

Walking Archives:
The Soy Children

EDUARDO MOLINARI



"Eduardo Molinari has produced a compelling document demonstrating that the process of recombination can be wrenched from capital's oppressive grip, and put to use to expose and critique its expansion from modern imperialism to a molecular invasion that establishes full spectrum biocolonization. Juxtaposing fragments of political and cultural history, political theory, mythology, and ecological study, in conjunction with personal memories and observations, Molinari produces an associational web that yields a long-awaited radicalization of relational aesthetics." – Critical Art Ensemble

Who are children of genetically modified soy production? What disowned bastards are produced by the hybridization of agri-business, biotech, capital, and culture?

To answer these questions the *Archivo Caminante* (Walking Archive) embarks on a trip through the opaque and strange world of genetically modified soya plants in Argentina in search of its inhabitants, forms and structures, languages and narratives: the forces that swirl around the soya rhizome. In the style of *Gulliver's Travels* it makes visible some of the routes in the soya chain giving shape to a new international division of labor food policy in global semicapitalism.

More than 50% of the cultivated lands in Argentina are for soya production, with 90% of that area covered by Monsanto products and representatives. This agrarian system and its results are only possible using Roundup herbicide, the brand name of Monsanto's glyphosate. The rhizome formed by soya production dives deep into the Argentine society: it organizes new political alliances, and, above all, modifies the social and cultural structure of the country. Is there a transgenic culture inside semicapitalism? Does the soyazation process modify culture and society, or is it the other way around, and soyazation is only possible in a transgenic culture?

Eduardo Molinari is a visual artist who lives and works in Buenos Aires, Argentina. In 2001 he founded the Archivo Caminante (Walking Archive), a visual archive in progress that delves into existing and imaginary relations between art, history and politics.

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Interview with Eduardo Molinari

Conducted by Nancy Gartin, LatinArt.com

LatinArt: *When and how was the idea of the Archivo Caminante born?*

Eduardo Molinari: Although the relationship between art and history has always been present in my work, the specific practice that gave rise to *Archivo Caminante* began in 1999. My art studies are in drawing and painting, and that year I visited the National Archives (Archivo General de la Nación – AGN) in Buenos Aires to look for some photographs of Argentine history that I wanted to paint. I never found the photos I was looking for – on the presidential transfer of power, the moment when they hand over the presidential sash and the ceremonial staff. The experience of visiting the Archives was fascinating, however, and signalled an encounter with a source whose

aesthetic qualities, materials and the particular way they're displayed led to drastic changes in my practice: I have never painted since. Instead, after visiting the AGN all through 1999 and putting together a repertory of images on Argentinean history as a result of my research, photography and walking became part of my art practice. I had to go out and generate my own documents to be able to engage in a non-subordinate dialogue with the official narration of history. I started walking around in the city (and nature) in search of crossroads, places where the past, the present and the future met.

My archive (unnamed until 2001) took shape based on three sources or types of documents: copies of the AGN's official photographic material, the photographs I take on walks, and lastly what I call junk or garbage documentation: scraps and fragments of print media (magazines, newspapers, graphics in general) and publications (books, posters, postcards, maps, etc.) Those three elements, joined together as a manual collage, have created the Documents of the Walking Archive.

LatinArt: *What was the first work to stem from the project-process that is the Walking Archive, and what has that approach been like in relation to the collective projects in which you take part?*

Eduardo Molinari: In 2001, after having been chosen by the TRAMA program to conduct work on "art practices and their social context," I took a walk in the union landscape, the patrimonial territory of unions in Buenos Aires, a geography that was altered by the neoliberalism of the nineties. After that experience, which culminated in a series of graphic prints and the piece *Columna Vertebral* (Spinal Column), an intervention on the columns of the current School of Engineering of Buenos Aires University (UBA) – the former Eva Perón Foundation – I decided to establish the Walking Archive.

The process behind the relationship between the Walking Archive and the collective processes I take part in has been colored from the outset by the dynamic of the walker: it's a relationship that's always in context, always linked to others, always open to new forms of knowledge and practices. That's why I refer to the Walking Archive as a project in which walking as an aesthetic practice and collective and interdisciplinary action are at the core.

The name of the project indicates a breaking away from or differentiation from the hegemonic paradigm of the Argentina of the nineties, embodied in the figure of the artist Guillermo Kuitca (who started a trend by his as-

sociation with the curatorial practices of the Rojas Cultural Center and the scholarships that bear his name to this day): the paradigm of the wandering, out-of-context and out-of-history artist.

The Walking Archive is not a “nomadic” nor a “wandering” archive. It walks in the sense that it goes from one place to another, one person to another, one generation to another, carrying – like mules – power/memories, burdens that are viewed as valued and even secret, through territories that are difficult to move through, and creating a concept of movement in which it is essential to know when to move and when to stop.

LatinArt: *How does this project-life-work relate to your practice as a teacher? How do you visualize the creation of alternative forms, projects involving new pedagogies, de-education, etc.?*

Eduardo Molinari: The relationship is one of involvement and indissolubility. I view myself as an artist and teacher; they’re two sides of the same coin. I think art – through the possibility it has of materializing our imaginaries – has an enormous potential to bring about social change. When I was in Berlin a few weeks ago, I heard Edgar Arandia, the director of the Museum of Fine Arts of La Paz, talk about the challenges he faced in that institution, which is burdened with a long imperial and imperialistic history, a history of violence, extermination and plundering. He said that under his tenure the challenge was to make the museum a place to “inform, teach and transform.” I like that pedagogical trilogy very much.

In our countries, our region, art education has special characteristic as a result of a neoliberal dismantling process of the nineties. The Menem-Cavallo law on education destroyed free, public art schools: it severed the links between the three levels of teaching (teachers, professors, and post graduates) and created a new institution that hasn’t been able to meet social needs yet. But it’s the only surviving example of free art education in the country.

I therefore think that if we’re going to undertake an analysis from the perspective of “alternatives” or “de-education” we need to be very careful, we need to know the ground we’re treading on. I’m not at all interested in promoting the dismantling of free, public art education. It’s privatization through private workshops and universities, the establishment of institutions that are purportedly autonomous or independent (when in fact they depend on funding from foreign countries or private foundations with ties to the fruits of the policy of privatizations) or the proliferation of “clinics” or “workshops” strike me as symptoms of a very perverse system: the need for semi-capitalism to

create a use of language (in this case visual) in which recombining signs is more important than producing understanding or meaning.

Semiocapitalism speaks of “emerging artists,” of “alternative” aesthetics, of the need to do away with the “old academic institutions.” However, the fact is that few social subjects can move freely through the “new” institutions. For me the clearest examples in Argentina of these cultural policies that perpetuate the simulation and recombining of meaningless signs (as a means for social elites to control people’s and new social imaginaries) or I could also say with meanings that work for those elites, are:

The CIA (Centro de Investigaciones Artísticas – Center for Art Research), an acronym that eloquently reflects the discourse logic that is being sought – an “alternative” institution that says it is based on its founders’ concern with art education.

The Di Tella University, a private, elitist enclave that has a screening process even though one has to pay, which conducts training seminars and currently offers the Kuitca scholarship. The aim in both cases is to “de-educate” academic methods.

I think free public education should be strengthened, at the primary level, starting with children. I think that’s where efforts to encourage the development of new imaginaries should focus, emphasizing the need to move away from the logic of national states and their borders, while promoting the visions, the images that speak of our common problems so as to find common solutions. I think there’s an imperative need for the region to continue with the instituent processes of the post-nineties in the quest for new institutional frameworks, and not “alternatives” that only serve those who profit from those false “outsides.” I think that “de-education” today consists – as I said before – of avoiding the reproduction of narratives and imaginaries dealing with national states and instead looking for the threads that unite social and transformational experiences through culture that seek greater social justice.

For me that means, for example, showing (in my case through art practices) how to follow the routes that lead us in our daily lives, in a natural and invisible way, to get to know our living conditions: the route of water, the route of plants, the route of food, the route of decisions, the route of the media and their discourses, the route of political decisions, the route of art images, etc.

Teaching viewed as a means of sharing knowledge and the shaping of new knowledge so that we can all be part of those routes and so they’re not just used by those who can afford to pay the toll or those who have the au-

thorization and legitimization of power to do so. Teaching how to make new maps: not “alternative” ones, but one’s own.

LatinArt: *Can you explain the concept of “semicapitalism” that stems from Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s work and how it is addressed in your work?*

Eduardo Molinari: I explained it a little in my previous answer. During my research for *Los niños de la soja* (The Soy Children), which is a tour of the interior of the soy rhizome, of the process known as the “soyazation” of Argentina, whereby more than 50% of the land cultivated in our country has been given over to transgenic soy (i.e. over 18 million hectares), I discovered that biotechnology and culture had an operation in common: the operation of recombining.

On the one hand recombining genes of mineral, plant and animal origin to create transgenic plants such as RR soy, the only strain that can survive the effects of Roundup, Monsanto’s commercial name for glyphosate; also the recombining of forms of land tenure to give rise to the central players in this process: planting pools.

On the other hand there is also the recombining of fragments of our lives (this is where I begin following Bifo’s line of thought) as a central characteristic of flexible, cognitive work methods. In culture (following Bifo’s reasoning), signs are recombined regardless of their meaning. The main task of semicapitalism is a perverse use of language, transforming all transformation processes into information. The production of value (of capital gain) stems from the recombining itself. This leads me to ask – and this is at the core of a new, emancipating education – what kind of culture needs an economic model based on transgenic single crop farming? What artist’s paradigm, what type of images does this kind of economic organization, this new policy of global food production need? One answer, not a very positive one, is that today’s neoliberalism needs a transgenic culture. But naturally there are always seeds of rebellion.

LatinArt: *How are networks being created through the Walking Archive?*

Eduardo Molinari: Networks are being created since 1999 through actual experiences with fellow travelers. Our bonds basically stem from not taking politics and social issues as a “topic,” but as a need for the Walking Archive (my specific doing) to develop within transformative projects, as another presence, along with others. In that sense, I’ve always tried to let art meth-

odology research be a way of sharing with others concerns, questions and the quest for answers, outside the “bunker of contemporary art.” Sometimes more is achieved, sometimes less. I’m not very fond of the word “networks”; I prefer *quipus* (a Quechua word meaning “knotted cords,” an Inca system of recording information).

LatinArt: *What is the immediate and long-term future of the Walking Archive, of your work?*

Eduardo Molinari: At the moment I’m going through the experience of building a self-managed space, La Dársena (The Dock), a platform for art-related thought and interaction, with my partner and fellow artist, Azul Blaseotto. It’s a former kiosk in the Almagro district of Buenos Aires, in which we’re conducting – on a human scale, without subsidies – a project involving exchanges and experiments, an attempt to break the predominance of the discourse whose “concern for art education” has served to tame/domesticate artists all the more by making them believe they should be their own agents and managers and achieve success quickly by going to the right “clinics” or “workshops.” Our aim is to rethink the policies behind the reception and circulation of our images, collectively shape thoughts and contribute narratives and imaginaries that will help us bring about a happier, freer and fairer world. In this context, I’ve decided to make my archive public by letting people consult it twice a week. I’m also thinking about the new work I’ll be doing after *In the Footsteps of the Corn Men* and *The Soy Children*.

LOS GRUBO

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introduction
The Trucks

1.

“Imagine”

– Slogan of Monsanto

“Sometime ideas, like men, jump up and say ‘hello.’ They introduce themselves, these ideas, with words. Are they words? These ideas speak so strangely. All that we see in this world is based on someone’s ideas. Some ideas are destructive, some are constructive. Some ideas can arrive in the form of a dream. I can say it again: some ideas arrive in the form of a dream.”

In view of the upcoming commemorations for the bicentennial of the revolutionary movements that gave origin to the first Argentinean government’s independent from the Spanish Crown in the Americas – which have brought into life new perspectives and dreams yet unfulfilled in our region – *Archivo Caminante* (the Walking Archive) proposes a exercise in memory. On the one hand, memory of the ideas and forces that guided historically chained processes: those framed within the undertaking of their Catholic Majesties of Castile and Aragon, the conquest and evangelization of the so-called “new world,” with its continuities and discontinuities at present. An approach to the operations of a machinery that succeeded in (re)combining the economic exploitation of human and natural resources (genocides and enrichments) through the deployment of a religious and cultural imaginary. (Re)combination only possible through a particular narrative practice of creation and distribution of images, with a precise ideological functionality.

The memory exercise I propose – a task I consider necessary and healthy, although not because of that purifying, therapeutic or whitewashing – leads us

1 Log Lady intro to Episode 2 of David Lynch’s TV series *Twin Peaks*, 1990.

inevitably to question our present conditions and ourselves, inside post-modernity and the political, economic and cultural paradigms that condition our lives.

On the other hand, I am interested in a form of memory that is, at the same time, imagination. Memories become relevant if they enable us to convey potentialities and splendors, as if we were mules – persistent animals, able to go through difficult and dangerous grounds.

Memories that put places, people, generations in contact, conveying that which doesn't exist yet, but may exist.

Closing my eyes, I could try to make visible a set of images in which emancipating ideas became a reality in the Americas, in present day Argentina. From the resistance of the native communities, the revolutionary events of May 1810 (month that especially evokes the Bicentenary in my country) and the subsequent wars for independence, going through the confrontations with England and France at the beginning of the 19th century and the internal disputes set up by the polarity of “civilization and barbarism,” and their successive recycling. Also, the first anarchist and socialist unions at the beginning of the 20th century and the emergence of two social and political movements, influenced by the resonance of the World Wars: Radicalism and Peronism. Later on, conditioned by the Cold War and the military dictatorships in our continent, but also encouraged by the Cuban Revolution, I recall the prominence and the political-cultural resistance of the youth, the workers and the armed revolutionary organizations during the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, I think of the struggle for memory, truth and justice led by human rights organizations in relation to state terrorism in the '70s, and the new social movements that resist the neoliberal model. I could also try to track down those dreams and their desires for liberty at the heart of the metaphors present in many works of art in the cultural history of Argentina.

2.

“The following motions have been accepted: we won't allow trucks loaded with cereals, livestock or dairy products to get to the port; we won't bother tourists or citizens in transit; we'll strengthen the pickets around the ports, and we'll try to persuade the trucks to go back and not to stay parked in front of the pickets.”

2 Eduardo Buzzi, president of Federación Agraria Argentina [Argentine Agrarian Federation], during an assembly in Santa Teresa, province of Santa Fe, 20 March 2008. In Osvaldo Barsky-Mabel Dávila's, *La rebelión del campo, historia del conflicto agrario argentino* [*The Rebellion of the Countryside, a History of the Argentine Agrarian Conflict*], Ed. Sudamericana, 2008, p. 247.

In spite of the previous enumeration, today we can see a picture that is very different from those living bodies. Those struggles were organized according to national, state, and also class and anticapitalist, ideas.

The present context is very different when thinking/imagining the dimension of the historic polarity of “liberation or dependence,” that condenses the revolutionary alternatives. What do those terms mean today? Are they still in effect? Besides its strictly political and economical side, new questions come up about the relations between form and content that those concepts propose, and about the role that artistic images could play in the formation of new emancipating imaginaries, beyond nationalisms and government involvement.

