's House (Chile), and Capacete Entretenimientos (Brazil). According to Trama, the criteria of selection of the participating initiatives

> …consisted in locating a group of projects originated in different Latin American countries that challenged the hegemonic status posed from the established contemporary art system, insofar as these projects made way for and proposed spaces where it would be possible to imagine new conditions of possibility for social creativity, while positing critical proposals aimed at the ruling cultural policies.[539]

The discussions held during these four days addressed the specificity of each project, their interaction with the art community, the institutional context affecting them, and management strategies articulated to that effect in each particular case.[540]

During the second phase of the event, each participating initiative gave public presentations of their projects at Espacio Giesso, a cultural space in San Telmo (Buenos Aires), followed by keynote lectures given by art historian from Mexico, Francisco Reyes Palma, and Argentine philosopher, José Fernández Vega. As in most of Trama's activities, both Reyes Palma and Fernández Vega were invited to attend these meetings as external witnesses to confront the artists' proposals and to

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[539] Trama, *The Network as a Common Place*, p. 136.
[540] Ibid, p. 135.

encourage and stir debate among the participating artists and the general audience. Over two days, there were public presentations of the projects, in the framework of lectures given and conclusions expressed by the guest theoreticians.[541] Among the topics discussed during the dialogues and debates that took place in the '*Encuentro de espacios de arte independiente'* were issues of autonomy and independence, issues of self-denomination of the initiatives, different curatorial approaches and innovative ways of establishing connections with the audience, and art as a tool for the construction of networks [Fig. 3.11].[542]

The '*Encuentro de espacios de arte independiente'* was significant in that it facilitated 'concrete interchange with bordering countries' allowing for the policies of decentralization of information and resources that lay at the base of Trama's network to project into the region.[543] In addition, this event was important because it constituted the first attempt at the creation of a regional network of artists' initiatives or independent spaces in Latin America and the Caribbean. Rather than establishing a fixed and formal network, the organizing initiatives devised this meeting as a strategy that would open up possibilities for future encounters.[544] Following their footsteps, Hoffmann's House, one of the initiatives that participated in the '*Encuentro de espacios de arte independiente'* of 2003, organized a similar event two years later entitled '*Encuentro internacional de espacios de arte independientes'* (*EiEi,* or International Meeting of Independent Art Spaces). However, the *EiEi* event, which took place in Valparaíso between March and April 2005, had a more international character. As a peculiar fact, six out of the seven initiatives that had previously participated in the *Encuentro* of 2003 were also present on this occasion: La Rebeca (Colombia), Capacete (Brazil), Trama (Argentina), Duplus (Argentina), Galería Metropolitana (Chile), and Hoffmann's House (Chile). In addition to these, several other independent initiatives from Chile were also invited: La Nueva Gráfica Chilena, Galería Chilena, Radio Ideal, Ex-Gremio, and H10. Planet22 (Switzerland), Instant

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[541] A full transcription of the two keynote lectures is included in Trama's publication *The network as a Common Place*, 2003, pp. 134-150.

[542] For a detailed account of the contents of the event, see: Santiago García Navarro et al*., El pez, la bicicleta y la máquina de escribir: un libro sobre el encuentro de espacios y grupos de arte independientes de América Latina y el Caribe*, Fundación PROA, Buenos Aires, 2005.

[543] Trama, *The network as a Common Place*, p. 135.

[544] Ibid, p. 8.

Message e Salon (Switzerland), 24/7 (England), Coffee (Canada), and Freewaves (USA) completed the list of invitees. Taking the *encuentro* organized by Duplus and Trama in 2003 as an example: this event also hosted a series of public and private conferences and discussion sessions, as well as a documentation center and the installation of an exhibition of video and site specific artworks. It is interesting to note how the three main objectives of this event echo quite closely those established by Trama:

> 1) To work with art spaces who are projected from their own living area and coincide with us, to give priority to concepts of cooperation, companionship and neighborhood, with no more wishes than making more affable the environment, with identity and amusement; without leaving aside the critical energy and the deep analysis of some subjects.
>
> 2) To link all these experiences and be able to create nets of exchange that decentralize the way that countries operate in this part of the world, specially Chile, bypassing the institutions which until today, according to our point of view, have not achieved this.
>
> 3) To focus the management of these spaces (which have reached with character, convincement and little economical resources, to install locally and sometimes also internationally, its managements) without the intention of being paternalist, to be carriers of the energy that will incentivate the new generations of local artists, to have conscious of the possibility of outlining way-out roads, far away from the continuous and long wait, to receive the support of the entities of power.[545]

As their objectives indicate, cooperation as well as friendship are at the base of these projects which, through a variety of artistic initiatives, attempted at filling the voids in their respective contexts through self-organizing strategies and practices.

Many of the links established with artists, theorists, and alternative organizations within the region during the '*Encuentro de espacios de arte independiente*' of 2003 became instrumental one year later for Beltrame and de Caro during their trips across South America. The two field trips organized by Trama through Latin America in 2004 sought to investigate what other artists' initiatives or independent projects were in operation in the region, what kind of projects they

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[545] Elisa Cárdenas, 'Artistas independientes del mundo, ¡uníos!', *El Mercurio*, 11 February 2005.

were, and what their aims were. As Carlota Beltrame explains, Argentina has been historically alienated from its neighboring countries; its gaze always fixed towards Europe rather than towards its own continent.[546] Furthermore, although the internet nowadays allows for easy access in terms of communication, in the early 2000s it was very difficult to access information related to the art produced in other Latin American countries, as the region has been widely historically unarticulated. Thus, Trama thought of expanding its net of artists' initiatives in Latin America, so that artists' initiatives could reach across national boundaries and address shared problems:

> Our purpose was to get in touch with artists, institutions, intellectuals, and other cultural actors so as to exchange information in an effort to pave the way for the construction of a regional cooperative network among artists through both bilateral and multilateral projects.[547]

With this in mind, the first itinerary, led by Marina De Caro, included Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil, while the second, led by Beltrame, included visits to Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador [Fig. 3.12]. During these trips, both de Caro and Beltrame met up with other artists who were also involved in alternative projects or artists' initaitives (case studies) in their own countries. In this way, they were able to learn about these other independent art scenes in the region. In this regard, Beltrame commented:

> Not the hegemonic art scenes, in fact, but the scenes that evolve from a sustained effort to 'transform failure into energy', and which have resulted not only in the development of new forms of production and visibility, but also in new ways of joining forces by sharing social capital, funding strategies, programs, projects and activities, etc. Thus, nowadays, expectations exceed the interesting aesthetic derivations that arise from these ways of operating to involve ethics (and this is of vital importance to Trama).[548]

The itinerary of the trips was facilitated by artists, professionals from the art field, or intellectuals who acted as witnesses or 'accomplices', as Beltrame put it, providing a more comprehensive view and understanding of the art scenes in the different countries and their specific characteristics. These 'accomplices' were selected based,

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[546] C. Beltrame, personal interview with author.
[547] Trama, 'Cuestionario'.
[548] Carlota Beltrame, 'Informe de viaje a Latinoamérica', n/p. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

not only on how representative of the alternative scene they were, but on their generosity, passion, commitment, and bonhomie.[549]

Besides meeting artists and learning about the wide diversity of artist-led initiatives in the region, de Caro and Beltrame also presented Trama's project in some of the cities they visited, disseminating information and circulating symbolic capital within the network. Moreover, they visited exhibitions, museums, and other relevant art instituions. According to de Caro, as an outcome of these trips, 'we became aware that there were a lot of people in the region working in a similar manner and we began to outline this map of exchanges, the same map we aimed at outlining here [in Argentina], began to take shape in Latin America as well…'[550] These visits were also instrumental in strengthening the individual networks of both artists (de Caro and Beltrame) as these would eventually translate into opportunities for further collaborations and exchanges for the artists themselves. Hence, these exchanges and collaborative projects among neighboring countries sowed the seeds for the kind of exchanges that later would become more and more commonplace within the region, such as artistic residencies, conferences and other meetings of artists' initiatives.