In a perverse way, on the one hand, the hegemonic discourse of globalization considers national states obsolete, with their fields of action extremely reduced in front of multinational corporations (at least up to the beginning of the American economic crisis in mid-2008, this point of view wouldn't accept any questioning). On the other hand, those states are the justification for arm races, arms trade, wars and xenophobia, that turn borders into hermetic barriers. But also and above all, global capitalism still needs states as tools, guarantors of private property and the claimed “legal certainty,” essential to free market. In this context, the image I propose to visualize the present day national states is that of a heavy fleet of trucks.

Trucks on whose sides we could read that historical slogan of “liberation or dependence,” as well as any or none. This fleet of heavy vehicles – in a transparent and opaque way– serves interests related to market and trade. Controlled circulation of goods (with tolls), in all the forms and combinations we can think of, including human beings. Certainly, artistic practices, visual arts, culture, don't escape this condition.

3.

*“The map they taught us gives two-thirds of the world to the North and one-third to the South. Europe is shown as larger than Latin America, even though Latin America is actually twice the size of Europe. India appears smaller than Scandinavia, even though it's three times as big. The United States and Canada fill more space on the map than Africa, when in reality they cover barely two-thirds as much territory. The map lies. Traditional geography steals space just as the imperial economy steals wealth, official history steals memory, and formal culture steals the word.”*³

3 Eduardo Galeano, *Patas arriba, la escuela del mundo al revés*, Ed. Catálogos, 1999, p.323. [English version: *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World* (translated by Mark Fried; New York: Picador, 1998)

The commemoration of the revolutionary movements that liberated the South American region during the 19th century makes evident that this liberation hasn't come to an end, nor have the colonial processes, although they have changed their forms. What does "to be free" mean to the peoples of the world today? What do maps show us? Do colonialism and imperialism exist? What has become of neo-colonialism? What are the post-colonial forms?

The capitalist "original accumulation" related to the colonial process through an enormous transfer of wealth, its concentration and accumulation in Europe, is still in effect by means of a series of mechanisms whose working principle and origin we could call (as the thesis of our collective work defines it) the "Potosí Principle": a principle centrally organized by certain relationships between human beings and earth, between man and nature.

In the territory of Argentina, the maps of globalization show that neo-liberalism, prevailing force between 1989 and 2001 (in a savage way), has achieved many of the goals of the scientific-industrial-military complex of the developed countries in the "Western and Christian" world as well as those of their local allies (the military in favor of coups, oligarchs, social elites, and a politically active church, all of them showing no respect for majority will), goals they have pursued from the end of World War II to the fall of the Berlin Wall. One of those goals was the development of a process of "agriculturization" that included a special combo: the implementation of the direct seeding method (no-till farming) that enabled the expansion of the agrarian frontier, the incorporation of new technologies (biotechnology, agrottoxics and precision agricultural machinery) and, finally, new combinations of forms of land ownership.

The most evident consequence of this process of agriculturization in Argentina is the so-called "*sojización*" (soyazation) of the country.

The "soyazation" process has turned the country into the world's third producer of soya and by-products, second producer of genetically modified soya (after the USA), and first exporter of soya flour and soya oil in the world. 50% of the total cultivated lands in Argentina belongs to soya, and 90% of that surface corresponds to Monsanto's RR GM soya (and Monsanto's local representatives). This agrarian system and its results are only possible using Roundup herbicide, brand name of Monsanto's glyphosate. During the 2007-2008 season, 180.000.000 litres of glyphosate were sprayed over Argentine lands, turning the country into a "massive experiment" from the eco-toxicological point of view – in the words of Andrés Carrasco, director of the Laboratory of Molecular Embryology at the *National Scientific and Technical Research Council* (CONICET) and Professor of Embryology at the

Faculty of Medicine of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). At the same time, this territory is a part of a new recognizable form in the maps of South America: the “Republic of Soya.” Created for an advertisement by the multinational company Syngenta, this new “republic” crosses the borders of some of the national states that celebrate their bicentennials in 2010: it covers part of Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil. It is worth remembering that “syngenta” – perhaps cynically – means “gathering of peoples.”

4.

“Coup-friendly, soy-producers and oligarchs.”

– *Graffiti painted on a wall in the city of Rosario, province of Santa Fe, during the agrarian conflict of 2008.*

“Cristina K, Montonera, Resentful, Liar, Revengeful, Atheist and Greasy.”

– *Poster fixed on the surroundings of the Presidential Residence of Olivos, province of Buenos Aires, during the agrarian conflict of 2008.⁴*

Before starting my work for the installation *The Soy Children*, my artistic practice had already approached the agrarian imaginary. Between June 2007 and February 2008, for the first time in my life, I lived abroad, in the German cities of Berlin and Chemnitz. There, I carried out some research first, and then a series of walks and tours, “after the steps of the Corn Men.” That was the title of my last work, a triptych comprised of an installation, a film and a publication.

The Corn Men are the main characters of the Popol Vuh, an anonymous narrative of the Quiché-Mayan creation myth. In my work, the Corn Men were a powerful image to embody modes of collective construction and imagination, not individual or individualistic.

In the myths, the Corn Men are characterized by their deep vision and for being together, avoiding helplessness. Their vision and their being together were the features that allowed them to survive the misfortunes of daily life. That image had also been present, but just as a drawing on a wall, in the installation “El Parque Problema” (The Problem Park), work done in 2006 for the last stage of the “ExArgentina” project, the exhibition “Lanormalidad” (The normality), on that occasion as a metaphor for the social and cultural collectives that had resisted the neoliberal model during the 1990s.

4 Montonera: belonging to the armed revolutionary group of the 1970s

By mid 2007, I had left Argentina governed by Néstor Kirchner and, although reality reminded us that social injustice still reigned and there were new challenges before the global situation, it seemed he enjoyed some credibility and consensus. In fact, in December that year, his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, after winning the presidential elections, would come into office, becoming the first woman elected President in Argentina. However, soon after the beginning of her term in office, near the end of the Argentine summer, on March 11th, 2008, the government's announcement of the implementation of a new scheme of taxes on exports of grains triggered an agrarian conflict that resulted in unexpected outbreaks of social violence. I had returned home in February 2008 and that violence took me by surprise or, at least, under the effects of my first distanciation from the Argentine society.

For over four months, the Kirchnerist government and the representatives of the agricultural corporations debated the new taxes through very different modes: the "Mesa de Enlace" (Liaison Committee) (an alliance of the Argentine Rural Society (SRA), the Argentine Agrarian Federation (FAA), the Argentine Rural Confederation (CRA), the Confederation of Rural Associations of Buenos Aires and La Pampa (CARBAP), and their political allies) used the Piquetero's method of road blockades all along the country; they threw away food in front of the trucks, restricted the circulation of trucks and shipping in ports, caused food shortage, and burnt farmlands (arguing they'd be for cattle) creating thick smoke clouds over the cities of Rosario and Buenos Aires. They received strategic support from almost all of the mass media that fired up the conflict. The President gave nationwide speeches. There were massive demonstrations and rallies, but very few meetings and little dialogue between government and opposition, and a controversial parliamentary vote.

The conflict shook big cities (Buenos Aires, Rosario, Santa Fe, Entre Ríos, Córdoba, Tucumán) as well as villages in the interior of the provinces, and almost checkmated the government, that finally decided the issue would be handled by the National Parliament. On 16 July 2008, the Vice-President of the Nation, Julio Cobos, broke the deadlock in the Senate casting a deciding vote, his "not positive vote" (the first time in the Argentine history a vice-president votes against his own government's proposal). The sliding-scale export tax proposed in March became null and void.

That tense and unexpected situation triggered my interest in the process of soyazation, because its deep implications were now clear. The rhizome of soya dives deep into the Argentine economic reality, it organizes new political alliances and, above all, it modifies the social and cultural structure of the

country. Then, I started asking myself some questions: Is there a transgenic culture inside semiocapitalism? Does the soyazation process modify culture and society, or is it the other way around, and soyazation is only possible in a transgenic culture?

5.

*“With the term semiocapitalism I define the mode of production that prevails in a society in which every act of transformation can be substituted for information, and the working process is carried out through the recombination of signs. In its traditional forms, semiosis had meaning as its specific product, but when semiotic processes become a part of the cycle of value production, the assignment of meaning isn’t the purpose of language any more.”*⁵

*“Transgene: Gene that has been transferred from one organism to another.”*⁶

*“An imaginary related to the school repertoire, a tendency to handicrafts; a perfect, smooth and tidy assemblage; the taste for gluing, cutting, folding, making collages; an obsession for repetition and the use of iconographies related to childhood, games for kids, books of tales, school handbooks, maps, trading cards; a poetic mystery, certain tenderness and beauty, a tension between individualism and massing, between being alone and crowding together; typical of school.”*⁷

*“The founders got support from different institutions, and from international and some local donors; their work is done ad honorem.”*⁸

What are the conditions of the transgenic culture for the process of soyazation to be possible? Is there a recombinant relationship between economy and culture? What paradigm of an artist and what cultural institutionality does the soya model require? What kind of images and languages?

5 Franco Berardi Bifo, *Generación Post-Alfa, patologías e imaginarios en el semiocapitalismo*, Tinta Limón, 2007, p. 107-108. [Published in English: *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism e3 the Pathologies of Post-Alpha Generation*]

6 <http://www.monsanto.com.ar/prensa/glosario.aspx>

7 Text (without the signature of a curator) of the exhibition “Escuelismo, arte argentino de los ‘90” [Schoolism, Argentine art of the ‘90s], between 13 June and 3 August 2009. Part of the press release of Malba-Fundación Costantini [Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires – Constantini Foundation].

8 http://www.ciacentro.org/quienes_somos

One of the starting points of the “Potosí Principle” project was a reflection about colonial painting related to the Imperial Villa of Potosí and the communities of origin of the migrant workers (*mitayos*), between the 16th and 17th centuries. Questions about the role the production of artistic images played inside the process of enrichment and accumulation of capital through the routes of gold and silver at that time. Studying a collection of colonial paintings, we sought to question the contemporary art production and the legitimating role it plays in favour of elites in globalization. That is, to question ourselves, of course.

The work of art I have been studying for the installation *The Soy Children* is a picture by an anonymous painter of the 17th century, at present exhibited in the Royal Mint House (Casa de la Moneda) in Potosí, Bolivia, and it depicts a moment in Saint Ildefonsus’ life. It is an oil on canvas painting, of a quasi-symmetric composition, divided into two fields (heavenly and earthly). In the heavenly dimension, Saint Ildefonsus receives a chasuble from the hands of Virgin Mary, as a reward for his defence of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in a treatise he presented in the Councils of Toledo, Spain, in 653 and 655 B.C. Two virgins are present in the scene: Saint Lucy and Saint Leocadia. The former had her eyes gouged out for defending her virginity and carries them on a plate. The latter was a virgin and martyr during the Diocletian persecution of Christians.

Below, in the earthly dimension, different scenes take place in a landscape of strange plants. There, in an “artificial nature,” with out-of-scale, alien plants, we can see episodes in the lives of two friars, a Dominican and a Franciscan. We can also see the donor figure, praying. At the end of the landscape, which includes animals, stones and a river, there is a bridge, and something like a City of God (historians speak of a metaphor for the city of Jerusalem).

Both religious orders (Dominicans and Franciscans) carried out evangelization activities in South America in a complementary way, in spite of their opposing stances toward syncretism. Dominicans, as Inquisitors, persecuted it, trying to annihilate it. Franciscans were tolerant with new (re)combinations, always in subordinating conditions, of course. The unity of the two stances can be seen in the scenes depicted: both friars walk through the landscape, separated or together, and they meet and shake hands friendly on the bridge.

Besides the work of evangelization, the priests in the Americas shared another task: the investigation, capture and transfer to Europe of the knowledge that the indigenous communities had about the earth, astronomy, agriculture and stock-breeding, among others, at the time they fought against “idolatry,”

imposing new relations between man and nature. The bigger pictures of these monks are a little more disturbing. The Dominican, kneeling, is flagellating himself, while the Franciscan, sitting on a rock, is experiencing a mystical ecstasy.

I became interested in this work for two reasons. First, the presence of nature. But... a rarefied, strange, artificial nature. Effect generated mainly by the plants, supposedly painted by an European artist who didn't know them directly. The aforementioned machinery of conquest and evangelization promoted a serial production of pictures painted partly in Europe (generally the backgrounds) and finished in the Americas (mainly the characters). The second reason was the ghostly presence of the anonymous Andean painter. What might he have felt in his heart of hearts as he created and developed his images? What kind of traces could I discover in his painting?

6.

So, the *Archivo Caminante* (the Walking Archive) embarks on a trip to the opaque world under the strange GM soya plants in Argentina, in search of its inhabitants, its forms and structures, its languages and narratives, the forces that swirl around the soya rhizome. In the style of *Gulliver's Travels*, I try to make visible some of the routes that the trucks-states-nations follow in the soya chain (while many of them celebrate the Bicentenary of their creation), those that give shape to a new international division of labour and a new food policy in global semiocapitalism. Nature and religion, science and war. Industry, labour and art. Concepts, learnings and activities that are being reformulated, due to the financial, economic and social crisis of capitalism in the USA, and its global echoes. However, in the middle of many queries and uncertainties, it seems a cultural condition, that envelops and articulates everything, is indispensable for the "Potosí Principle" to keep its force: social infantilization.

In the Argentine cultural field, especially in the visual arts, aesthetics related to "escuelismo" (schoolism) (the influence of the primary school period on artistic practices, in the words of the quoted curator of MALBA) and unpaid artistic work (the management and participation in cultural projects always ad-honorarium), together with the lack of a policy of acquisition of works of art by public institutions, and the scarce resources that the cursed "Law of Patronage" contributes to the production system, are some of the forms that infantilization adopts. A logical step in the 2001 post-crisis normalization, if we have in mind the silence of the hegemonic artistic practices

and their theoretical and intellectual support in relation to the dismantling of the state and the looting of the '90s. A sharp look to the networks that today (and then) link artists, intellectuals, managers, officials and institutions (public and private) of each period is all it takes to verify what kind of art the ruling elites want. In the transgenic culture, does art become a commodity?





The Ekeko

Nature, fertility and development

1.

“The world, its continents, its oceans and its poles know important global difficulties: climate change, contamination, the slow but sure disappearance of the energy resources and biodiversity while hunger and poverty increase in every country, debilitating our societies. To make migrants, whether they have documents or not, the scapegoats of these global problems, is not the solution. It does not meet any reality. The social cohesion problems that Europe is suffering from are not the fault of the migrants, rather the result of the model of development imposed by the North, which destroys the planet and dismembers human societies.”

– Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, Open Letter to EU in response to the “Return Directive” for illegal immigrants, June 2008.

In the history of mankind, different communities have found one or several ways of relating to earth. Nomadic or sedentary, through those relations they establish an existential abode. Their connection to earth proposes rhetorical operations in geography: signals, demarcations, appropriations, hierarchizations. By means of these operations, always collectively, we generate categories and spatial forms that bind us to others. In these processes, multiple and diverse symbolic universes or worldviews (as many as communities) are created, as the result of the interaction of different languages (verbal, written, visual, sound or body language) and they speak about the desirable bonds with nature, animals, plants and of course, with other communities. Simultaneously, and also collectively, another social form is built: time, a weave whose threads bind us to the past, the present and the future; to gods, ancestors and death. In rites, myths and legends, in the songs and tales of the communities, but also in daily life, in the shape of their dwellings, their ways and customs, their diet, we can find traces of those worldviews.

The “discovery of the new world” brought different worldviews into contact. Between the Spanish adelantados (and the missionaries who accompanied them) and the indigenous cultures, different imaginaries crashed. Certainly, it wasn’t a friendly contact. After the unknown geography had been explored and its inhabitants dominated, after mapping and making the territory measurable and controllable, the alliance of their Catholic Majesties and the Roman Catholic Church needed to impose a territorial and political organization to enable the use of the natural and human resources, their exploitation. The political-cultural operations for that huge plan revolved around tight bonds between religion-art, labour-industry, science-war, and were oriented towards fixed goals: progress, development, technological advance, the free market. Without forgetting the “salvation of souls,” and guiding thousands of people from the darkness “to the light.” The coming generations (then children) would see the results. Almost the same ideas, although with very different forms, organize the present semio-capitalist program.

For the indigenous communities, the relations between soul and body, ancestors and gods, nature and economy, art and work, even politics and war, were very different. What energies, from those different forms of being in the world, survived and were present in the revolutionary fights that 200 years ago gave origin to the national states and republics of the Americas? Could those worldviews be developed after the longed for “independence”? Do those imaginaries have a place in our lives at present?

2.

“The head of the Supreme Magician was cut off. Put his head on the tree of the road... When the head was placed on the tree, then the tree bore fruit...”

“To see the world with wide open eyes is starting to discover the dogmas that are no longer in effect. The myths that time has blown away, and attend the birth of new paradigms.”¹⁰

The ancient inhabitants of what would become the “Vice-Royalty of Peru” believed gods, in particular Viracocha, had commanded the people of the *ayllus* (Andean towns) to emerge from the interior of the earth. Before being humans they were rocks in the underworld, and they had come to populate the world surface emerging at special points, called *Pacarinas*. The bond between the members of the *ayllu*, originated in this situation, was powerful and survived from generation to generation. The *Pacarinas* could be mountains, caves, volcanoes, rivers, springs, lagoons, lakes or even the sea. The lake Titicaca was one of the most important *pacarinas* in the Inca Empire. I’m very interested in this image that makes us emerge from the earth.

The Andean economy was predominantly agricultural. Through different sophisticated techniques, they produced a variety of crops, making the best possible use of the land, even in adverse geographic and climatic conditions. The most important products were potato and corn (carried to Europe) but also sweet potato, pepper, cotton, tomato, peanut, *oca* and *quinoa*. Stockbreeding was another central activity in the Andes. Camelids were domesticated and their breeding served different purposes: food, clothing, transport. They also bred ducks and guinea pigs.

This brief account allows me to introduce a second image, attractive to rethink economic ideas and concepts. This image is the *Ekeko*. The *Ekeko* was an Aymara-Colla deity, venerated during the solstice of summer many centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards. His followers believed he brought prosperity and protected them against misfortune.

It was then adopted by the Incas, who considered him the God of abundance, fertility, growth and joy. In the beginning, it was represented by a stone figure, with indigenous features, hunchbacked and naked, since his nakedness was a symbol of fertility.

9 Anonymous, *Popol Vub*, in Eduardo Molinari, *Tras los pasos de los Hombres de Matz [After the Steps of the Corn Men]*, Edited by Weltecho and the author, 2008, p.8.

10 http://www.darsecuenta.org.ar/quienes_manifiesto.asp

In 1612, the priest Ludovico Bertonio described him as follows: “*Ecaco, I. Thunnupa. Name of one of whom the ancient Indians tell many tales, and many of them even now believe them to be true, and so it would be good to put an end to this persuasion they adopted, deceived by the devil. Among the creatures of God, there is one of these Indians whom they call Thunnupa, of whom they tell many things, many of them unworthy not only of God, but of any reasonable man, and some of them that resemble the mysteries of our faith... In other lands or provinces of Peru they call it Ecaco.*”¹¹

In 1781, in La Paz, after the indigenous uprising led by Tupac Katari, in an attempt of “normalization,” colonial authorities accepted his worship, although with some changes. Over time, the statue got the features of a smiling, slightly fat man, of mixed race, fully dressed and loaded with bags of food and household objects. He has a hole in his mouth for people to give him cigarettes, which the *Ekeko* “smokes.” Eradicating “idolatries” of demonic origin was one of the tasks of the Inquisition, that played a very active role in the imposition of the Catholic religion in the American territory. Nevertheless, the *Ekeko* survived.

At present, in the Andes there is the belief that he can grant wishes to those who offer him *alasitas*, miniatures of different materials that reproduce what one expects to get: houses, cars, gadgets, machines, money, food, clothes, love. The *Ekeko* and the *alasitas* festival continue the tradition of offerings to *Pachamama*. This ritual has been carried by Andean migrants to different parts of the world.

The *Ekeko* introduces us to the ideas of growth, abundance and fertility. Growth doesn’t necessarily mean “increase of production,” or “of consumption.” Instead, it means avoiding helplessness.

Abundance doesn’t mean quantity, but multiplicity, diversity. Growth doesn’t mean “development” or “progress” either; it does mean being fertile, capable of reproduction. Ways of being in harmony with nature, not challenging it.

What are the goals of biotechnology and genetic manipulation of the species? What are the consequences of the elimination of ecosystems and the indiscriminate clearing of woods? What are the bonds with nature of those who promote agribusiness? Who grants food for the peoples in global semio-capitalism?

11 Ludovico Bertonio, *Vocabulario de la Lengua Aymara* [*Vocabulary of the Aymara Language*], 1612.

3.

*“Haitians shall be known from now on by the generic denomination of blacks.”*¹²

*“Although we are responsible for a big part of their generation, greenhouse gases which are building up in the world’s atmosphere seem not to exist in daily life. This perception could change because on June 18th, 2009, Deutsche Bank’s Asset Management unveiled the First Real-Time Carbon Emissions Counter in the centre of New York, one of the most polluted cities in the world. As the counter started, long-lived greenhouse gases in the atmosphere were estimated to be 5.64 trillion metric tons, growing at 2 billion metric tons per month.”*¹³

In Buenos Aires, in the last years of the colonial period, the main figures of the revolutionary struggles of May 1810 gathered in a soap factory – on a cynical day I could think of it as an ethical and economic metaphor for the national whitewashing. The “Jabonería de Vieytes” (Vieytes’ soap shop) was located at the intersection of Tacuarí and Venezuela streets, in the porteño neighbourhood of Monserrat. Its owners, Juan Hipólito Vieytes and Nicolás Rodríguez Peña, were important political actors in the years of the first national government. The former was an important businessman, editor of the “Weekly Magazine of Agriculture, Industry and Trade,” a publication that tried to spread the reformist ideas of the European Enlightenment in the Río de la Plata. Vieytes’ magazine, sponsored by the Royal Spanish Consulate (!) was published between 1802 and 1807, when it stopped being printed because of the British Invasions of Buenos Aires. Among its contributors was Manuel Belgrano, a hero of the Independence struggles and creator of the National Flag. Through the magazine, both of them tried to promote Adam Smith’s ideas about free trade and “efficient use of land,” especially encouraging agricultural activities, following physiocratic ideas.

It is interesting to remember that the Haitian Revolution took place between 1791 and 1804: the first revolution of the American continent put an end to slavery and changed the basis of the pre-capitalist forms of production that existed in the colonies until that moment. That social movement was led by former black slaves (which makes it different from the French bourgeois Revolution and the subsequent South American revolutions) and among the first measures of the new government was the agrarian reform.

12 Constitution of Haiti, 1805, Article 14.

13 <http://www.tuverde.com/2009/06/primer-contador-en-tiempo-real-de-emisiones-degases-de-efecto-invernadero/>

4.

*“Leather was the first of the goods in the long chain that would constitute the productive structure of the Pampas. Its production started in the beginnings of 18th century and for a long period it was the material support for the development of the Pampean bourgeoisie, the one that would lead the Revolution of May. When the independence struggles started, the production of leather was replaced by that of *tasajo* (jerky) in the *saladeros* (charqueadas). By the end of the leather cycle, the “hunting” of wild animals had left its place to cattle ranches, a process that was strengthened by the boom of the *saladeros*. A new productive transformation and a new restructuring of the cattle ranch occurred with the appearance of the wool economy, whose cycle covered about forty years between 1840 and 1880.”¹⁴*

“...the accumulation of capital presupposes the existence of capital. To ‘invest’ in means of production, they must be available: land, for example, has to be bought and sold freely, but also there must be workers to employ.”¹⁵

The transformation of feudal society in Europe occurred in different forms, but all of them had something in common: those changes started in the agrarian world and then extended to the whole of social life. By mid 19th century, the period of primitive accumulation had finished in England and France, and had started in Spain, Italy, Russia, Germany...

Here, on February 3rd, 1852, the *Ejército Grande* (Big Army), a coalition of forces from the provinces of Corrientes and Entre Ríos, from Uruguay and Brazil, under the command of the governor of Entre Ríos, Justo José de Urquiza, defeated the army of the Argentine Confederation commanded by Juan Manuel de Rosas, governor of the province of Buenos Aires and Chief Official of Foreign Affairs of the Confederation. Among the leaders of the *Ejército Grande* there were two prominent figures of Argentine politics, the future presidents Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Bartolomé Mitre, promoters of the discourse of “civilization.” Rosas’ defeat enabled the Unitarian Party (Partido Unitario) to undertake, from Buenos Aires, the organization of a liberal government and to call the congress that would write the Constitution of the Argentine Nation in 1853. I want to point out that, by the end of the 19th century, the so-called “Conquista del Desierto” (Conquest of the Desert), a military campaign commanded by General Julio

14 Eduardo Sartelli (Dir.), *Patrones en la ruta* [*Lords on the Road*], p. 46, Ed. R y R, 2008.

15 Eduardo Sartelli, op. cit., p. 13-14.

Argentino Roca, a real genocide of the indigenous communities that inhabited the Argentine territory, made possible the appropriation of enormous extensions of land, a true expansion of the agrarian frontier. All these events set the basis for the development of the liberal model by the Generation of the 1980s.



Wire fencing *Opaque private property*

1.

*“Before the wire fences one could say: the whole country is a road.”*¹⁶

*“...many inhabitants don’t plant, sow or build anything because they don’t know for sure what is theirs.”*¹⁷

As a child I used to observe the illustrations in magazines and books of geography, history or natural sciences. But after my first camping outside the city of Buenos Aires, a postcard picture stamped itself on my mind: the Pampas

16 Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, 1878, in Noel H. Sbarra, *Historia del alambrado en la Argentina* [*The History of Wired Fencing in Argentina*], p.10, Letemendia Casa Editora, 2008.

17 Noel H. Sbarra, op. cit., p.13.

are a strange combination of an ocean of grass, land and sky, and an obstacle, a fence that interposes between that immensity and our wishes of plunging and getting lost in it. The obstacle consists of some strips of hard and tense wire, fixed to wooden posts, with sharp points arranged at intervals, to prevent trespassing. Wire fences are a part of the postcard picture of the countryside in my mind.

To recognize private property ownership was one of the purposes of the imposition of wire fencing in the Pampas. Since the second foundation of Buenos Aires by Juan de Garay, on June 11th, 1580, after the design of the city, which included a first distribution of lots and farms, it had been necessary to find a device to delimit the new properties.

Only twenty-six years later, in 1606, a voice of alarm was raised: the Attorney General, Juan Díaz de Ojeda, in the *Cabildo* (Town Council), warned about the difficulties for the development of agricultural work and urbanization, because the inhabitants didn't know the limits of their properties. The first attempts to set boundaries didn't produce positive results but finally, in December 1608, under the government of Hernando Arias de Saavedra (Hernandarias, first creole governor), three *cabildantes* (aldermen) and two technicians made the first official measurements, the first initiative to define the limits of private properties in our country.

2.

“Effectively, what has to be explained, as a particularity of the agrarian production, is the influence of the land in the movement of capital, that is, the obstacle it poses to the accumulation of capital. The same as Marx said in Capital, we presuppose the complete control of the land by capitalist property, so excluding all treatment of non-capitalist forms of rent. In effect, that interference of the land has important consequences, because it isn't a reproducible good. It is the material support of agrarian production and, as such, it can't be reproduced: the planet is finite. If it could be reproduced, if when needed it could be manufactured, the agrarian production would have no particularity. This situation gives origin to the constitution of a monopoly by the landowners, because unlike other conditions of production (air, for example), land can be monopolized, that is, it can be subject to private appropriation. That it is monopolizable means that it can be turned into private property, i. e., rights of property can be claimed over it. For instance, the right to not allowing its use. It is clear that the owner, the landowner, will win nothing with the exercise of that right. What enables him to partake in social wealth is, precisely, letting it, logically in exchange for a part of that wealth. Why should he give the land for free? First because it has no value: the

*only thing that has value in the capitalist economy is what implies human work; and land as such, excluding "improvements," hasn't any. That is why the capitalist have to make an exception to that rule of the mercantile economy: goods have to be sold at their value. As land, in a strict sense, has no value, the price of that right to the land is the result of an act of force, the force of monopoly. This is the reason why in the agricultural and livestock industries there is a category, that is not exclusive (it also exists in urban property, or in mining, for example), but in that sphere it reaches a particular magnitude: rent. Then, all land will have an absolute rent, because nobody will allow access to their property without something in exchange."*¹⁸

Mr. Richard B. Newton was a British subject who arrived to Buenos Aires in 1819. At that moment, the English were the biggest foreign community. Mr. Newton had been called by his father and joined the export firm "John Gibson Sons & Co.." Soon after, the Gibsons got the newcomer in charge of the administration of their business of sheep breeding at the ranch "Los ingleses" (The English) in Rincón del Tuyú, and also at another ranch located in Chascomús. In 1839 Mr. Newton bought that property, which he would name – after his wife – Estancia Santa María. In 1844 during a trip to England with his children, as he walked through the county of Yorkshire, in one of Count Fitzwilliams' parks, he observed a group of deer in a space surrounded and protected by a wire fence. Immediately, he decided to take that novel element to his adoptive country. His first attempt to ship it failed because of a shipwreck, but finally, the wire arrived to Buenos Aires in a ship called "Chalec" by mid 1846. The manor house, the parks, the gardens and the woods that surrounded Estancia Santa María were fenced, to protect the property from the growth of other ranches. In that way, Mr. Richard B. Newton became the introducer of wire fencing into the Río de la Plata, although – in this case – to fence his own house. In 1855, after the victory of the Unitarians, he became a member of the Commission of Landowners of the province of Buenos Aires, and when the Sociedad Rural Argentina was founded, in 1866, he was appointed vice-president. He died in 1868 and has a mausoleum in the British Cemetery of Buenos Aires.