The territorial dimension of Trama's network found its climatic moment of visibility in its final event, *Trama: El Encuentro, Jornadas Regionales de Intercambio en Gestión Artística y Redes de Cooperación Cultural en Latinoamérica* (Trama: the Gathering, Regional Meetings for Exchange in Cultural Management and Networks of Cooperation in Latin America) [Fig. 3.13]. Taking place in Buenos Aires from 29th October to 5th November 2005, this massive event marked the culmination of Trama's five-year project dedicated to the support and research of contemporary art production and artists' initiatives in Argentina. As they themselves contended, this conference:

> …synthesized the experience, information and knowledge capitalized by Trama between 2000 and 2005 through diverse activities directed towards the cooperation, development and training of artists' organizations in the areas of

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[549] Carlota Beltrame, 'Informe de viaje a Latinoamérica', n/p. [unpublished document, Trama archive]
[550] M. de Caro, personal interview with author.

cultural management, sustainability, legitimation of artistic thought and social responsibility.[551]

With *Trama: El Encuentro* most of the artists' initiatives and *artistas-gestores* supported by Trama got together for the first time in one event [Fig. 3.14]. More specifically, the event brought together 70 *artistas-gestores* and cultural professionals from different Argentine cities –many of whom had already participated in previous Trama events–, as well as 22 special guests from various Latin American countries. The aim of *Trama: El Encuentro* was to facilitate a platform for collective work that could stimulate cross-pollinations, exchange, and cooperation between cultural agents both locally, within the country, and regionally, within Latin America.

Including both theoretical and practical components, the event was structured around three main activities: presentations by artists' initiatives, training workshops, and a cycle of public debates. In the first two days of *Trama: El Encuentro*, twelve artists' initiatives from different provinces in Argentina, as well as other Latin American countries, gave visual presentations and discussed the specificities of their projects. Among the participating initiatives from Argentina were: El Levante (Rosario) [Fig. 3.15], La Baulera (Tucumán), and Belleza y Felicidad, Eloísa Cartonera, and Crear Vale la Pena (Buenos Aires). Initiatives from Latin American countries included: Fundación de Arte Contemporáneo (Montevideo, Uruguay); Arte BíoBío – Polo de desarrollo de arte contemporáneo (Concepción, Chile); CIEA (Belo Horizonte, Brazil); Proyecto Areal (Porto Alegre, Brazil); Realidad Visual (Lima, Perú); N.A.D.A., Conart and mARTadero (Cochabamba, Bolivia) [Fig. 3.16]; as well as El Observatorio, Esfera Pública and Espacio Vacío (Bogotá, Colombia) [Fig. 3.17]. The event aroused a lot of interest in the artists' communities in Latin America, especially in those countries they had visited during the field trips in 2004.[552]

Ten workshops related to different aspects of cultural management were held in order to analyze and find solutions to specific problems common to the artists' organizations by means of practical exercises. The topics discussed in the workshops were: project planning, management and evaluation, artists' publications, the role of

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[551] See, *Trama: El Encuentro* [brochure], p. 1. [author's translation]
[552] Trama, 'Final report to RAIN', n/p. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

artists' initiatives in art education [Fig. 3.18], intra- and inter-institutional relations [Fig. 3.19], art research and text production [Fig. 3.20], and the development of visual tools and networking. With these workshops, Trama's objective was to provide conceptual and working tools in these particular areas, to strengthen the organizational work structures of the participating initiatives, and to stimulate the articulation of common strategies for the long term sustainability of the initiatives.

The debates, which ran over six days, were intended to provide a theoretical frame of reference for all participants. Furthermore, they aimed at providing research concepts and perspectives that could deepen the analysis of the problems that had been posed during the workshops. The debates addressed the following topics: 'The management and practice of art', 'Art strategies for the construction of collaborative networks' [Fig. 3.21], 'Diagnosis of cultural policies in Argentina', 'Cultural policies in Latin America and possibilities for the construction of cooperative cultural networks' [Fig. 3.22], and 'The theory and practice of art: Theoretical construction of the phenomenon of artists' organizations' [Fig. 3.23].

These activities were designed meticulously, responding to the assessments made by the participants in previous activities, and the suggestions and basic needs expressed by them. Among these were: the continuation of training in the area of cultural management, deepening of the discussions related to specific problems of each production context and social circumstances, the generation of regional collaborative links, and the construction of independent thought and discourse with neighboring countries. Thus, the discussions that took place during the workshops were all linked to specific problems that artists' initiatives have to face in their practice, and the dynamic was mainly through sharing experience and analysing results.[553]

Alongside these activities, Trama facilitated a 'sala de encuentros', a space for encounters that found its own dynamics in the use participants made of it [Fig. 3.24]. Marina de Caro and Florencia Cacciabue, two of Trama's organizing members, were the coordinators of the room providing advice and information to encourage

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[553] Trama, 'Final report to RAIN', n/p. [unpublished document, Trama archive]

connections and possible ideas for future collaborations. This meeting point also served as an exchange and information center, where information and documentary material about every participant was made available to the public.

As I previously discussed in Chapter II, the party that was organized by some of the participating initiatives at the end of the event gave an indication of Trama's significant legacy within the artistic community; a legacy that translated into diverse synergies, affects, and exchanges [Fig. 3.25]. As Fontes remarked at the end of the debate sessions:

> As a result, we leave behind an artistic scene based on cooperation that was non-existent in Argentina in 2000. The human, symbolic and material resources that Trama gathered are available to an artistic community that now has the possibilities of exchange with various cities across the country, and with our dearest friends in Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Mali, South Africa, Cameroon, India, and Indonesia.[554]

The participation of approximately 100 artists' initiatives clearly demonstrated how the phenomenon of *autogestión* had become an established practice within the art field in Argentina. As a result of this event, links which had been previously created were strengthened, while new associations emerged, both nationally and regionally, linking artists' initiatives from very distant locations for the first time.[555] Furthermore, several alliances between artists and artists' initiatives started to appear independent of Trama. The event instigated the circulation of affects as many of the personal encounters evolved into friendships and future collaborations. For Marina de Caro, these informal and spontaneous encounters – and the subsequent collaborations that emerged – were one of the most significant outcomes of *Trama: El Encuentro*, 'a luxury that exceeds any theoretical framework.'[556] Indeed, Trama's network has continued to exist after it ended as a 'tacit network that is re-activated when concrete possibilities for cooperation arise.'[557]

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[554] Transcript of the conclusions of *Trama: El Encuentro*, 2005, n/p. [unpublished document, Trama archive]
[555] Trama, 'Final report to RAIN', n/p. [unpublished document, Trama archive]
[556] M. de Caro, personal interview with author.
[557] Duplus, *El pez, la bicicleta y la máquina de escribir*, p. 91.

It could be argued that *Trama: El Encuentro,* as well as the previous artists' encounters and meetings organized by Trama during its years of operation, (re)instituted this type of event as a legitimate format for intercultural as well as interdisciplinary debates and exchange within the Argentine art scene. There is, however, an important precedent worthy of mention, *Encuentro en la Cumbre*, which took place in the city of Córdoba in 1990. Gathering over 300 artists from all over the country, *Encuentro en la Cumbre* aimed to reflect on issues like the role and state of affairs of the art institutions, as well as the role and needs of the artistic community in general. The critical state of the art field and its institutions required collective action and solidarity within artistic community. As the organizers proclaimed:

> We wish to re-establish communication between ourselves and audiences, to become a part of the social environment, to let people know about our needs and opinions. We wish ENCUENTRO EN LA CUMBRE to be acknowledged as a starting point for the generation of projects and actions aimed at divulging national art. We, as participants, commit ourselves to provide the kind of organization that will further the right kind of management for such goals to be achieved.