Another foreigner was the first landowner to use wire fencing to demarcate an estate in Argentina. Herr Franz Halbach, later on Consul of H. M. the King of Prussia in Buenos Aires, native of Remscheid, to the West of present-day Germany, had come to Río de la Plata with his father, also in 1819. Called by Juan Cristian Zimmermann, he started working in Zimmermann, Frazier

18 Eduardo Sartelli, op. cit., p. 21-22.

& Co., imports and export company. In 1830, already known as 'Francisco' Halbach, he married a creole woman and established his own firm. Since 1837 he was the representative of the Free City of Bremen in Buenos Aires and, in 1845, he was appointed Consul of Prussia, a position he held until his death. In 1850 Halbach set up his agricultural business, with the acquisition of Estancia Los Remedios, in Cañuelas, a province of Buenos Aires. The same as Newton, he was invited to integrate the Commission of Immigration in 1854 and the Commission of Landowners in 1857, as a consultant of the provincial government. He dedicated himself to the breeding of sheep, imported the first iron ploughs and installed the second steam mill of Buenos Aires in the Plaza de Lorea. In 1854, Don Francisco had travelled to Europe. There he bought wire, indispensable for the task he had decided to undertake. At last, in 1855 he fenced his estate Los Remedios (except for one of the sides adjacent to the river Matanza) with four strands of wire, held to the posts of ñandubay with staples.

He dedicated himself to the rearing of sheep, and in 1859 won the first prize in the second exhibition for livestock and agriculture in Buenos Aires. Herr Halbach died in 1870 and his remains rest in the Recoleta Cemetery, in Buenos Aires. Over time, his estate would be subdivided between his relatives, until in 1945 some lots were expropriated in order to build the Ezeiza airport.

It is pertinent to remember that since 1858, the traditional Argentine exhibition for livestock and agriculture takes place in the porteño neighbourhood of Palermo, in lands that once belonged to Juan Manuel de Rosas, leader of the Federalist party that was defeated in 1852. It is interesting to point out one aspect related to the spatial forms that social forces generate, which show – as we have already seen – traces of their imaginaries. At present, the exhibition centre and fairground that hosts the main rural exhibition of our country is located in the same area, giving continuity to a very precise liberal landmark. It is not less curious that, since May 2005, the Sociedad Rural Argentina (directed by Luciano Miguens and Hugo Biolcati) gave the place “for its commercial exploitation” to the Colombian businessman, naturalized Argentine, Francisco De Narváez.

This businessman is also owner-shareholder of different mass media (*América TV*, newspaper *Ámbito Financiero*, radio *La Red*) and deputy of the province of Buenos Aires for a coalition of opposition parties, with Felipe Solá and Mauricio Macri. Together, with the aforementioned members of the Sociedad Rural Argentina and other agrarian corporations, they took part in the alliance “of the countryside” that in 2008 confronted the government’s

decision to increase the export taxes to soya. Lastly, I'd like to remind that Francisco de Narváez was a member of the cabinet proposed by Carlos Menem for the elections of 2003, and that, during Menem's government, Felipe Solá was the Secretary of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who signed the Resolution 167 on March 25th, 1996, authorizing the experimentation, production and commercialization of soy bean seeds "tolerant to glyphosate of the line 40-3-2, that contain the gene CP4 EPSPS" and its by-products. It was Felipe Solá who authorized the introduction of Monsanto's RR soy bean seeds into the country.

3.

"We have thought of a Decalogue that will be known in a couple of days: it is 'the Menemist Decalogue' for the Reform of the State. The first commandment – in Menem's words – he doesn't know it yet, the first commandment, extracted from one of his many speeches, goes like this: 'Nothing of that which should belong to the State will remain in the hands of the State.'"¹⁹

"The transfer of companies of the food chain to foreign capitals is a good example to understand the behaviour of some actors at this stage: they could either transfer their patrimony or subordinate to the logic of the new 'nucleus of power' and become subordinate actors of the chain. Agribusiness-men chose the former option (selling, and sending their money abroad) and landowners chose the latter."²⁰

The Pampa Húmeda (Humid Pampa) is an extensive region of flat grassland, a square that comprises part of the provinces of Córdoba, Santa Fe, Buenos Aires and Entre Ríos. Its name is due to the hydrological regime that allows to grow crops without the need of artificial watering. At the end of 1860s, communities of immigrants settled there, especially in Santa Fe and Entre Ríos, in the "colonies," that would give origin to and boost the Argentine agriculture, through the production of cereals, first to meet the demands of the local market and then starting to export. The main figure of that process was the capitalist tenant. This figure, together with the contractor, will be extremely important in the development of the agricultural and livestock activity in the country, until our days. Both, tenant and contractor, conform today the social basis for

19 Roberto Dromi, Minister of Public Service during Carlos Menem's government; fragment of his speech announcing the first privatizations, 1989.

20 Norma Giarraca in Rodolfo González Arzac, *¡Adentro!* [Come in!], Ed. Marea, 2009, p. 202.

agribusiness. In 1994, Menem and Cavallo approved the Law 24.441, which established the figure of *Fideicomiso* (Trusts), enabling the conformation of the first agricultural trust funds. After the 2001 crisis, the end of convertibility, the devaluation and subsequent reduction of debts contracted during the '90s, the producers who survived the concentration and accumulation of capital joined the new forms that had appeared during the process of agrarian transformation: since the mid '90s, from the recombination of different forms of access to the land, the country witnessed the appearance of the new and powerful actors of the "Republic of Soya": the farming pools (*pools de siembra*).

The relations between landowners, contractors and tenants in the 19th century gave shape to a model of landownership in Argentina, which remained unchanged until the Peronist government in 1945. The Peronist policies of the late '40s froze the leasing of lands and the credits for acquisition of agricultural machinery, at the time they promoted the local manufacturing of those machines. The freeze on leasing had an important consequence: faced with the decrease of the value of the lands, many owners chose to sell a part of them, what caused the emergence of many new small landowners and producers.

The *Revolución Libertadora* (Liberation Revolution), a military dictatorship that expelled the Peronism from the government and proscribed it, also left its marks in the agricultural and livestock activity, especially regarding landownership, due to the modification of the system of land leasing. The Decree-Law 2188/57 authorized contracts for a maximum of two seasons. It established a form of landownership that would be permanently incorporated to the agrarian practice with the name of *contratismo*. *Accidental* contractors (name given to this kind of land ownership) are different from the producer-contractors and agricultural machine-contractors, because they take third parties' lands and pay for them partly in fixed payments and partly with goods. That is to say, their profitability depends on their production. Other measures of this military government were the closing of *IAPI* (Argentine Institute for the Promotion of Trade), which up to that moment bought the whole harvest, and the opening of *INTA* (National Institute for Agricultural Technology), in charge of the diffusion of new technologies.

The coup also re-established the same taxes on exports that the first military dictatorship, with peculiar mechanisms, had established in the 1930s, and the country joined the International Monetary Fund.

An interesting fact when analysing the process that leads to our present rural model is that it was then, on December 18th, 1956, in Zárate, that a multinational company, deeply involved in the process of soyazation, opened its first plant in Argentina: Monsanto.

MONSANTO

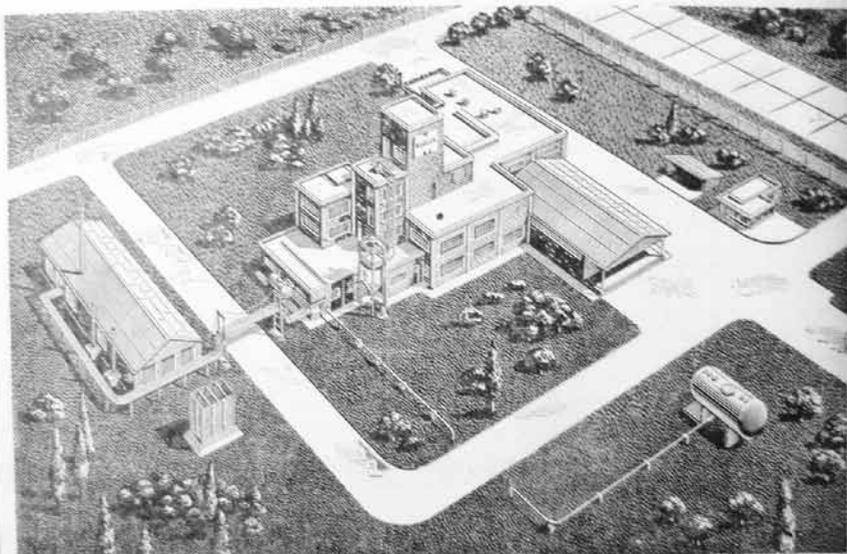
pone en marcha
su planta industrial

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MONSANTO ARGENTINA S. A. I. C.

GALO DE JERARQUÍA PARA LAS FIESTAS



Two things sparked my interest in this period of the Argentine history. On the one hand, that the first Peronist governments in the decade 1945-55 represented a moment of deep political, social, cultural and economic transformations, with significant changes in the legal frameworks that regulated life in our country. Changes in the relations between the state, the public and the private, that included a reform of the National Constitution. Something similar would occur again, although with a totally contrary sign, during the also Peronist governments of the decade 1989-99, which transformed our society again in accordance with the neoliberal ideology, and after the Pacto de Olivos (Treaty of Olivos), achieved another constitutional reform in 1994.

On the other hand, I'm interested in this period because during the conflict in 2008, the government and the rural corporations started a confrontation that – in many respects – used the same language and actions of the historical antinomy between Peronism vs. Anti-Peronism, of racial and class hatred, making it evident how deeply rooted they are in our culture. In relation to the hypothesis that the transgenic culture is infantilizing, (quoting Osvaldo Barsky's and Mabel Dávila's book *La rebelión del campo* (The Rebellion of the Countryside) there was again a "proverbial antinomy that went back to the coup of 1955, 52 years before, when most of the participants hadn't been born or were small children."

4.

*"The owner may be a big or small producer, but the truck with soya has the same price."*²¹

The phenomenon of leasing and sharecropping has a long tradition in Argentina, and it is the origin of a relationship between the owners of important extensions of land and those who develop production processes and give a part of their profit to pay for the rent of the lands. At present, inside agriculturization in Argentina and in the region, the matter is not to increase the extension of lands owned, but to increase the units of exploitation leased, and to unite them under a single organization. Given the high international prices of commodities, leasing has grown noticeably, and small landowners have chosen to lease their lands to the farming pools. This causes that, in view of the demand for cultivable land, landowners, even very small ones, enjoy very profitable conditions. The data of the Censo Agropecuario of 2002 (Agricul-

21 Víctor Trucco in Rodolfo González Arzac, op. cit., p. 117.

tural and livestock Census) show an increase of the combined forms of land ownership (leaseholders and contractors), a process that has speeded up in the last few years. Renters have expanded and captured a big share of the agricultural surplus, transforming Argentine agriculture in a strange case at an international level. Estimates indicate that renters represent more than a half of the holders of units.

The mental postcard of my childhood doesn't exist any more in the soya-world. Between the roads and the private properties behind the wire fences, there are shoulders, strips of land, "public space" in the postcard from the past. Today, toll road concessionaires outsource those strips, renting them to some of the recombinant forms of land ownership, that in a few meters, plant Monsanto's RR soy-seeds to fill their trucks.



Homeland

Herds and post-modern fascism

1.

“We, who, though unworthy, exercise on earth the power of our Lord and seek with all our might to bring those sheep of His flock who are outside into the fold committed to our charge, consider, however, that the Indians are truly men and that they are not only capable of understanding the Catholic Faith but, according to our information, they desire exceedingly to receive it.”

– Pope Paul III, Sublimus Dei Bull, June 2, 1557

“First we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then... their sympathizers, then... those who remain indifferent; and finally we will kill the timid.”

– General Ibérico Saint-Jean, Ex-governor of Buenos Aires, 1977

“So I want the American people to understand that we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and

to prevent their return to either country in the future. That's the goal that must be achieved. That is a cause that could not be more just. And to the terrorists who oppose us, my message is the same: We will defeat you."
– Barack Obama, 2009

While I worked in the creation of images for the “Potosí Principle” project, I started sensing a certain disquiet. Not in the form of a question or curiosity, but of intense intellectual or mental, and also physical, restlessness. Restlessness because I verified that a section of the colonial machinery under analysis is still in effect. A part of that machinery that Bicentennials remind us of: a persistent, lasting part, that works with new energies. A solid chain formed by three links: homeland, God and children.

These links joined inside the machine of domination turned the place we inhabited in our childhood, the place of our ancestors, our home, into a cold, rough and hermetic form, in which the essential ideas of identity, race and religion block all openings, entrances and exits, passages and points of contact. Homeland (the word is taken from the American governmental office, “Homeland Security,” for the prevention of terrorist attacks) is a metaphor for the spatial-political form that occupies a perverse and distorted position in the imaginaries of the ruling elites, along history.

Homeland-Patria enables control and looting, exploitation and racism. In this concept, geography, religion and future generations are merged, and are an adequate and sufficient excuse to make wars, invade, “preventively” attack, torture, kill, exterminate people, and also to destroy nature. In the last 200 years (considering Bicentennials), but also along the history of mankind, I could search for the paths that connect empires, colonialism, imperialism, authoritarianism, totalitarianism and religious fundamentalisms. With own or outsourced forces, violence is committed in the name of the homeland, God or our children.

What can art do in Homeland?

2.

*“Long live the homeland!”*²²

*“Post-modern fascism consists in the dissolution of the democratic State into a pluralization of social technologies that redirect the will to live.”*²⁵

22 Slogan of the producers in different roadblocks, during the agrarian conflict in Argentina, 2008.

23 Santiago López Petít, *Breve tratado para atacar la realidad* [Brief Treatise for At-

*“The Western World has been claiming a set of common values: free market, private property, anti-Statism, individualism, etc., that it tries to spread. This great narrative ends up in a social contract. This contract, which is behind the War-State, establishes an equality (paradoxical) between security and liberty.”*²⁴

In search of memories-potencies, it is clear that I could also find moments in history in which the energies of the socio-cultural experiences were oriented by significations that are very different from those mentioned in the formula *Homeland-Patria*. Mainly if we pay attention to those that go beyond that formula, leaving it behind. Experiences of forms of being (not just existing) on earth and in life.

In present-day Argentina, a supplier of food commodities and mining commodities, with record foreign reserves, the discourse of “insecurity” is imposed. A permanent claim spat out by politicians and almost all of the mass media that supposedly “inform” the population about daily events of delinquency and crime. The discourse of insecurity claims for increased police presence on the streets, more sophisticated equipment for the police, more prisons, more severe punishment and more funding for those purposes. In the beginning of February 2010, the Mayor of Buenos Aires, Mauricio Macri presented a new police, “his” Metropolitan Police, apart from the already existing Federal Police. Then, two armed bodies share and divvy up the control of the security of the citizens.

No doubt we need new categories to think and conceptualize what we are discussing when we talk about “security” and about wanting “to be safe.” Post-modern fascism, the linguistic, intellectual and visual flattening of mass media, the scarce political imagination, have turned our home-neighbourhood-city into a paranoid, oppressive and uninhabitable place.

In big cities, post-modern fascism generated the economic and social conditions for the emergence of what was dubbed the “*pibes chorros*” (the thief kids). In the countryside, it created the conditions for the existence of the “soy children.” In that patriotic, western, modern discourse, that frequently invokes God and the Virgin, the children are the incarnation of the future. However, from the perspective of my present work, I’d like to highlight that, potentially, all the children are soy children. All those who live in regions of the world where nature is subjected to the opening of new markets for agribusiness, for the sale of GM seeds, pesticides, herbicides, agricultural machinery. The soy children are those who depend on the new world organization of labour and

tacking Reality], Tinta Limón, 2009, p. 88.

24 Santiago López Petit, op. cit., p. 88.

the food chains of multinational corporations, with no possibility of defending themselves or giving an opinion. Not only the children who live in the country, the ones near genetically manipulated crops sprayed with glyphosate, the ones who die of cancer or are born with terrible malformations. Not only those whose parents fall ill to die. Not only those used as human flags for fumigation planes either. The soy children are the children of the workers and of the unemployed all over the country. The sons and daughters of soy producers. Of small, mid-sized and big producers. The children of the invisible farming pools and of the employees of Monsanto's sales offices. The children of renters, of contractors and journalists. The soy children are also the children of the cities, including the "*pibes chorros*," cities whose social structures are organized in accordance with the soy chain, a chain that connects direct seeding and open-pit mining in a destructive and looting movement. The soy children are the children of politicians and bankers, of financiers and consultants. The soy children are also all the infantilized adults, treated like kids, with mortgaged lives, with no right to express our opinions and decide changes in our lives, who must be controlled to be obedient and claim for more "security." For us to forget our dreams of a different world, a fairer world, respectful of nature.

3.

*"Liberal individualism as a pluralist logic means (re)production of differences, and its most appropriate name is post-modern fascism. Democratic homogeneity as a logic of identity is the imposition of a principle, and its most appropriate name is war-State. Thus we can affirm that 'really existing democracy' is the articulation of war-State and post-modern fascism."*²⁵

*"To be deployed successfully global mobilization requires a formalism capable of managing the conflicts produced by the deregulation of capital, of canalizing the expressions of the will to live, of neutralizing the political... That formalism is democracy."*²⁶

The historical period that goes from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the present economic and financial crisis originated in the United States of America but with global consequences, such as the difficult situation in Spain (also including the crisis of the neoliberal laboratory in Argentina in 2001 and the 9-11

25 Santiago López Petit, op. cit., p.83.

26 Santiago López Petit, op. cit., p. 79

Twin Towers attacks), has among its main characteristics the collapse of the concept of representation.

Political representation in Western democracies and their institutions, political parties, unions, banks, international organisms, is cracked, like a broken vase that has been glued back together. Everything continues, but how? In a shared exercise of political imagination, I consider it prudent to ask ourselves: Who do kings and monarchies represent today? Is there transgenic blue blood?

In the field of culture, the idea of representation has been central in the history of Western art. After the hegemony of simulation, the present context faces artistic practices with the difficulty, impossibility, or nonsense? of maintaining the pretension of “representing” the realities that surround us. In the same way as the political and the economic systems, art sees its own institutionality affected: museums, galleries, fairs, biennials, curators. In all these cases, the reformulation of the relations between bodies, ideas and ideals is at the centre of the question, reaching its boiling point.

Western democracy, whose main foundation is the concept of political representation, is de-legitimized because its liberating dimension has been seriously damaged. Today democracy works as a market mechanism, subsumed in it. The point is not to maintain the fragments of the broken vase glued together or to inhabit the ruins of the institutions, but to create new spatial and temporal forms that enable the deployment of the will to live, forces that do not close upon themselves, in the Homeland. New forms that can be inhabited by forces that privilege being present over just being.





The washing machine

Recombination, biotechnology and semicapitalism

1.

“The washing industry of the cultural machine appears before our eyes when we observe the pictures that are superimposed to the plans of the museum, giving origin to the centrifugate paths inside ‘normality.’”²⁷

“The new form of production is based on a technological principle that substitutes totalization for recombination. Informatics and biogenetics are based on a principle of

27 Loreto Garín Guzmán, Eduardo Molinari and Federico Zukerfeld, “La papa caliente” [The hot potato] in *Lanormalidad / ExArgentina*, Interzona Editora, Instituto Goethe de Buenos Aires, Edic. Literaria Gabriela Massuh, 2006, p.10.

recombination: units able to multiply themselves, proliferate, recombine themselves, and escape totalization. A new sign can change the meaning of the whole picture."²⁸

*"Post-modern fascism allows something extraordinary: that life itself be the authentic form of subjugation... It is apparently the apotheosis of difference, when in fact it is the strongest and most oppressive consensus. However, its presentation is never political but cultural."*²⁹

In March 2006 I took part in a collective of artistic coordination for the organization of the last stage of the project *ExArgentina*, the exhibition "Lanormalidad," in Buenos Aires, together with the German artists and curators Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann, and the Argentine artists, members of the group *Etcétera* and the *Internacional Errorista* (Errorist International), Loreto Garín Guzmán and Federico Zukerfeld. The project focused on the "normalizing" political discourse that sought to leave behind the 2001 crisis. The political, economic, social and cultural consequences of that crisis, however, were still in sight and coexisted with the first hints of a new national and international situation. The government of Néstor Kirchner (2003-2007) bet on a re-composition of the initiatives that the state had lost during the neoliberal period: job creation, recovery of the internal market and a call to the national bourgeoisie to demonstrate their commitment to the productive model.

Nevertheless, a feature was becoming prominent in Argentine economy, and the government would soon pay special attention to it: the enormous expansion of the agrarian frontier.

Among its political aims, Kirchernism started a new stage in the struggle for memory, truth and justice regarding state terrorism, by declaring null the laws of *Obediencia Debida* (Due Obedience) and *Punto Final* (Final Point), starting new trials and sending many repressors, torturers and murderers of the last military dictatorship to prison. It shyly attempted the construction of alliances outside its party (Justicialist Party) following the transversal logic of the social movements of 2001, although the attempt lasted for a short time. Instead, it strengthened the idea of a "national and popular project," faithful to the traditions of the leftist and Peronist militants of the seventies. This was not welcome by social sectors linked to the neoliberalism of the '90s, nor by other forces that resisted that project, who expected – in vain – a step forward in the construction of the "new politics." The fact is that Néstor Kirchner got

28 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, op. cit., p. 8.

29 Santiago López Petit, op. cit., p. 88-89.

support from electoral majorities and had a positive image during almost all of his term in office, considering the possibility of a re-election.

Finally, the candidate was his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who won the presidential elections in 2007. However, the national and popular programme, despite the State (almost dead in the national political and economic design) had taken the initiative, was overshadowed by the permanence of some structures originated in the logic of neoliberal Menemism. The tension between that persistence and the will to change is one of the characteristic of the Kirchner period, and the conflict with the farmers was one of its extreme manifestations. It was essential, in that context of “return to normality,” to ask ourselves some questions about the relationship between art and politics. Also regarding the hierarchical structures of the contemporary art system. It was necessary to have a clear position before the “normalizing” response that the Argentine art system was giving to the activist and militant practices of the ‘90s. That response was the creation by the artistic institutions, but also by the intellectuals that had offered theoretical support to the hegemonic practices of the ‘90s, of a new conceptual category: “art and politics.” Suddenly, the doors of legitimation were open for those who wished it. From our point of view the word “and” was absolutely superfluous, since all art is political.

The washing machine started to work and we knew we could end up inside of it.

Can semiocapitalism and its industries work as a huge laundry? Can its museum institutions become huge washing machines, that through their exhibition and cataloguing systems try to whitewash and “purify” social conflicts, discrimination, xenophobia, wars, genocides, poverty and the destruction of nature?

2.

“One of the problems of the politics of subjectivation that artistic practices face has been the anesthesia of our vulnerability to the other – an anesthesia all the more devastating when the other is represented by the ruling cartography as hierarchically inferior, because of his or her economic, social or racial condition, or on any other basis. But vulnerability is the precondition for the other to cease being a simple object for the projection of pre-established images, in order to become a living presence, with whom we can construct the territories of our existence and the changing contours of our subjectivity. Now, being vulnerable depends on the activation of a specific capacity of the sensible, which has been repressed for many centuries, remaining active only in

*certain philosophical and poetic traditions. These traditions culminated in the artistic vanguards of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, whose activity produced effects that have left their mark on art across the twentieth century. More broadly, they propagated throughout the social tissue, ceasing to be a privilege of the cultural elites, particularly from the 1960s on. Neuroscience itself, in recent research, corroborates this observation that each of our sense organs is the bearer of a double capacity: cortical and subcortical. This is... the “resonant body.”*⁵⁰

*“Living Modified Organism: Any living organism that possesses a novel combination of genetic material obtained through modern biotechnology.”*⁵¹

*“Farming pool is any of the possible combinations by means of which farming is carried out. A frequent form is the combination of a landowner, a contractor and an agronomist, who arrange a production in which each one contributes their resources (land, labour and supplies, respectively) and they share profits according to their participation.”*⁵²

Semiocapitalism imposes its artistic dynamics, organizing cultural industries. I’m interested in going deeper into the relation between the recombinant dynamics of biotechnology and the soya world, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, into the washing machine of the transgenic culture.

For that purpose, we will pick up the image we proposed in the introduction: the trucks.

In accordance with the privatizing experience of the 1990s, a new modality appeared in our ways of circulating and travelling: toll roads.

To circulate we need an authorization or we must pay.

On the way to the Bicentenary, three tolls organize the functioning of the recombinant transgenic culture: The first toll is the exchange of History for Memory: transforming energies of socio-cultural experiences and their search for new “institutional” forms are obstructed and normalized. The toll-exchange makes that all our energies concentrate on remembering (and displaying memories of) past struggles, instead of continuing them in the pres-

30 Suely Rolnik, “Geopolítica del rufián” [“The Geopolitics of Pimping”] in *Micro-política, cartografías del deseo* [Micro-politics, Cartographies of Desire], Félix Guattari & Suely Rolnik, Tinta Limón, 2005, p. 479-480. Available at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/rolnik/en>.

31 <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/publi/gmo/fullrep/gloss.htm>

32 INTA in Osvaldo Barsky-Mabel Dávila, *La rebelión del campo, historia del conflicto agrario argentino*, 2008, p. 91.

ent. The result of this exchange is the transformation of these memories in mummies (similar to those exhibited in museums trying to account for the death of native American cultures), and also, the loss of the historic dimension of our present existences, since history – after crossing the toll barrier – is only “past.”

Finding modes of recuperating the historicity of our present lives, of asking common questions for common problems, of sharing memories-potencies and of creating inhabitable spatial and temporal forms, are at the centre of the challenge for activist and artistic practices. This reflection doesn't mean to devalue the creation of spaces of memory in Argentina, nor in any place in the world where the struggles for memory, truth and justice regarding state terrorism might be necessary. On the contrary, it tries to highlight – inside these struggles – the dangers of the banalization of memory as an instrument for social changes.

The second toll is the anaesthesia of the resonant body. I have already talked about the erosion of the concept of representation, in its political, economic and artistic dimensions. About the present impossibility or nonsense of trying to “represent” the realities that surround us, or the subjectivities of struggles and resistances. The paradigms of militant, activist and/or artist are in question. The matter is not to “represent” the fighters, but to be present together, to be living presences, with our own voices. I'm talking about the relations between bodies, ideas and ideals, about incarnations.

The incarnations of the political-artistic movements of the 1960s and 1970s had a distinctive feature: the link between ideals, ideas and bodies was so strong, that it gave sacrifice, the sacrifice of one's own life for the sake of transformation, a central place as an instrument for collective changes. I'm not interested in a nostalgic look at those subjectivities, nor do I consider that we must repeat their paradigms. Instead, I don't want to leave them alone or forget them. I want to look for modes of continuing their searches and struggles, since many of the realities of injustice and poverty of those times continue at present.

The neoliberal response of the 1980s (in the words of Suely Rolnik) was the pimping of those subjectivities. Once many of the survivors are pimped, simulation will be the form in which the political-cultural practices of the '90s become strong. Simulation imposed new relations between ideals, ideas and bodies: different from illusion, which is an imagination or deceit of the senses that surprises us, simulation means the rational and voluntary construction of a fiction, a falsification.

In Argentina simulation took – among others – the form of currency convertibility (Menem’s and Cavallo’s fixed pegging of one-to-one parity between the *peso* and the US dollar).

During the years of the dismantling of the State, of the looting of the State and natural resources, of the increase of unemployment, the hegemonic artistic practices had in their theoretical repertoire the negation of context and history, the valuation of “perfumed moments,” “zero degree curation,” the paradigm of the “wandering artist”

Later, in the last years of the decade and up to the 2001 crisis, artistic practices were organized by the concepts of “beauty and happiness,” the “coin of wish” and the “technologies of friendship.” The notion of militancy or mere involvement in politics left its place to some kind of “role play,” in which hyper-real simulation dismantled the notion of representation (to do away with it), but also devastated the presentation or resonant presence, our own and the others.’ Finally, simulation took the place of experience, and anaesthesia won over vulnerability. The rhetorical operations chosen for that purpose by hegemonic artists were the parody or tragicomedy. Faced with that passivity, we feel the need for aesthetic and political activism.

We have already discussed the third toll in the first part of this chapter. Overwhelmed by the presence and visibility of aesthetics and practices different from the ones mentioned above, curators, theorists, managers, officials created the categories of “art and politics,” “art and activism” or “artivism.” A normalizing attempt and an ethical judgement of the entrance to institutions: the gesture of the intellectual in the Argentine contemporary art system – from an almost “divine” position, outside their earthly involvement with the matter in question – wasn’t very friendly with the practices that long before had crossed the borders between art “and” politics. However, there was no going back, and although in 2010 it is a fact that the artistic field has expanded, as regards the incorporation of new actors (before disdained), there hasn’t been a true democratization, nor are there more spaces for discussion and debate. Indeed, exhibition and sales spaces have been opened. In this part of the cultural route, the toll is still very expensive: the political is accepted as an “artistic topic,” but if the images are part of an incarnation, different from those of the artist who produces objects for sale or if they constitute a serious criticism of the institutions (public or private) or, if, finally, they question the material conditions of work without fees or contracts, the lack of interlocutors evidences that the silence of the ‘90s is heard again. Normalization is still a goal.

The transgenic culture recombines these three operations (history for memory, anaesthesia of the resonant body, and creation of the category “art

and politics”) and generates the conditions for the legitimation, distribution and circulation of artistic images.