> The net and network. Unlike a 'service' or an 'organization', the net is a 'tool'. In the first two cases, the user plays a passive role. This tool named net is the thread that weaves bonds among human beings, gaining them access to a whole series of information items that might be called 'instruments for growth'.[558]

Similar to Trama, the artists involved in the *Encuentro en la Cumbre* were responding to the individualism and isolation of artists and aimed at strengthening the social ties through active communication, increased social insertion, setting the basis for a more critical art production, and the development of a network of artists and art professionals. Consequently, this constitutes an important attempt by artists to organize into a national network.

Interestingly, many of the ideas sketched out by this group of artists in the 1990s were carried out later by different *gestores culturales* (cultural managers), or organizations, such as Fundación Antorchas. As Américo Castilla acknowledged, the

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[558] M. J. Herrera, 'Management and discourse', p. 178.

idea of the network that was 'in the air' at the time also inspired him in the creation of the *clínicas*.[559] Thus, to an extent, as artist from Salta and Trama participant Andrea Elías suggested, Trama itself materialized some of the objectives these artists had identified a decade before, especially regarding the network. Although there was a second iteration of this meeting, entitled *Encuentro Nacional de Artistas Plásticos*, which took place in the city of San Juan in 1992, these type of *encuentros* bringing together artists to reflect and discuss were not commonplace at the time. The series of meetings and *encuentros* organized by Trama, renewed these kind of practice, which have continued to be organized in a more systematic way within the art world. This is attested, for instance, by *encuentros* such as 'Artistas Etc. Muestra y Encuentro de artistas gestores', organized by Germina Campos: espacio nómade de gestión cultural in Santa Fe, Argentina, in August 2007; Encuentro de gestiones autónomas de artes visuales contemporáneas, organized in Córdoba in 2011; and the II Encuentro Nacional de artistas visuales y curadores con proyectos de gestión, organized in San Juan in 2012.[560] If one of the aims of Trama's network was that, through it, the local initiatives could widen, diversify, and give continuity to the *trama* it had created, these subsequent *encuentros* – all of which have taken in provinces other than Buenos Aires – confirm how artists' initiatives all over Argentina continued to emerge, benefiting and expanding the network initiated by Trama, and deepening the discussions between visual artists and the broader system of the art institution.

Following Lefebvre, beyond its strategic purposes, Trama's network was essentially a social space which potentiality was activated through collective practice and social interchange. By blurring physical and geographical frontiers, and through unexpected alliances and the sharing of passions and energies, the network produced a common, shared space. 'The network as a common place', as the title of their third publication suggests, constituted not only a public space, but a common space, a vacant territory to inhabit, a common space in which to coincide.

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[559] Américo Castilla, personal interview with author.
[560] Interestingly, many of the artists and artists' initiatives that participated in these events had participated in previous activities of Trama, including: Jorge Gutiérrez, Carlota Beltrame, Aldo Ternavasio, Natalia Lipovetsky, Carina Cagnolo, Andrea Elías, Pablo Guiot, Geli González, Laura Valdivieso, Roly Arias, Sandro Pereira, among others.

CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to explore the unprecedented phenomenon of *autogestión* which gained visibility and became widespread in the field of the visual arts in Argentina in the period post-2001. Premised on the notion that the economic, political, and social crisis of December 2001 also encompassed significant transformations in the cultural sphere, I have argued in this thesis that artists' initiatives based on *autogestión* played a key role in the reconfigurations that took place in the contemporary art scene during this period.

This study revisited and analyzed the phenomenon of *autogestión* in the visual arts by focusing on the specific case of Trama, an artist initiative active between 2000 and 2005 that focused on cooperation, confrontation, and artistic exchange. Most particularly, it argued for the legitimation of artists' initiatives as an innovative element that arose in the Argentine artistic landscape in the post-crisis period, as artists sought to fill the voids left by the withdrawal and collapse of the State and its institutions. In so doing, this study sought to qualify artistic *autogestión* from local art historical accounts which, all too often, tend to focus on art activism or artist's collectives in a more general sense.

The dissertation is grounded in Henri Lefebvre's multifaceted conception of *autogestión* since one of its main objectives was to recontextualize and reinvest the term with some of its political connotations (i.e. direct action, autonomy, self-determination, democracy). Relying on Lefebvre's theoretical framework as an heuristic tool, I have sought, with this study, to analyze the ways in which Trama operated as a political strategy by, on the one hand, responding to specific ethical concerns and the need for more democratic and cooperative configurations within the art field. On the other, it contributed in generating a set of conditions within its context which I have identified and analyzed here with regard to the social, the subjective, and the spatial. In focusing on these three parallel but inter-related registers, this study explored how the conditions generated by Trama were closely enmeshed within broader social processes and experiences; namely, those led by the autonomous social movements which, engaging in a variety of self-organizing

strategies and endeavours, expressed a strong desire for self-determination, autonomy, solidarity, and political engagement.

Guided by an interdisciplinary approach and methodology, this thesis challenged traditional object- or authored-centered art historical accounts, as well those that tend to limit the political potential of artistic practice to the textual references, or the social or political claims of artworks. Lastly, this dissertation argues for the need for more comprehensive scholarly research and analysis of *autogestión* in contemporary art, a topic that has been overlooked or previously unconsidered in depth, even though the Argentine context has provided fertile grounds throughout history for the emergence of many different types of collective artistic manifestations and self-organizing initiatives.

I

The specific economic and socio-political circumstances experienced in Argentina, especially in the period post-2001, turned the country into a 'global emblem of the tendencies of *autogestión* and politico-artistic activism.'[561] As discussed in Chapter I, this interest in *autogestión* as practice and discourse can be partly explained by the withdrawal of the State in cultural matters, as well as the situation of despair and urgency that affected all aspects of social life. This sense of urgency, coupled with society's low confidence in its institutions, led artists to question their practice and to develop different strategies to intervene in the socio-political context, as well as new modes of production and organization. In the case of Trama, the initiative to self-organize collectively and to create a network based on cooperation responded to the need of transforming the context of the art field at the time, dominated by an extreme individualism, alienation, and self-refrentiality. The social and political upheaval, and the events that precipitated with the implosion of the crisis, translated into a greater politicization within Trama, while confirming the relevance of a project based on cooperation and collective action.

The extent to which the phenomenon of *autogestión* propagated in the realm of the visual arts throughout the country was evinced in *Trama: El Encuentro*, the

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[561] S. Krochmalny, 'Arte en relación', para. 7.

program's final event celebrated in 2005. As suggested in the last section of Chapter III, what started in 2000 as a an inchoate network of contemporary artists, by 2005, had consolidated into a network of artists, artists' initiatives, and organizations all over Argentina, with possibilities of exchange with like-minded initiatives and institutions in Latin America and the global South. Most importantly, perhaps, *Trama: El Encuentro* made manifest Trama's most significant contributions to the art field. Among these, it is noteworthy how Trama consolidated an arts network based on an ethics of cooperation. As discussed in Chapter II, *autogestión* in Trama was driven by ethical values and concerns which were articulated and enacted in the different events, encounters, and activities organized. In this case, the ethical is understood as an extension, as an inherent aspect of the aesthetic; not dissociated from it. The strong ethical imperative underlying the project (implicit in its objectives) constituted, at the same time, the foundation of the political in Trama. As philosopher, Simon Critchley, might put it 'if ethics without politics is empty, then politics without ethics is blind.'[562] Thus, principles like cooperation, social responsibility, and democracy, strongly encouraged and promoted in Trama, were at the base of its ethico-political stance.

The practice of *autogestión*, as Lefebvre argued, enables a change in social relations allowing for the strengthening of associative ties. In this respect, as argued in the first section of Chapter III, Trama advanced a 'new societal ethics' within the art field by actively encouraging and promoting horizontal relationships and generating a public space of visibility and dialogue where new modes of cooperation and unexpected alliances could emerge. At the broader social level, Trama related to the social movements in their efforts at recomposing the social bonds within Argentine society and by redefining the question of citizenship through a process of political engagement and the creation of new modes of sociability.

The construction of a proper context for production in Trama implied a process of self-affirmation and self-validation that was articulated through the legitimation of artistic knowledge and discourse. As explained in the second section of Chapter III, Trama promoted a renewed value of artistic subjectivity by endorsing the figure of

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[562] Simon Critchley, *Ethics, Politics, Subjectivity: Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought*, Verso Books, London/New York, 1999, p. 283.

the artist as a thinking subject, rather than an object or a producer of commodifiable artworks. Furthermore, Trama created an alternative parallel mechanism of legitimation based on cooperation and peer-to-peer validation and recognition, calling into question, as a result, the dominant legitimating system. This process gave rise to, and eventually naturalized, the figure of a new cultural producer – the *artista-gestor* – in the contemporary art scene in Argentina; that is, the figure of the artist who is capable of managing all aspects of his/her practice, as well as assuming a position with regards to the particular context and conditions in which the practice takes place. At the subjective level, this process of revalorization of artistic subjectivity in Trama finds echo in the emergence of new subjectivities, the new social actors who, in a context of precariousness and urgency during the period post-2001, recognized themselves as protagonists of their own realities and material circumstances.

Comparable to the autonomous social movements, the project of Trama acquired a territorial dimension through the creation of a (public) space – a 'differential space' where collective thought and action converged – and through the consolidation of a national and international network of artists' initiatives. In the case of Trama, as for many other initiatives of the time, the absence of spaces which could contain the production and the interests of artists at the time resulted in the creation of new (public) spaces devoted to art. Thus, as contended in the last section of Chapter III, one of Trama's main contributions was its capacity to conglomerate and render visible a myriad of self-organized initiatives operating at the margins, which had not yet been acknowledged or legitimated in their local contexts, and that, in spite of their multiplicity, were atomized. By providing economic support, training, and promoting their work, Trama contributed to legitimating these independent endeavors alongside local and international organizations. Moreover, Trama's network and its activities on cultural management provided artists with an incentive to create their own projects contributing, in this way, to the development of contemporary art scenes in different contexts outside the hegemonic center, which had traditionally been concentrated in Buenos Aires. Consequently, this network of heterogeneous artistic initiatives operating nationwide contributed to the reconfiguration of a new cultural map in Argentina.

As contended in this thesis, Trama helped to validate or legitimize artists' initiatives in Argentina as an expanded field of artists practice. In this sense, the practice of *autogestión* implies an expansion of artistic practice and the traditional roles of the artist in order to assume the responsibility of managing the various aspects related to the distribution and reception of art. Moreover, it implies a self-reflexive attitude, the revision of the conditions of production of knowledge, as well as the socialization of resources and symbolic capital produced in the artistic community. In this way, Trama created an awareness of the practice of *autogestión* within the art community and the capacity of artists to engage in self-organized cultural projects so as to influence and advance the development of contemporary art scenes in their respective contexts.

Trama contributed to reconfigurations within the field by encouraging and promoting new social values, new social relations, new scenes of artistic production, intergenerational and intercultural exchanges, and interdisciplinary approaches; in sum, new ways of thinking and doing. However, the changes and transformations in the different spheres of the field at this time were not only due to Trama's efforts. In fact, Trama and the way the project developed throughout its years of operation can be understood as contingent to the wider socio-cultural reconfigurations taking place in Argentina at this historical conjuncture. In this sense, Trama aligned new modes of production, a renewed sense of politicization of artistic practice, and new programs for artistic formation (i.e. workshops by Fundación Antorchas, Taller de Barracas, etc.) with a series of practices, thereby enabling and advancing processes that were already taking place. Even so, while the changes in the field cannot be solely attributed to Trama, I contend that Trama played an undeniable role in strengthening and legitimating artistic *autogestión* within the art field.

II

Underlying this study is the notion that certain phenomena that arise within the aesthetic realm cannot be solely understood through an art historical approach. Grounding my research and analysis in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework – in consonance with Trama's objectives of broadening the boundaries of artistic inquiry beyond the confines of the art field itself –, this study reveals a much richer picture

than that which can be accounted for through a merely art historical analysis. Thus, this study represents a contribution to knowledge in so far as it highlights aspects of artistic practice that have been largely overlooked in scholarly research. By shedding light on how micro artistic experiences are interwoven with macro historical, social, and political circumstances, this thesis contributes to the historicization of new modes of organization within the art field in this time period, while expanding on the relatively small body of knowledge regarding artists' initiatives in Argentina.

In this regard, Lefebvre's own multifaceted approach to *autogestión* was instrumental in illuminating different aspects of artistic practice that tend to go unnoticed or are not taken into consideration in most traditional art historical accounts. His broad understanding of this practice, which still offers significant insight for contemporary political critique and modes of resistance in the present, provided relevant points of reference that served to anchor and guide my research and analysis on this phenomenon in the particular context of Argentina. In particular, it enabled me to identify points of convergence between the case study and the autonomous social movements that engaged in heterogeneous experiences of *autogestión* during this period. It allowed me to devise a structure that could facilitate an analysis of the phenomenon of *autogestión* and its multiple manifestations in a broader perspective. By analyzing social and immaterial aspects of contemporary artistic practice in relation to *autogestión*, this thesis can also be considered as a contribution to recent studies that seek to offer critical views or interpretations from a myriad of lenses on the nature and complexity of important social and political aspects and dynamics that manifested in the historical context marked by the 2001-crisis in Argentina.

Likewise, this study contributes to recent revisions on Lefebvre's theoretical ideas on *autogestión*, as it illuminates certain aspects of this concept – especially those related to the social and the subjective – which are not considered in depth or commonly addressed by scholars, but are rather worked through in a broader set of questions around Lefebvre's notion of space, the urban, or the right to the city.

As an emerging field of research, *autogestión*, or self-organization in contemporary art, provides fertile ground for further investigation. Possible areas of exploration within the Argentine context might be artists' initiatives as a form of new internationalism and the role that artistic *autogestión*, or cultural management have played in recent years in relation to the expansion of the institutional art system.

Since its inception, Trama's objectives were determined by both the local and the international context. In this thesis, the analysis of Trama and the phenomenon of *autogestión* are framed within the specific spatio-temporal conditions in which they emerged. As a consequence, there are a number of issues and aspects that exceeded the scope of this study. While in this thesis I discussed the significant role Trama played in opening up the art scene to a broader global art context by articulating its network at a regional level (within Latin America), a more rigorous analysis of Trama's interactions with other initiatives at a broader international level would provide invaluable insight in order to understand Trama in a broader cultural spectrum. As the phenomenon of artist-led initiatives emerged against the backdrop of globalization, an interesting future research project might consider how initiatives like Trama were linked to global shifts in the art world at the turn of the twenty-first century, and how local artistic practices become increasingly interlinked with trends and practices in the global art circuit. This relationship between the local and the global in relation to contemporary developments in the field of the visual arts in Argentina could be proposed and analyzed from the perspective of a new 'internationalism'.

There are several traditions of '*internacionalismo*' in Argentina. The term has been used to describe various strands of experimental art in Argentina and Latin America. For instance, the internationalist tradition explored by Ana Longoni in which a number of Argentine artists, inspired by the dependency theory, took part in the efforts to create a regional movement of solidarity between Latin American

countries.[563] Exemplified, for instance, by events such as the *Encuentros Latinoamericanos* in Santiago (Chile) and the *Encuentro de Artistas Latinoamericanos* organized in La Habana (Cuba) in the early 1970s, this tradition – which, according to Longoni sought to revisit the old internationalist ideals of the Left – was eventually hindered by the emergence of military dictatorships in the region. The term also makes reference to the tradition expounded by Andrea Giunta in her book *Vanguardia, internacionalismo y política* that has to do with the different strategies devised by artists and institutions – such as Instituto Torcuato di Tella – during the 1960s in order to insert Argentine art, in particular modern artistic practices, into the international art scene. Another tradition would be that of the alternative networks of *mail art* that emerged and expanded internationally through the postal system since the 1960s. Closely linked to the Fluxus movement, these networks were created, not only as alternative modes of circulation and exchange of experimental art and ideas, but as a channel for political denunciation in repressive contexts.[564] Hence, considering the previous traditions of internationalist strategies in the Argentine art history, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, it would seem relevant to examine the strategies created or pushed forward by *artistas-gestores* in the last fifteen years in order to insert determined local artistic manifestations or practices in the international art scene. Revisiting archival material pertaining to Trama's participation in the RAIN network, as well as its international activity, would be important in this respect.