“Hasta la Victoria Ocampo!”³³

In the last few years this recombination includes the interest for artistic formation and education. After the last *Documenta* in Kassel (2007) – one of whose leitmotifs was the state of education – the establishment artists of the ‘90s, who didn’t care about the dismantling of the primary and secondary public school systems, the attempts of privatizing higher education or the fate of public artistic education, today they focus on this aspect of contemporary art. The same actors that negated context, that judged activist practices for entering institutions and for joining international projects under foreign directions, now “discuss exhaustively the problem of artistic formation.”

Derived from that, something curious links the contemporary art world to the soy-world: the artists who since 2006 “discuss exhaustively” the problems of formation finally created a space in 2009. Faithful to their aesthetic taste for parody and simulation, the new institution managed *ad-honorarium* is named: “C.I.A.” Under the legal umbrella of Fundación Start, of a well known performance in the ‘90s, “C.I.A.” (Centre for Artistic Investigations) has a teaching staff, sponsors, contributors and a club of friends, that includes the figure of “benefactors.” What I consider relevant in this new institutional-ity, born in the context of the “agrarian conflict” and the dispute over export taxes on soya, is to ascertain that recombinant operations of semiocapitalism require the recombination of the same actors, but cultural renovation or greater democratization don’t seem to be among its goals. Nor the increase of the budget for public artistic education nor the improvement of the legal conditions for artistic work.

What cultural and artistic formation changes could we expect from the simultaneous recombination of the following elements: a) the “*tragicomic videos with a gauchesco atmosphere*”³⁴ produced by a dominant artist at the peak of violence of the conflict in 2008; b) the same artist’s nephew appointed, since 2007, director of the Centro Cultural Rojas (Rojas Cultural Centre), an emblem of the aesthetics of the ‘90s; and, finally, c) a lawyer, father of the director of the Rojas and brother of the author of the tragicomic videos, as

33 A pun on Che Guevara’s words: “Until Victory Always”. Victoria Ocampo was an aristocratic Argentine writer. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeUvPregRh4>

34 <http://www.ciacentro.org/node/105>

a benefactor of the C.I.A. and legal representative of the farming pool “Los Grobo”? It looks like there are some landlords in the field of art.

I suggest those who like inductive logic (logic mastered by the Argentine writer and militant Rodolfo Walsh and the Italian historian Carlo Guinzburg, among others) to follow those clues in the web, and to find some connections between figures, institutions and interests, of course, that the cultural soya rhizome deploys.³⁵

35 <http://www.fundacionkonex.org/premios/premioano.asp?idano=44> http://www.lanacion.com.ar/nota.asp?nota_id=967119





The soy children *Guinea pigs and glyphocide*

1.

“...And the gods celebrated, and each one sent a present to the newborn: strength, courage, a long life, perseverance, discipline, wisdom, comprehension... Finally, goddess Kannon stared at the baby, took off her necklace, and with each of her nine hands placed nine golden pearls over the cradle. ‘The child already has heaven, so many are his gifts. Then, he has to conquer the earth’... And the pearls turned into seeds, that once planted multiplied and, once harvested, fed millions.”⁵⁶

According to traditional narratives, the discoverer of soya was the Chinese Emperor Shen Nung (2738 - 2696 B.C.) who, besides having large extensions of land for growing it, dedicated himself to study its nutritional and

36 Anonymous, oriental legend, in Osvaldo Barsky-Mabel Dávila, op. cit., p. 29

medicinal properties. Shen Nung, revered in China as the father of agriculture, is the author of *The Divine Farmer's Herb-Root Classic (Pen Tsao Gong Mu)*, in 2383 B.C., considered the first book of medicine, which includes a text dedicated to soya.

Present in myths and numerous legends, the Chinese say that the five sacred seeds appeared on earth after a war among gods: soy, barley, rice, millet and oats, all of them essential in eastern food.

According to Barsky-Dávila in *La rebelión del campo* (The Rebellion of the Countryside), the first plantations of soya in Argentina were carried out in 1862, or in 1898, according to R. Agrasar. In both cases the crops didn't arouse interest among the local agricultural producers. There were new attempts by state organisms and private companies (Gobecia S.A., Bunge & Born) between 1912 and 1925, but they weren't successful either. The main reasons were not agricultural, but commercial: the lack of an internal market and the lack of conditions to compete abroad.

Between 1931 and 1945, years of its short existence, the world's largest soya exporter was Manchuria, a protectorate designed by Japan in the North of China.

An important figure in the history of soya in our country was the agricultural engineer Ramón J. E. Agrasar, who, around 1955, after several study trips to the United States, founded the company Agrosoja S.R.L. in partnership with Brandt Laboratorios S.A. and Engineer Ruzo, to import American seeds and organize tests in experiment stations. Between the end of the '30s and beginning of the '60s, soya plantations seldom exceeded 1.000 hectares. On July 5th, 1962, soya was exported for the first time, on the ship "Alabama," which carried 6,000 tons to Hamburg, Germany. In 1965, the Junta Nacional de Granos (National Grain Commission) established quality standards for its commercialization.

The big soya expansion in Argentina had its origins in the early '70s because of a particular situation: a decrease in the production of fish flour in Peru, first world producer. Faced with this, the Secretary of Agriculture, Horacio Giberti, found that soya flour offered an opportunity for the country's exports. So they imported 80 tons of varieties of soya, that from almost 80,000 hectares planted in the beginning of the 70's grew to 1,200,000 in five years, and to 2,040,000 ten years later. The intensification of the agricultural production resulted in increased tillage, the abandonment of crop-livestock rotation, green fertilizers and different periods for letting the land rest, which caused, towards the end of the '80s, a decrease in yields due to soil depletion and erosion.

Since the end of World War II, many multinational companies that produce agricultural supplies introduced herbicide 2-4D to the market, a very important innovation since it enabled the development of direct seeding (no-till farming). This herbicide with high toxicity would be, later on, a component of the infamous “Agent Orange,” that the United States military sprayed over the jungles of Vietnam and Cambodia. Herbicides are agrototoxic chemicals used for weed control. In the 1960s the herbicide Paraquat came to the market and the American factories of agricultural machinery developed the first seed drills for direct seeding.

In Argentina, the Centro Nacional de la Soja (National Centre for Soya) was created in the Agricultural and Livestock Experiment Station in Marcos Juárez, province of Córdoba in 1974. And in 1977 (during the last military dictatorship) the city of Marcos Juárez hosted the first National No-Till Conference, organized by INTA, “*with the support of chemical supplies companies and manufacturers of agricultural machinery,*” according to Barsky-Dávila. By the end of the ‘70s, cultivated lands through direct seeding reached 5.000 hectares. Although the number is low, the promoters of the new system had accomplished a significant achievement: they had formed a network that articulated producers, manufacturers of machinery and agrochemicals, seeders and consultants.

2.

“I don’t say ‘goodbye,’ I say ‘see you.’”

– José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz, Minister of Economy, speech on his resignation, 1981

In 1984, in the United States, researchers reported the first cloning (since its detection in Petunias) of the gene that determines the action of the enzyme EPSPS, whose action is inhibited by the herbicide glyphosate. A year later, they obtained a gene tolerant to the herbicide Roundup Ready (RR), brand name of Monsanto’s glyphosate.

In 1986, INTA created the Project for Conservation Agriculture, that connected the institution to researchers, private consultants, producers, supply companies, the state universities of Rosario and Buenos Aires, and the Banco de la Nación (National Bank) (which granted loans to agricultural producers). Its goal: the expansion of direct seeding and its application to double-cropping soybeans and wheat.

The Argentine Association of No-till Producers (AAPRESID) was founded in 1989. Then, glyphosate was imported from China. Direct seeding

started its expansion by the end of the '80s, for the already mentioned reasons related to low yields of the soils. With direct seeding, specially designed machines place the seeds in the ground at a depth that requires minimal soil disturbance, replacing the use of ploughs and minimizing tillage.

On May 29th, 1992, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States (under the government of Bill Clinton) published its regulations concerning “foods derived from new plant varieties” in the Federal Register. Food products created by biotechnology were to be subject to the same rules as food created from the natural selection of species.

*“Food products derived from plant varieties which have been developed by the new methods of genetic modification are regulated within the same framework and with the same approach as those which are the product of traditional plant breeding.”*³⁷

The principle of “Substantial Equivalence” features in a paragraph of the FDA regulations which are central to the controversy surrounding Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs), as follows:

*“In most cases the substances expected to become components of food as a result of genetic modification will be the same as or substantially similar to substances commonly found in food such as proteins, fats and oils, and carbohydrates.”*³⁸

The US Environmental Protection Agency approved use of Roundup herbicide with herbicide-tolerant soya beans was granted in 1995, allowing the commercialization of Monsanto’s RR soy since 1996. In that year, in Argentina there were about 6,000,000 hectares of soya planted and the production amounted to 12,000,000 tons.

On March 25th, 1996, the Secretary of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food during Carlos Menem’s government, engineer Felipe Solá, signed the Resolution 167, authorizing the experimentation, production and commercialization of glyphosate-tolerant soybeans, and their by-products. This decision had enormous economic but also ecological and cultural consequences. A new step in the expansion of soyazation by multinational companies (Monsanto, Syngenta, DuPont, Bayer, Cargill, Nidera, Louis Dreyfus, Dow AgroSci-

37 Food and Drug Administration, “Statement of policy: foods derived from new plant varieties”, Federal Register, vol.57, n°104, 29 May 1992, in <http://www.combat-monsanto.co.uk/spip.php?article317>

38 Idem.

ences, Asgrow/Dekalb, Massey Ferguson, John Deere, among others), enabled by the new legislation to deploy, commercially as well as territorially, their new technological packs, chemical products and agricultural machinery in Argentina.

Something curious, however, marked the landing of Monsanto's RR soya in the country: the company had granted a licence for the use of the gene in the USA to Asgrow/Dekalb, whose subsidiary in Argentina was acquired by another biotechnology and agribusiness giant, the Dutch-based multinational Nidera. This recombinant operation prevented Monsanto from patenting their products in Argentina and from collecting royalties or restricting the use of their seeds, at the time it facilitated the sale of seeds outside the legal commercial circuit, a phenomenon known as the "bolsa blanca" (white bag). The "white bag" allows producers or simple intermediaries, to make use of the seeds, without having to pay for intellectual property rights to the companies that developed those species biotechnologically. Up to now (2010), Monsanto doesn't collect royalties for the intellectual property rights of RR soya seeds.

Does anybody remember the *Ekeko*?

3.

"... 'making money from money' without having to go through the detour of production, what would mean to crash against reality. The process goes as follows: creation of fictitious capital from real capital, then fictitious capital from fictitious capital... In this sense, global time-space is the practical realization of the capitalist utopia."³⁹

"First, they start fumigating the corners, what is called 'esquinero' (corner). Then, you have to walk 24 steps from the last place over which the 'mosquito' (plane) passed, from the middle of the machine, and stand up there. Sometimes we help them fill the tank. When it is windy the spray wets your face. With a 'mosquito' they cover 100 or 150 hectares a day. Two flagmen are needed, one for the way out and one for the return. We work from sunrise to sunset. Sometimes they give us lunch, and sometimes they take us home, it depends on the farmer."⁴⁰

The 2008 conflict between the government and the "people from the countryside" because of Resolution 125 affected my energies, shaking me violently at the very moment of my reconnection with my country. I decided to investi-

39 Santiago López Petit, op. cit., p. 47.

40 <http://www.proteger.org.ar/doc565.html>

gate the soya phenomenon, trying to understand why a tax to a crop had triggered such a confrontation, that included – among its most violent methods – throwing away food on the roads. One of the first things I read then was an “old” piece of news (2006) on the Internet. The article had been published in the newspaper *La Capital* of Rosario and related what happened in the town of Las Petacas, to the North of Santa Fe. There, producers of GM soya used children, aged between 14 and 16, as human flags, living signals to guide the planes that spray glyphosate over the fields, so that their work is done efficiently. The article had no pictures but it did have children’s statements, that were enough stimulus for my first visualizations of the situation. I kept on searching until I found the first images of the effects of agro-toxic chemicals on the health of the population of soya-planted regions. Images published on the web by different ecology groups and associations or defenders of rural models different from the one in effect.

Also, images of old TV programs that had dealt with the topic when nobody paid attention to it and finally, images and texts of local organizations in fumigated towns. I followed Jorge Eduardo Rulli’s radio programme and publications. Rulli is the co-founder of the Rural Reflection Group (GRR) and coordinator of the campaign “Stop the Spraying,” that informs about cases of people and towns in Argentina that suffer the effects of the indiscriminate use of agro-toxic chemicals, but above all, tries to raise awareness for people to defend themselves from the consequences of agribusiness, through collective work and knowledge of legal instruments. Through GRR’s material I knew of shocking cases, such as Marta Cian’s, from Líbaros, in the province of Entre Ríos, who, every day, has to wear a mask, similar to those used by soldiers in the World War I, to protect herself from poisonous gases.

Or Fabián Tomasi, ex-fumigator and flagman, in Basavilbaso, in the same province: “No one ever explained to us the quality of the water, I’ve learnt about it later on. We wore women stockings, tights on the mouth for the slime not to pass, to cover the mouth of the pipe in the airplane. That was the only treatment for the water. I’ve worked as a flagman many times and, although they deny it to doctor Graciela Gómez, I know they keep on doing it for the sake of practicality. There are many pilots who don’t know how to use GPS, so it is easier to place an employee on the field with a bag to mark the lot and generally, in order not to waste time, one ducks down, we ducked when that spray fell on our backs, it was poison, but we were happy and thanked the pilot for cooling us.”⁴¹

41 <http://www.medioymedio.com.ar/nacionales/1267-glifosato-condenados-en-el-aire.html>

At present, in Argentina there are over 16 millions hectares of GM soya. For this surface to exist, it was necessary to implement the direct seeding system, and this is possible only using glyphosate. In the season 1996-97, the consumption of that agro-chemical was around 28 millions of litres, but in 2008 it grew to 180-200 millions of litres. To be more precise, the glyphosate used in this lands is Roundup, Monsanto's herbicide, which contains the surfactant POEA.

It is impossible to use it pure because it has to be diluted for its spraying, through any of the methods of fumigation. The most traditional one consisted of a manual backpack-type sprayer, carried by a person. Nowadays "*mosquitos*" are used, in three forms: airplanes, self-propelled vehicles or machines that have to be dragged. In this sense, it is important to make clear that glyphosate, when sprayed resembles the mist of a spray bottle, and so, its drift is very likely, especially when it is sprayed by planes. It is less likely with the use of self-propelled vehicles. However these – when going through towns, before or after the task – can drop agro-toxic substances, that fall on the roads or the ground. Chemicals can also fall on trees or water courses. Another problem is washing the machines, which are kept and washed in urban areas, in many cases illegally and almost always, disregarding norms of prevention. The same happens with aircrafts that take off and land on aeroclubs, and cross villages dropping poison. Also dangerous are the containers of the agro-toxic chemicals, which are often re-used, even for daily tasks such as feeding animals.

The expansion of single-crop farming (RR soya) has done away with the traditional green belts for the reduction of impacts in villages, which also had gardens and orchards and bred animals. Now, soya reaches the first streets of villages and so do fumigations.

Grain storage represents another dramatic aspect of the use of agro-toxic chemicals. We could even conclude that the problem is the urban planning of the soya model. In many cases, for the comfort of farmers, grain storage is housed in huge silos located at the centre of villages and towns, and so, with their venting to prevent grain against moisture, they spread toxic particles.

Thousands of trucks loaded with grain cross the fields towards the ports, leaving behind a trail of toxic particles that the beans transport. Usually one can see the emptying of the control pipes in the streets of villages.

Soyazation moves forward because other landscapes withdraw. Transgenic soya is, on the one hand, synonymous with clearing forests. In 2007 the average of deforestation, considering only six provinces, was 280,000 hectares a year, being the provinces of Chaco, Salta and Santiago del Estero the

most affected ones. On the other hand, soil nutrients are lost too. Although soya is not different from other plants, recent research has discovered a notorious insufficiency of phosphorus in the soils. It is evident that we need policies to stop the destruction of natural ecosystems. In many cases, the mentioned clearing is carried out with fire, and it isn't done to grow soya, but to move cattle to lower-quality soils, or to breed that cattle with the feedlot system. Big smoke columns could be seen during the 2008 conflict in the cities of Rosario and Buenos Aires, making visible (and paradoxically reducing the visibility of the inhabitants) an activity unknown to urban populations until that moment.



4.

“The therapeutic power erases the enemy. Power gets dressed as a therapist and the oppressed becomes a patient. The therapist gives security and it is the patient himself who looks for that security. The privatizing individualization that post-modern fascism

develops becomes radical and turns against the individual. I'm the only responsible for failures because I don't know how to manage the life I have."⁴²

*"Capital no longer needs to take care of a human being to be able to steal the objective time the person has. It can take over discrete fragments of time to recombine them in a separate sphere from the individual life of the labourer."*⁴³

In spite of all the problems that have been already exposed, the worst danger could still be ahead: a sanitary catastrophe as a consequence of the "massive eco-toxicological experiment," as the Argentine scientist Andrés Carrasco referred to the situation of ignorance regarding the final results of the permanent rain of agrochemicals over such a large territory. Cancer has already become an epidemic in thousands of Argentine villages, as well as spontaneous miscarriages, sterility and malformations in newborns, besides of skin, sight, lung, or heart diseases, which are too frequent.

I want to mention (following a report by GRR) two emblematic cases: the Mothers of Ituzaingó Anexo, a neighbourhood in the suburbs of the city of Córdoba, and the population near the port of San Lorenzo, in the industrial area in the outskirts of Rosario, province of Santa Fe.

Ituzaingó has 5,000 inhabitants of which 200 suffer from cancer. There are cases of youths between 18 and 25 with tumours in their heads, and children aged 22 and 23 already deceased. There are also 13 cases of children with leukaemia. "In every block you can see women with their heads covered or kids with masks, because of chemotherapy and leukaemia," says one of the Mothers. They were the first organization of people affected by fumigations to make a formal complaint, more than ten years ago, due to the notorious advance of diseases in the neighbourhood. They were said to be "crazy."

Finally, they succeeded in making legal authorities prohibit glyphosate spraying in the neighbourhood, considering that action constitutes a penal crime. The Mothers of Ituzaingó were the first to denounce the complicity between soya producers and political authorities.

"They told us glyphosate was inert, that it got in contact with the soil and became innocuous and it did nothing to us, that it was the healthiest substance in the world, if handled with care as any chemical. When over the years you get to know that, for example 2,4-D, a liquid they said to be harmless, is banned in the USA, that it causes cancer, you realize they have always used us as guinea pigs. One can ignore some

42 Santiago López Petit, op. cit., p. 98.

43 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, op. cit., p. 90.

things, but once one knows, it would be very naive not to go into depth to see what is really happening."⁴⁴

The port of San Lorenzo is a symbol in Argentine history, closely related to the Bicentenary, because there, in the banks of the wide Paraná river, was the baptism of fire of General San Martín's Regimiento de Granaderos a Caballo (Horse Grenadier Regiment), that defeated the royal Spanish forces for the first time in 1813. At present, San Lorenzo is part of a complex of port facilities, next to the town of General San Martín, that comprises shipping terminals and private docks between kilometers 435 and 459 of the Paraná river. It is one of the most important ports for exports, and covers the following industries: grain and by-products, oil, combustibles, hydrocarbons, chemical and petro-chemical minerals. The following companies are located in this complex: Vicentín S.A., ACA (Association of Argentine Cooperatives), La Plata Cereal S.A., Alfred C. Toepfer Internacional S.A. (former Bunge & Born), Nidera Argentina S.A., Cargill S.A., La Terminal S.A. (group comprised of Aceitera General Deheza S.A., Aceitera Chabas S.A., Aceitera Buyatti S.A., Aceitera Guipera S.A., Aceitera Tankai S.A. and Oleaginosa Río IV S.A. The dock of this terminal was built in 1996), Refinería Refisan S.A. (former YPF), ESSO SAPA, Gas Litoral Privado-YPF S.A., Petroquímica Argentina S.A., Resinfor Metanol S.A. (part of the group Louis Dreyfus), Minera Alumbreira Ltd., Imperial Chemical Industries and Pecom Agra S.A. (which belongs to Pérez Companc and Conagra). Also in the city of San Lorenzo, with their silos and truck parking lots, are the companies Molinos Río de la Plata, ACA (Association of Argentine Cooperatives, one of whose silos exploded on 26 April 2002), ICI Argentina, and the refineries Petrobras and San Lorenzo.

When they transport their crops, rows of trucks cross the town: an endless traffic of trucks, 24 hours a day. The organization of neighbours, legally represented by Norma Tenaglia, succeeded in modifying this situation, achieving the interruption of traffic at night, but this cost the lawyer her license to practice law and being threatened. Besides, the companies have built a kind of "parallel" road, in order not to stop the traffic of trucks. Truck drivers sometimes spend almost a month beside their vehicle until they reach the port.

44 Gustavo Barletta in Jorge E. Rulli, *Pueblos fumigados, los efectos de los plaguicidas en las regiones sojeras* [*Fumigated Towns. The Effects of Pesticides in Soya Regions*], Del Nuevo Extremo, 2009, p. 146-147.

5.

“Glyphosate is like bayaspirin.”⁴⁵

“The key is to become aware.”⁴⁶

Dr. Kaczewer is a physician graduated from Universidad de Buenos Aires, who conducts research in ecological and toxicological issues, and is a member of GRR. According to him, the links between exposure and occupational or environmental disease, even with new and not well known toxins, are quickly detected, but prevention measures, instead, come too late. It is not the same to isolate a particular microbe than to identify clearly a home or work environment or epicentre at toxicological risk. What is in danger in the present situation is an ecosystem integrated by inhabitants of rural villages, animals, plants and the soil.

Dr. Kaczewer uses the term “glifocidio” (glyphocide) (glyphosate + genocide + ecocide). In his research on glyphosate, he was able to determine, for example, that the quantity of Roundup (glyphosate + surfactant POEA) required to kill rats is three times lower than that of pure glyphosate. As regards the effects of spraying over soya areas on human health, long-term impacts can result from a single exposure to high doses of herbicides or pesticides, as well as from exposures to lower levels but over longer periods of time.

Problems can crop up a long time after exposure, and without people knowing that they have been exposed to the effects of agro-chemicals.

This ignorance is possible because many physicians (unbelievably irresponsible, due to fear and labour precarization, if not to complicity) deny the association between symptoms and exposure to agro-chemicals in the clinical records of patients from affected areas. This social ignorance about the issue derives from the lack of dissemination of scientific information contrary to the hegemonic model. This would indicate the existence of a paradoxical academic-scientific-industrial-military complex that goes against the basic principles of science: open and disinterested investigation of the causes of natural processes. Studies related to glyphosate are sufficient, at least, for the creation of a new set of regulations to guarantee the safety of the population.

Although affected adults can see the signs of a critical health situation, the babies-in-information, infants and children are the most vulnerable to the

45 Gustavo Grobocopatel interviewed by Jorge Lanata in DDT (*Después de todo*) [*After all*], Channel 26, 2009.

46 Víctor Trucco in Rodolfo González Arzac, op. cit., p. 117

effects of spraying and agro-toxical substances. Clearly, they are not exposed themselves (except for the notorious cases of “flagboys”) but are affected by exposures that wouldn’t be toxicologically significant in adults. And the time between exposure and adverse effects is much shorter for children.

Spontaneous miscarriages, babies born dead, harelips or malformations of limbs, neurological dysfunctions, neural tube defects, leukaemia, and cancer are some of the consequences.

Children, as they are growing up, have a lesser detoxifying capacity. Pediatricians say that “children are not small adults,” and this is very important in this situation, because in the same scene, the levels of vulnerability are very different. Besides of being more in contact with the ground, children breathe more air, eat more food and drink more water per kilo of body weight than adults. Besides, the exposure to pesticides that their parents can suffer, especially their mothers, has terrible consequences, since milk and food are other ways in which children become in contact with chemicals.

“...glyphosate is a chemical product that can cause incidents of poisoning, from mild to severe, or even death. The lethal dose in an adult is of 100-150 ml., taken orally.”⁴⁷

However, glyphosate is never used pure, but in cocktails. In the beginning, Monsanto’s advertisements maintained that it was a low-toxicity herbicide, to eliminate weed. Then there was a Roundup with an active ingredient of 41%. However that dose was increased, and Roundup Max has an active ingredient of 74%, what demonstrates that each time a larger quantity but also with a higher percentage of the active ingredient is sprayed over the lands. Severe poisoning in adults causes the following symptoms: gastrointestinal pain, massive loss of gastrointestinal fluid, excess of lung fluid, lung congestion or dysfunction, pneumonia, loss of consciousness and destruction of red blood cells, abnormal electrocardiograms, low blood pressure, and renal damage or failure. Indeed, what is common with this kind of poison, most severe problems occur some time later, when it is difficult to establish a relationship between exposure and disease, which is usually lethal: cancer.

Roundup activates what is known as checkpoint (control proteins) in the cells. Each cell has two of them, which are only activated when there are problems of cell division.

47 *Manual de Atención Primaria de Intoxicaciones [First Aid Manual for the Management of Poisoning]*, Ministry of Health, Argentine Nation, Book II, Special Part, 2002, p. 374-5.

Roundup interferes with the synthesis of DNA, as carcinogens do. Once checkpoints have been activated, there are three possibilities: repairing of DNA, cellular suicide or, neither repairing nor death, because the gene that regulates the functioning of the checkpoint has been affected: that is how the process of cancer is activated.

“All inhabitants are entitled to the right to a healthy and balanced environment fit for human development in order that productive activities shall meet present needs without endangering those of future generations; and shall have the duty to preserve it. As a first priority, environmental damage shall bring about the obligation to repair it according to law. The authorities shall provide for the protection of this right, the rational use of natural resources, the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage and of the biological diversity, and shall also provide for environmental information and education. The Nation shall regulate the minimum protection standards, and the provinces those necessary to reinforce them, without altering their local jurisdictions. The entry into the national territory of present or potential dangerous wastes, and of radioactive ones, is forbidden.”⁴⁸

“The interpretation and application of the present law, and every other norm by means of which environmental policies are implemented, will be subject to comply with the following principles. (...) Prevention principle: The causes and sources of environmental problems will be attended to with priority and in an integrated way, trying to prevent the negative effects that may occur in the environment. Precautionary principle: When there could be danger of severe or irreversible damage, the lack of scientific information or certainty will not be used as a reason to delay the adoption of efficient measures, according to the costs, to prevent the degradation of the environment.”⁴⁹

“Any person who endangers the life or health of others, by leaving them in a situation of abandonment, either by abandoning them, or by abandoning a disabled person he must support or take care of, or whose condition he himself has caused, shall be punished by 2 to 6 years imprisonment. The penalty shall be detention or imprisonment for 5 to 10 years if, as a consequence of abandonment, the body or health of the victim is seriously damaged. If death ensues, the punishment shall be detention or imprisonment from 5 to 15 years.”⁵⁰

48 Constitution of the Argentine Nation, Section 41.

49 General Environmental Law of the Argentine Nation, Art. 4.

50 Argentine Penal Code, Art. 106.

*"Those who want filet mignon will have to pay \$80 a kilo, like in Uruguay."*⁵²

One of the tasks that gives shape to *Archivo Caminante* (the Walking Archive) is the street gathering of all kind of graphic pieces and litter: newspapers, old magazines, political or commercial posters and ads, all sort of leaflets, which become documents. I remember a flyer that the Chinese community in Buenos Aires handed out to advertise a shop, I can't recall exactly if it was a supermarket or a restaurant, but its name was "Argenchina."

The Argentine Republic established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China in 1972. Nevertheless, only since the last years of the 20th century the commercial exchange between both countries became of importance. The complementation between them was possible thanks to the Argentine capacity for the production of cereals, oilseeds (and by-products), and the Chinese production of manufactured goods from textile, plastic (and related) industries. In 2007, in the trade balance with China, Argentina recorded a surplus of US\$79 billion. The importance of China as Argentine commercial partner is clear: it is the country's second client, after Brazil. The growth of China resulted in a bigger demand for food, especially with high protein value.

Following the "route of the soya," in 2008 the Argentine soya complex concentrated 80% of their sales in China (51% soya beans, 29% soya oil). Argentine exports of primary products to China represent 54% of the total exports to that country. Besides of this products, in the near future some industrial manufactures could be added, such as copper minerals and by-products, rolled steel, iron and plastics, all of them necessary supplies for the Chinese. On the Chinese side, 50% of their exports to Argentina belong to electrical and mechanical material, portable computers, cameras, integrated circuits for computers, and 11% to chemical products (among them, glyphosate). Also textiles are of great importance. In the last five years, Argentine exports to China grew at an annual average of 42%, while imports grew at an annual average of 75%. As we can see, "Argenchina" does exist.

However, it is necessary to analyze another aspect of the route of soya. Soya contains an amino-acid profile that makes its vegetal proteins very similar to animal proteins. Undoubtedly, soya has been included in the

51 Gustavo Grobocopatel, interviewed by Jorge Lanata in DDT, Channel 26, 2009.

52 Alfredo De Angeli in a rally in Chajarí, province of Entre Ríos, on July 11th, 2008.

diet of humans, especially in the East. But the Argentine GM soya feeds human beings only in an indirect way, because it is basically used to feed cows, chickens and pigs; in China as well as in the European Union, another central point in Argentine exports. Soya is meat, or meat is soya. Let's have a look at some examples: in 2001, China joined the WTO (World Trade Organization) and since then there has been a rise in raw material prices in the global market. Many multinational manufacturing companies concentrated on that country, taking advantage of the fact that the labour force – quasi-enslaved – was one of the cheapest in the world. China is the world's first producer and consumer of pork, and the great demand of Argentine soya is closely related to that. Within the European Union, Denmark is the third importer of Argentine GM soya, because the largest European pork producer is the Danish Crown Amba (its subsidiaries are: Tulip International A/S, Danish Prime K/S, Plumrose USA, VJS Holding UK, DBC, Dat-Schaub, SFK AmbA, Scan Hide); but also the largest producer of dairy products in Europe is from Denmark, the Arla Foods Amba (merger of Danish MD Foods and the Swedish company Arla). Not only Argentina, but the "Republic of Soya," that fictitious territory created by Syngenta for one of its advertisements, feeds the main Spanish producers of meat, milk, poultry and food, through three American companies that control the soya market in Europe (Cargill, Bunge and ADM). In 2006, when the deforestation of Brazilian Amazonas for soya farming was debated, the response of the groups El Pozo, Pascual, Sada, Casa Tarradellas or Coren was silence.