Unsurprisingly, the legitimacy that artists' initiatives based on *autogestión* gained in the period post-2001 led to the naturalization and, to a certain extent, the institutionalization of these practices and the figure of the *artista-gestor* in the second half of the 2000s. This is attested, for instance, by ArteBA's (Buenos Aires' art fair) inclusion of artists' initiatives and alternative spaces within the section of the fair entitled 'Barrio Joven'; events like 'Periférica', an art fair of independent spaces celebrated in 2006; as well as the creation of grants in support of collectives projects,

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[563] Deriving from Marxist ideology during the 1960s, dependency theory is based on the notion that resources flow from a 'periphery' of poor and underdeveloped states to a 'core' of wealthy states, enriching the latter at the expense of the former.

[564] *Perder la forma humana*, p. 155.

or self-organized cultural initiatives with a strong influence in their social context awarded by Fondo Nacional de las Artes (FNA). The latter, as well as programs like 'Pertenencia' and 'Interfaces' (created in partnership with Secretaría de Cultura de la Nación), which have sought to encourage and promote emergent artistic production and artistic exchanges in all regions of Argentina, are the result of recent revisions to national cultural policies created precisely after discussions within the cultural sector regarding how the State could offer support to the wide array of cultural initiatives that emerged in the period post-2001. Artists' initiatives undoubtedly contributed to these changes by organizing themselves collectively, and engaging in critical reflection and debates about their practice.

In the particular case of Trama, it could be said that the program played a key role in positioning the concerns and needs of artists' initiatives in the institutional agenda. For instance, the topic of cultural policy was widely discussed in Trama. Most particularly, in *Trama: El Encuentro*, two panels were dedicated to this subject: 'Diagnóstico de políticas culturales en la Argentina' ('Disgnostic of cultural policies in Argentina') and 'Políticas culturales en Latinoamérica y posibilidades de construcción de redes culturales de cooperación' ('Cultural policies in Latin America and the creation of cultural networks of cooperation'). In this regard, it could be said that Trama contributed to the process of the normalization of artists' initiatives and its strategies, as they became a legitimated point of reference for many artists, spaces, projects, and networks that emerged thereafter. Many of these replicated, in their own way, the practice of *autogestión* after their participation in Trama; particularly if we consider that many artists that participated in Trama, or that were in some way related to the project, eventually occupied official positions in institutions at state or municipal level (e.g. Tulio de Sagastizábal, Andrea Elías). Potential future research, then, will focus on revising the role of the *artista-gestor* in a growing process of institutionalization of art in Buenos Aires and the provinces in the last fifteen years. It could be argued that, by constituting themselves as actors in their respective art scenes (along with museums and art schools), artists' initiatives also contributed to the expansion of the institutional art system. Thus, it would be worth analysing how the proliferation of artists' initiatives – many of which operated outside the

institutional art system –, ultimately, also contributed to an increased institutionalization of cultural management, or the *autogestión* of artistic practice.

While the project of Trama and its activities departed from a reflection based on the needs of the art field and particular needs of the artists in a context of precariousness and political radicalization, nowadays it is no longer possible to think of the politicization of art as something that takes place exclusively outside the framework of the institution, as the case of Artistas Organizados clearly shows. If, in 2001, artists needed to create their own spaces outside the official circuits of the art system in order to engage in discussions and debates with peers about their practice, a decade later, in 2012, artists would express their ideas and exchange points of views from within the confines of the institution with which they are trying to negotiate their demands. Thus, an investigation of artists' initiatives and art practice in the present would need to take as a point of departure this increasing symbiotic relationship between artists and the institutions; that is, the different ways contemporary visual artists inhabit the institutional art world.

IV

The network of artists' initiatives created by Trama made tangible artists' capacity for self-organizing, and managing all aspects of their practice and production, distribution, and reception based on their own necessities. If, traditionally, artists tended to rely on the institution as the sole mechanism of validation and legitimation of their work, the network of cooperation created by Trama demonstrated that 'it is feasible to imagine and create a space of one's own';[565] in Lefebvre's terms, a differentiated space, a space for de-alienation. Beyond the production of artworks, Trama had to do with processes, with how artistic practice can produce a space for dialogue, self-reflection and cooperation, and generate collective action and thinking. Shifting the focus from the art object to art as social practice enabled an understanding that the phenomenon of *autogestión* has to do with a radical transformation in artist's consciousness regarding their own practice and the

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[565] Trama, *The Network as a common place*, p. 98.

strategies, or modes of organization, they must adopt in order to self-valorize their own work.

Despite the fact that, by the mid-2000s, the practice of *autogestión* had naturalized and lost its political effervescence, the lessons learned and the experience imparted by initiatives like Trama remained as a tool, as a possible strategy, or, as the case of Artistas Organizados clearly attested, as an attitude that is latent within the art community and might re-emerge whenever it becomes necessary. Above all else, the experience of Trama bequeathed *autogestión* as a legitimate possibility within the art field. It established, as Américo Castilla acknowledged, a 'demonstrative gesture' of the empowerment of the artist.[566] Echoing Lefebvre, it bequeathed the lesson of 'the possible'.

Reading Trama through the lens of *autogestión* allows us to understand a different way of articulating artistic and political praxis; that is, by locating the political in what cannot be visibly reproduced – the different kinds of knowledge, practices and the possibilities opened up collectively by setting into motion a multiplicity of energies, affects, resonances, and potentialities. This thesis is an attempt to revalue the processes that shape the political dimension of artistic practice which are not visibly representable.

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[566] A. Castilla, personal interview with author.

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Trama archive / Claudia Fontes, Brighton, United Kingdom.

APPENDICES

Appendix A   List of Interviews

Irene Banchero, personal interview, 4 December 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Carlota Beltrame, personal interview, 14 November 2012, Tucumán, Argentina.

Lorena Cardona, personal interview, 9 November 2012, Rosario, Argentina.

Graciela Carnevale, personal interview, 9 November 2012, Rosario, Argentina.

Marina de Caro, personal interview, 28 November 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Valeria Conte Mac Donell, virtual conversation, 17 November 2014.

Tulio de Sagastizabal, personal interview, 4 December 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Andrea Elías, personal interview, 19 November, Salta, Argentina.

Christian Ferrer, personal interview, 3 December 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Claudia Fontes, personal interview, 21 August 2012, Brighton, United Kingdom.

--------, personal interview, 10 October 2012, Brighton, United Kingdom.

--------, skype conversation, 2 August 2013.

--------, skype conversation, 14 May 2014.

Pablo Guiot, personal interview, 17 November 2012, Tucumán, Argentina.

Jorge Gutiérrez, personal interview, 16 November 2012, Tucumán, Argentina.

María José Herrero, personal interview, 10 December 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Magdalena Jitrik, personal interview, 27 November 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Andrés Labaké, personal interview, 8 December 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Mauro Machado, personal interview, 7 November 2012, Rosario, Argentina.

Gabriela Massuh, personal interview, 30 November 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

María Eugenia Pérez, personal interview, 19 November 2012, Salta, Argentina.

Sergio Pereira, personal interview, 15 November 2012, Tucumán, Argentina.

Roxana Ramos, personal interview, 18 November 2012, Salta, Argentina.

Diego Sztulwark, personal interview, 5 December 2012, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Aldo Ternavasio, personal interview, 16 November 2012, Tucumán, Argentina.

Note: All interviews have been conducted by the author. All references to interview material has been translated by the author, unless otherwise stated.

Appendix B   Trama: Chronology of Activities

I.   Artistic practice: Training and exchange

2000
Meeting for the Analysis of Artworks, Rosario.
Meeting for the Analysis of Artworks, Buenos Aires.
Meeting for the Confrontation of Systems of Construction of Artworks, Buenos Aires.

2001
Research workshop 'Artistic practice and its Social Projection', Buenos Aires.
Series of debates 'Networks, Contexts, Territories', Buenos Aires.

2002
Research workshop 'Artistic Production and Contexts of Creation', Tucumán.

2003
Workshop on Analysis and Development of Art Projects, Mar del Plata (in collaboration with Fondo Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo from Mar del Plata).

II.   South-South Interchanges

RAIN Meetings: 2000 / 2002 / 2005
2000: Participation of Trama (Claudia Fontes and Leonel Luna) at the opening debates for RAIN, Haarlem, The Netherlands.
Participation of Trama (Claudia Fontes) at the evaluation debate of RAIN, Amsterdam.

2001: Participation of Trama (Claudia Fontes) at the debates 'Visibility and Invisibility in Contemporary Art', organized by CEIA, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

2002: Debate organized by RAIN in Jakarta, Indonesia. Participants: Tulio de Sagastizábal and Pablo Ziccarello.

Participation of Adriana Lestido (invited through Trama) at 'Violence – Silence', organized by Pulse, Durban, South Africa.

2005: Participation of Trama (represented by Claudia Fontes and Mauro Machado) at RAIN's meeting in Mexico DF, Mexico.

2002 / 2004 / 2005
'Context': Traveling project of cooperation and exchange among artists in the framework of RAIN.

2002: 'Point of view'. Collaboration project between Germaine Kruip, Jorge Gutiérrez and Jorge Lovisolo in San Miguel de Tucumán in the first stage of the 'Context' project. Coordinated by Carlota Beltrame.

2004: Participation of artist Jorge Gutiérrez in the second stage of the 'Context' project. Collaboration with Mexican artist Miguel Rodríguez Sepúlveda. Co-organized by Trama and El despacho, Mexico DF.

2005: Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

2003
Meeting of independent contemporary art organisations in Latin America and Caribbean. An activity co-organized by Duplus and Trama.

2003
Mariela Scafati partcipated in representation of Trama at the 'Workshop on Photography and Bogolan Painting', organized by Centre Soleil, Bamako, Mali.

2003–2004
Trama collaborated in 'Yo escribo esta pieza. Arte y cultura pop', a project by el despacho (Mexico), within the framework of RAIN.

Participation of anthropologist Hugo Viggiano on behalf of Trama in 'I write this song: Art and Pop Culture'. A project by el despacho (Mexico), in collaboration with Pulse, Trama, RuangRupa, CalArts, The Art Bakery, Rijksakademie, and Phil Beaumont.

2004
Trama's collaboration in 'Cabin baggage', a project by Open Circle for the World Social Forum, Mumbai, India. Invited artist Leo Rocco, member of Taller Popular de Serigrafía (The Popular Serigraphy Workshop), took part in representation of Trama.

Research trips on independent management and artists' initiatives in South America
- Pacific: Chile, Perú, Bolivia, Ecuador. Artist representing Trama: Carlota Beltrame, San Miguel de Tucumán (September).
- Atlantic: Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. Artist representing Trama: Marina De Caro, Buenos Aires (July/October).

2005
Trama's participation in the KO 1ST DURBAN VIDEO FESTIVAL, organized by Pulse in Durban, South Africa.

III.   Artists' Management: Training, Exchange and Cooperation

2002
'Research Workshop in Cultural Management for Artists I', Luján, Buenos Aires Province.

Presentation of Trama and of the project 'Context', Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten de Amsterdam, Netherlands. Presented by Claudia Fontes.

2003
'Research Workshop on Cultural Management for Artists II', Buenos Aires.

2004
'Regional Meetings for the Analysis of Cultural Management for Emerging Artists' Initiatives', March 2004, Bahía Blanca, Salta, Córdoba and Posadas. Coordinators /tutors: Carina Cagnolo, Daniel Besoytaorube, Gustavo López and Jorge Gutiérrez.

Participation of Trama (Claudia Fontes) at *InFest*, organized by PAARC (Pacific Association of Artist-Run Centres) in Vancouver, Canada.

Presentation of RAIN and Trama by Claudia Fontes at De Vloed (The flood), by invitation from Kabk, Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten, La Haya, Netherlands.

Participation of Trama (Claudia Fontes) in *The South Project*, Sidney Myer Asia Centre, University of Melbourne, Australia.

2005
Participation of Trama (Florencia Cacciabue and Irene Banchero) at *EIEI, Encuentro Internacional de Espacios Independientes* (International Meeting of Independent Spaces), organized by Hoffmann's House, 20–31 March, Valparaíso, Chile.

Trama El Encuentro / Trama: the Gathering, Regional Meetings for Exchange in Cultural Management and Networks of Cooperation in Latin America, Buenos Aires, 29 October – 5 November.

Participation of Trama (Marina De Caro) at the *15th VideoBrasil International Electronic Art Festival*.

2006
Participation of Trama (Irene Banchero and Mauro Machado) in *The South Project*, Santiago, Chile.
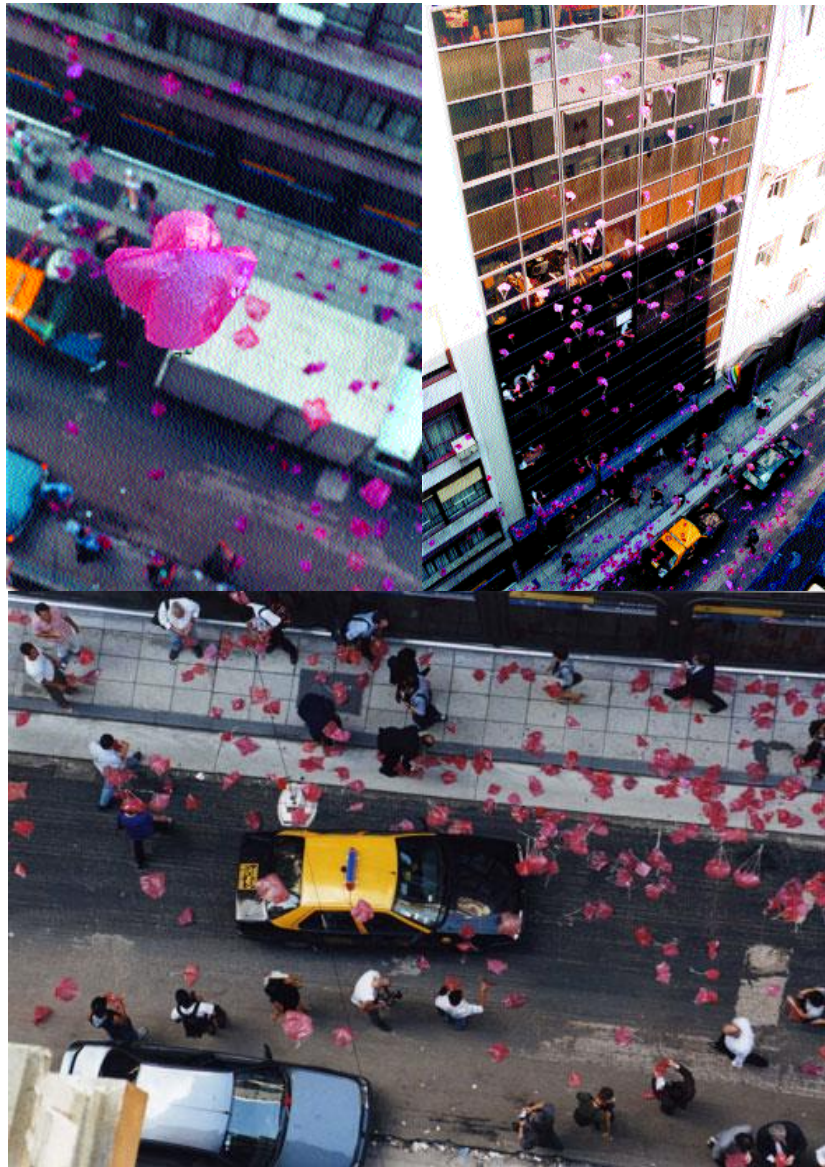
Chapter I