I think it is important to point out that, as a part of the chain that connects agriculture with livestock, soya (*all* GM seeds for which intellectual property royalties are claimed) is a link within the new machinery of global food control of populations, that will completely depend on their capacity to buy from the companies and organisms that organize the production, distribution and commercialization of food. In the present context, the echoes of the Potosí Principle are intense, but they will be stronger in the upcoming regime.

7.

*"Past is before our eyes and guides our steps. On our backs we carry the uncertainties and dangers of the future. But we only walk in the present."*⁵⁵

53 Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, Potosí Principle, March 2009.

Two trips: to Rosario and to Carlos Casares. Nothing. It was like looking through a keyhole. The clarity of the small image is not enough, however, to have an idea of what happens on the other side of the door. Unlike other experiences in my walking practice, on this occasion, the temporality of the present, almost imperceptible like the mist of glyphosate sprayed over soya villages, became sticky until it covered any attempt to inhabit the past or future.

My wishes (an urban inhabitant's wishes) to get close, physically, to a field transformed by biotechnology and agribusiness, to know its scale, proportions, smells, colours and above all, to try to inhabit – at least for a short time – the invisible world of transgenic plantations, my wishes faced something unexpected: the soy-world has a pleasant appearance, full of green, stillness and immensity. However, something strange escapes the field of vision, an escape from our senses to another part of the body, that punches us in the stomach. The soy-world is full of black holes, of passages to another and no place. What remains unseen is what defines it, in perfect tune with the very notion of the transgenic.

As the anonymous painter of the colonial painting of Saint Ildefonsus, among those strange, genetically manipulated plants, I tried to find the main figures of the soya rural model. The reality that inhabitants of cities only know through mass media, in flattened versions, like something out of a Sci-Fi film (directed by unknown people) or also, like an alien invasion.

I tried to observe, listen, get close and depict the landscapes and inhabitants of those regions in which nature and its immense power are “there,” within one's reach.

Many times during the trips, walking along natural trails, by the river, near the trees, the animals, birds, through tracks (or unpaved roads), under the sun or (unexpected) rains, I remembered the anonymous Andean painter and wondered what images he would choose today to paint his picture.

I also remembered him as I walked to wherever my intuition took me, in the surroundings of the well-watched plants of the farming pools, the silos, the parking lots for thousands of trucks, the entrances to ports.

What are the faces portrayed today in the transgenic landscape? Who walk through the strange plants and shake hands on a bridge? Would anybody have reasons to flagellate themselves? Is a mystical ecstasy possible here? Are there donors? Finally, do miracles happen in the “republic of soya”?

In still cultivable lands, in places where nature has not been violated yet, those who propose the bio-technological no-till model show us their arguments: this is what has to be done to be a part of the “society of knowledge,”

“integrate to the world” or “attend the birth of new paradigms.” For this form of knowledge, “time has blown away” myths.

What kind of knowledge are they talking about? What kind of world? What kind of time?

8.

“The therapeutic power acts as an authentic insurance company... it extends the therapeutic contract to the whole society. This contract takes the form of a mortgage loan: living will be paying for “the debt of life” that is contracted for having a life at our disposal. In a few words, ‘having a life,’ and not simply living, has to be paid for. For that reason, our life becomes a mortgaged life.”⁵⁴

When I arrived to Rosario, as I went out of the bus station and crossed an avenue, a huge sign proposed: “Together, towards the Bicentenary of our Homeland.” Behind the statement, the image of an adult hand, with a ribbon with our national colours, holding the hand of a child that seems to caress it. It was an advertisement of La Segunda Insurance Group, member of the Argentine Association of No-Till Farming Producers (AAPRESID). Abruptly, that sign seemed to summarize many of the threads that guided my research. I took a picture and walked, with my partner Azul, to the hotel.

The city of Rosario was the epicenter of one of the two largest concentrations of the “people of the countryside,” precisely on May 25th, 2008, a date that commemorates the establishment of the first government independent from the Spanish Crown. The other one took place at... the Monument to the Spaniards, in Buenos Aires, near the Rosedal of Palermo.

My walks around the city and then, a tour through the industrial areas, together with my friends of the collective *Wokitoki*, were the first manifestations of the effect I’ve commented above. The soy-world and certain memories of the 2008 conflict, were noticeable in the city. One of the clearest manifestations was the real estate boom, especially luxury high-rise buildings and the adaptation of port facilities (and silos), destined to housing as well as to culture. Soya farmers have become real estate investors, that is evident. Also, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rosario is located in the former Silos Davis, and was opened in 2004. The exhibition I saw there (all a symptom) was titled “Fragilidad Ltda.” (Fragility Ltd.) and many conspicuous artists of the ‘90s participated in it, among them one of the founders of C.I.A.

54 Santiago López Petit, op. cit., p. 97.

Before, we wondered about the temporal quality of the soy world, well, in this museum, it seems the times of neoliberalism hasn't passed, and there is nothing to exhibit but the acclaimed artists of those times.

On the road, I had my first real approach to transgenic soya. It was on the roadsides of the private road to the village of Ricardone. Picking up again the image of the postcard I described at the beginning of this work, my surprise was big: between the road and the private fields there were not only wire fences, but, instead, the shoulders were covered with GM soya. My friends explained to us what all that was about. The companies in charge of maintaining toll highways, "outsource" that space, which used to be public space. They rent it to farmers who use from 300 to 500 meters at the shoulders to grow soya. The first symptoms of an invasion start cropping up.

The localities on the banks of the Paraná, such as San Lorenzo and San Martín, part of the port facilities, show two faces. On the one hand, the river, the beauty and strength of the running waters of the Paraná river. On the other hand, the impossibility to get to another part of the river banks because they are occupied by big companies. It is not possible to get images there. Instead, another part of the soya chain is clearly seen, a free sample, given the moment of the year (it is not the time of harvests): the trucks that transport grain wait in the loading and unloading zones. My friends tell me that, in March, the queues will reach kilometers and the air will become unbreathable because of the particles in suspension.

There are many particles in suspension in the municipal newspaper library too, but that is the usual climate in the archives of old papers. Re-reading about the conflict between government and farmers in 2008, a piece of information became relevant: since Cristina Fernández went into office until the end of the rebellion, there were more trials of the military officials from the last dictatorship, even an attempt to take Isabel Martínez de Perón (President between 1974 and 1976) to the court over crimes against humanity, following an investigation of crimes committed by the Triple A (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance) (it didn't succeed). I believe these events have to be taken into account when we consider the changing moods of Argentine society. Many times, the accusations of the opposition towards Kirchnerism concentrate on an apparent "resentment" or "thirst of revenge" against the Argentine military and the last dictatorship. The agrarian conflict began on March 12th, 2008, and the first demonstration that united the farmers, who were blocking roads, with the *cacerolazos* (saucepan-banging demonstration) held by inhabitants of big cities and towns along the country, took place on March 25th, a day after the anniversary of the 1976 coup. Newspapers evidence how

on those two days there was a dispute over the control of public spaces with very different goals and arguments.

Transgenic soy started to be a part of my mental landscape, of my memory, and also of my physical experience. We took some leaves to the hotel in a plastic bottle, and placed it in front of the door of the room, to see the other guests' reactions, or the owners.' No one said anything, and only the woman who cleaned the rooms seemed a little worried: she put the genetically manipulated plant in a corner, as if punishing it.

At the intersection of two highways, in front of a Petrobras plant, which obscenely stores sulphur in the open air (a yellow mountain visible at a distance), we came across a strange sculpture, mounted on a stone base that brings it closer to passing cars, buses and trucks. In the middle of the traffic, we see a monk, with the bible in one hand, speaking to two natives, a man and a woman. The priest is standing up and they are sitting, apparently receiving – from above – the divine message. Below, in the middle of the tall grass that surrounds the base of the “monument,” there is another figure, carrying out agricultural tasks: an Indian is holding a plough, and there is a bull pulling it. The group becomes an absurd metaphor of the pre-Hispanic cultural diversity, cornered and dominated.

“In the villages a new generation of producers sprang up. A small producer who doesn't produce anything. Who rents his little land. Who has money enough to live on. But who has nothing to do.”⁵⁵

The images on our arrival to Carlos Casares were completely different. Before getting there, I had read that, at kilometer 309 of route 5, I'd see the production facilities of “Los Grobo,” Grobocopatel family's company. I paid attention to that piece of information, to watch them from the bus. The fact is that – unlike the road to Rosario – at the sides of this road, during all the journey to the west of the province of Buenos Aires, the seas of soya were larger and more frequent. It was clear that we were getting closer to the hard core of the “Republic of Soya.”

I had visited Carlos Casares in 1992, invited by the Municipality to participate in a meeting of mural painters. On that occasion I met Gustavo Grobocopatel. I returned there two more times to carry out collective works. My present trip to Casares also gave me the opportunity to see that the murals were still on the walls. I didn't try to contact the “Grobo.”

55 Rodolfo González Arzac, op. cit., p. 155.

When I recognized the facilities at kilometer 309, I realized it wouldn't be easy to photograph them. They weren't near the village, and, on top of it, weather wasn't very welcoming: the sky was turning grey. During the days we spent in the village, the weather was very changeable, something I wasn't prepared for. More than once, my walks were interrupted by heavy rains.

Carlos Casares is a village of low houses and it isn't more than 20 blocks long in any direction from the central square, where there are three flag-staffs with the flags of the three most important communities of its history: Jews, Italians and Spaniards. Besides of a flagstaff with the Argentine flag, of course. It's interesting to point out that the history of the village is linked to a truly epic journey of Jewish settlers from the south of Russia, brought to these lands by the Jewish Colonization Association, founded by Baron Mauricio Hirsch.

Among those immigrants, there was a family that in the year 2000 would establish the company Los Grobo. These authentic "Jewish gauchos" settled in the then called Colonia Mauricio, present-day Casares. Since 1989, they started experimenting with direct seeding and GM seeds. Currently, the group is the first producer of wheat and second producer of soya in the country.

It isn't a touristic village, although there are some historic attractions, such as an ancient Jewish cemetery, next to the lake of Algarrobos. It wasn't easy to find a map of the place, with the minimum indications to move around without just going adrift. I only got a map with street names, but no cultural or architectural references. I started my tour, and in my first walk I came across some huge silos next to the railroads (that start in Buenos Aires, in the neighbourhood of Once, operated by the provincial state company Ferrobaires). These silos are, as reported in *Pueblos fumigados (Fumigated Villages)*, a few blocks away from the centre, and that is the loading and unloading area for the trucks of Grobocopatel S.A. (Gustavo's brother), of Bunge Fertilizantes and Cereales Casares S.A.

Like in Rosario, in Carlos Casares there is an evident real estate and construction boom. Walking around we can see some signs of the changes brought by the soya boom: more "bunkered" houses, distinct from the traditional ones, that include sophisticated security systems. Also the vehicles show some traces: brand new 4x4 trucks, and youths going around in quad-bikes. However, the "pulse" of the place seems rather slow, at least for a porteño (native of the city of Buenos Aires). People have siestas. There are few places to eat, and to our surprise, no *parrilla* (barbecue restaurant) in



the village. If you want some beef, you have to go to the road. It seems that the increasing incomes of farmers are not enough to modify the gastronomic habits of the village, which resemble more the snob porteño neighbourhood of Palermo and its restaurants than the culinary traditions of the *gauchos*. That “*palermization*” (making the place look posh and cosmopolitan) is also evident in the kind of clothes shops and in the extended use of new technologies (mainly among younger people): portable computers, mobile phones, photo, audio and video equipment.

Everything seems to indicate that this type of rural village is what soya producers consider the “society of knowledge.” As I watched those shop windows, I wondered what could be the contents of the subjects in Casares’ public schools.

In the villages of the interior of Argentina, general stores were the typical shops, where one could buy all kind of supplies for agricultural tasks, including work clothes, tools, etc. In my tours I couldn’t find any sign that they should sell Roundup in any of those stores. Only in one of them I saw a backpack style sprayer. I experienced in my own flesh what I had read: the network of Monsanto’s sales support centres is published on the

Internet, but in the physical space there are no signs of its existence. Just as my friends of Wokitoki had warned me: there are no logos in the facilities of companies linked to the soya chain. This opacity is one of its features: it is among us, but not everybody knows where. No doubt, some of the parts that conform the farming pools is responsible for handling information, but... which one? This impression, “vague and ghostly” (quoting Barsky-Dávila), of the farming pools and their rhizomes became palpable. On my last day in Carlos Casares, it didn’t rain but poured. I had to make a decision and go out to walk, which I finally did. I headed for the road, towards the entrance of the village, because I remembered a huge sculpture, an authentic “monument” to the planters.

I walked slowly, trying to avoid mud and puddles. It was a big surprise to come across the Roundup logos. Monsanto’s sales support center was closed (it was Sunday), but it was there. I took some pictures and went away.

For the *Archivo Caminante* (the Walking Archive), images are interesting when they convey the idea of how one gets to and leaves the places. Then I thought that two of my goals remain unachieved, and for one reason: it was impossible to find the ways to get to the places. The first goal was to find the sprayer tractors, to meet their drivers as well as other victims of fumigation. The second goal was to experience what happens when a citizen walks into Monsanto’s sales support centres and wants to buy glyphosate, to be face to face with the sellers, paying attention to their instructions for use. It wasn’t possible either. I will try again.

Avoiding mud, I went back to the hotel. In the room, looking at the last pictures of the place, two images flashed up in my mind, as if the anonymous Andean painter of Saint Ildefonsus’ picture were able to place them there (and remove them at will).

The first one was the picture of a larva at the very moment the crystals of the bacteria Bt, that Monsanto’s bio-insecticide puts in its stomach, germinate and fragment the stomach, impeding its feeding and causing its death. The other image was a detail of a ceramic mural at Bulnes subway station in the Line D of the Buenos Aires city tube. The mural depicts legends, native customs and popular songs, among them the legend of the “Flor del Lirolay” (the flower of Lirolay).⁵⁶ I see an enormous plant with

56 <http://www.redargentina.com/leyendas/flordelirolay.asp>. In English: <http://ancientpixels.tumblr.com/post/98255314/latin-american-myths-written-in-micro-fiction>

large stem and leaves, and on the ground, near the roots, a child with a flower in his hand.

The soy children lie among plants as well as in the city streets of Argentina, a country that, with pleasure for some of our own and some partners, is part of the Republic of Soya.



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