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Fig. 1.3 Police repression during the 19th & 20th December 2001, Buenos Aires, Argentina. [Source: http://argentina.indymedia.org/news/2012/12/827716.php]

Fig. 1.4 Riots during the 19th & 20th December 2001, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
[Source: http://www.fotolog.com/elsolfanzine/54320750/#profile_start]

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[Source: http://www.argentinaindependent.com]

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[Source: http://comunicacionpopular.com.ar/desde-%E2%80%9Cel-corralito%E2%80%9D-
205-empresas-pasaron-a-ser-gestionadas-por-sus-trabajadores/]

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[Source: http://tidalmag.org/blog/everyday-revolutions/everyday-revolutions/]

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[Source: http://sculpture-center.org/exhibitionsExhibition.htm?id=111090]

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[Source: http://www.eloisacartonera.com.ar/ENGversion.html]

Fig. 1.15 El Levante, Rosario, Argentina.
[Source: http://www.arte-sur.org/residencies/el-levante/]

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[Source: http://www.revistaplot.com/es/muestra-de-marcelo-pombo-en-la-fundacion-fortabat/]

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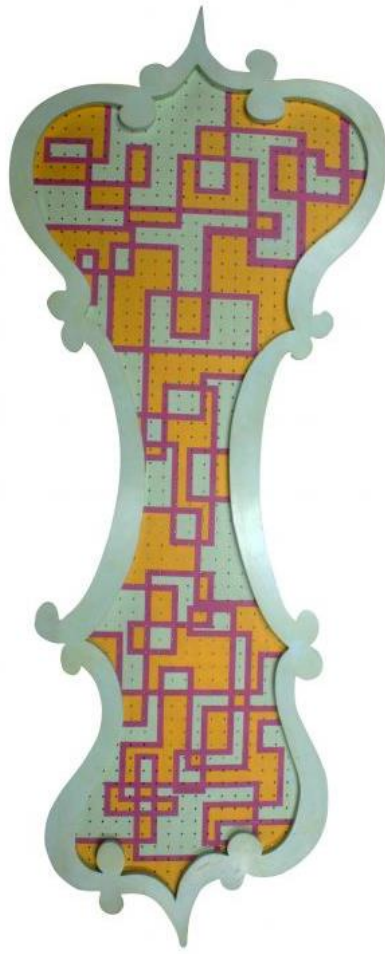
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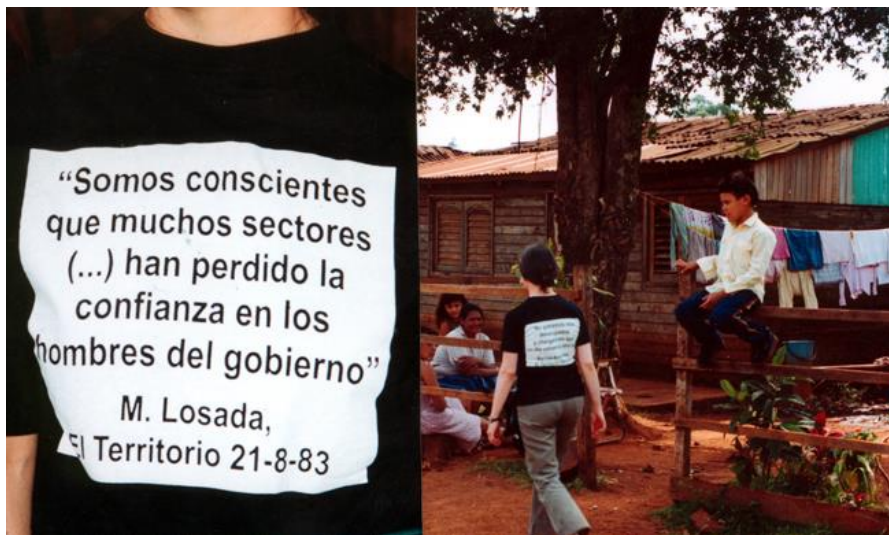
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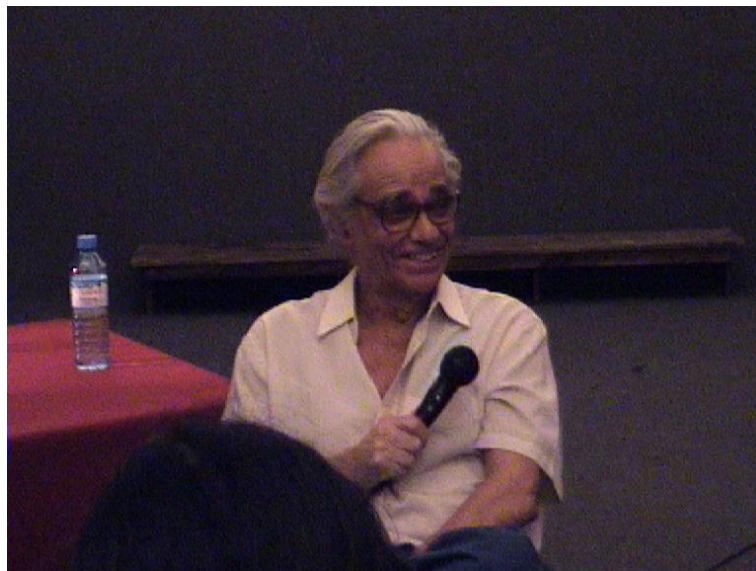

Fig. 2.11a León Ferrari during the public debates at the 'Meeting for Confrontation of Artworks', 2000, Buenos Aires. (Photo: Courtesy of Trama archive)
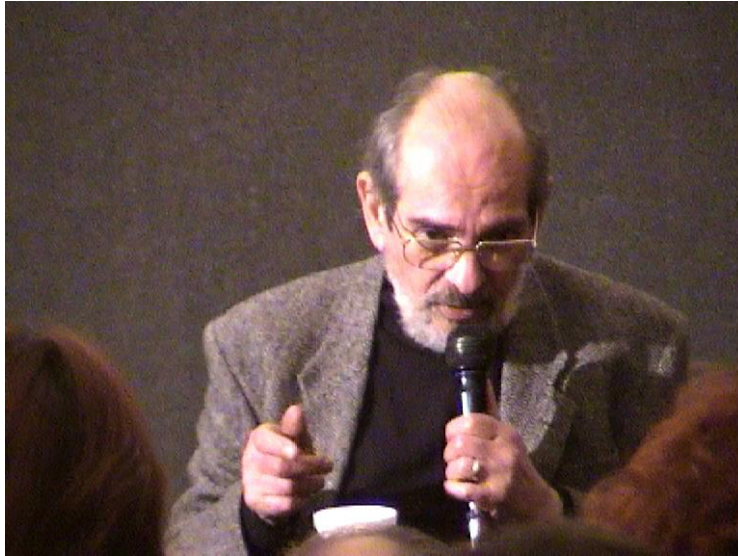
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[Source: http://www.artishock.cl/2013/11/17/insurgencias-urbanas-estrategias-artisticas-subversivas-y-espacio-publico-en-el-contexto-sudamericano/]

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Fig. 3.2 Grupo Escombros, *Sutura*, installation, 30m of soil and rope, 1989,
La Plata, Argentina.
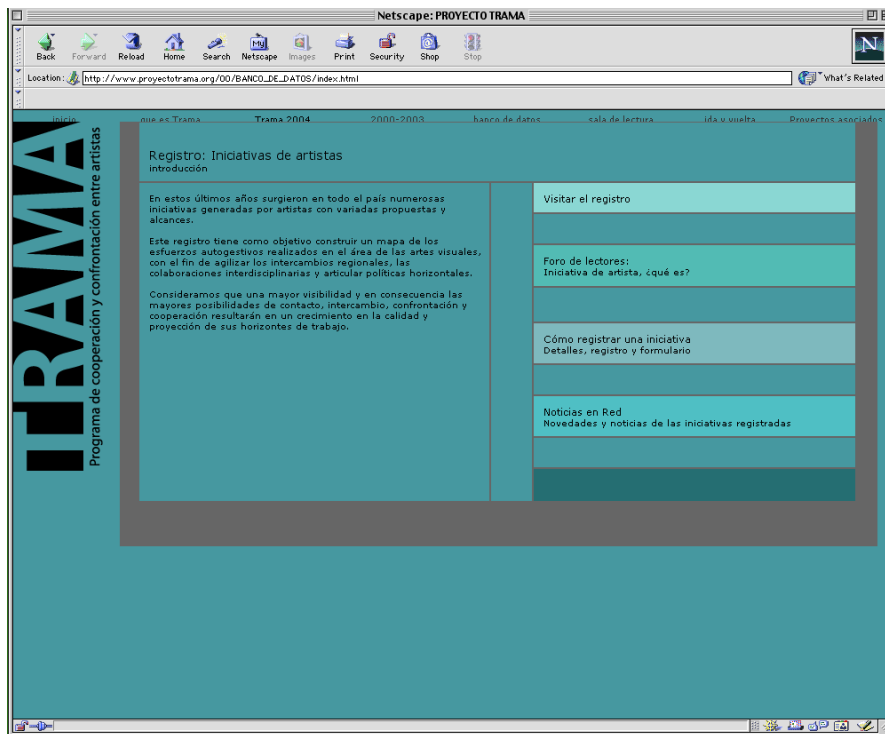[Source: http://grupoescombros.com.ar/imgs/obras/convocatorias/ciudad/ciudad.html]

Fig. 3.3 Registro de iniciativas de artistas (Register of artists' initiatives), Trama website [www.proyectotrama.org; currently inactive]. (Photo: Courtesy of Trama archive)
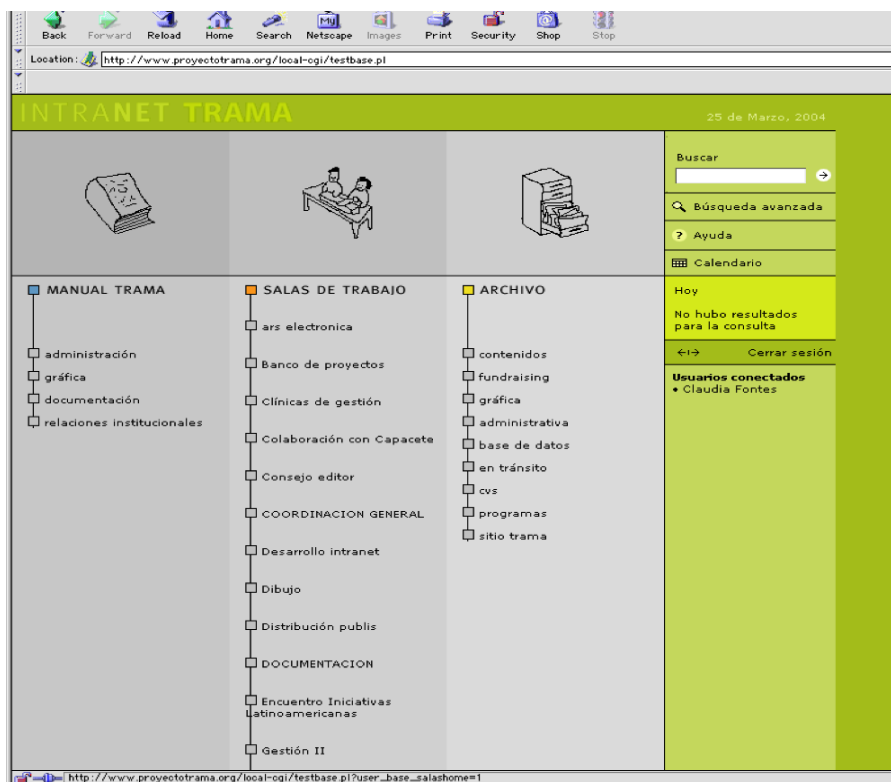

Fig. 3.4 Intranet, Trama website [www.proyectotrama.org; currently inactive]. (Photo: Courtesy of Trama archive)
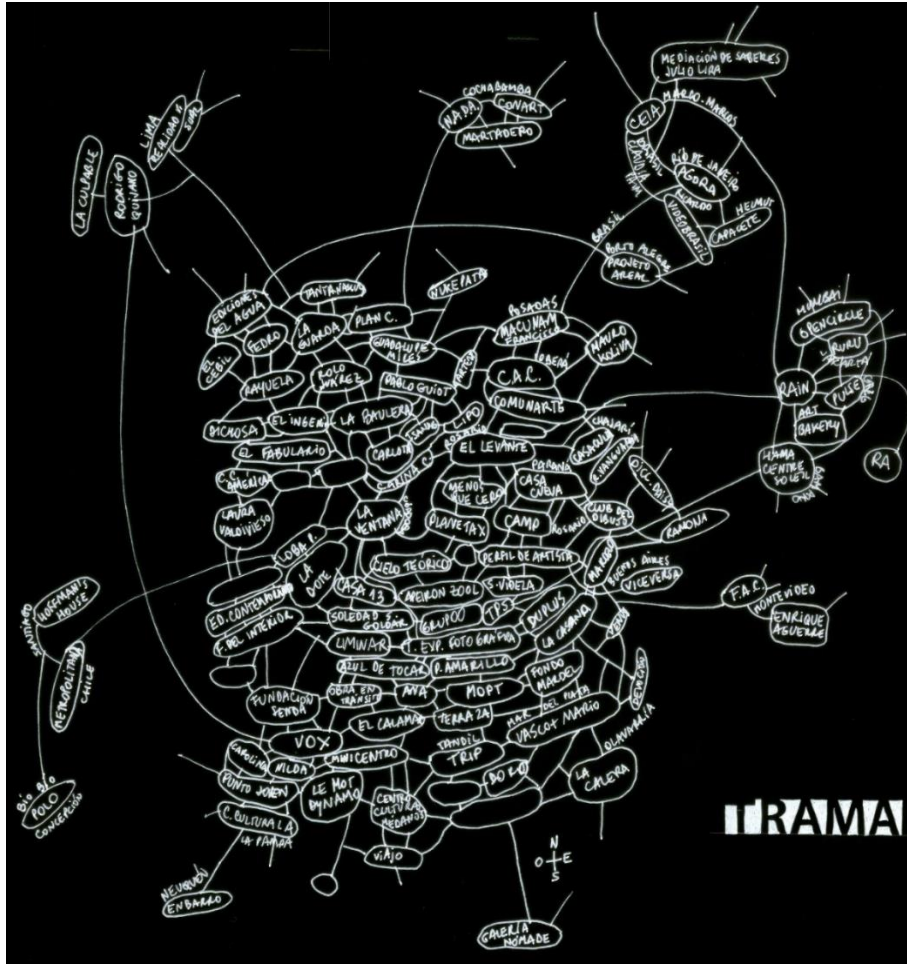
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Fig. 3.16 Angélika Heckl presenting N.A.D.A. (Nodo Asociativo para el Desarrollo de las Artes) from Cochabamba, Bolivia, 'Trama: El Encuentro', October 2005, Fundación Telefónica, Buenos Aires, Argentina. (Photo: Courtesy of Trama archive)

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Fig. 3.19 Carina Cagnolo and Carlota Beltrame during the workshop on the role of artists' initiatives in art education, 'Trama: El Encuentro', Centro Cultural Borges, Buenos Aires, Argentina, October-November 2005. (Photo: Courtesy of Trama archive)

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