

ARGENTINA'S HORIZON OF HOPE

That Paul Ray and Juanita Brown's assertions are not purely utopian has been proved by recent developments in Central and South America. With the benefit of what we can reap from the experiences of the Zapatista movement and Argentina's practice of "horizontalism," we can now look at how new forms of social change both support, and are supported by, personal inner change. For this, we will look primarily at Argentina. Here we can find an emblematic portrayal of the devastating policies of elite globalization on one of the most developed and industrialized countries of South America. And yet, we can see, as a phoenix rising out of the ashes, a movement of hope that can serve as an example to all who strive to carry further social change hand in hand with inner development. In addition, looking at Argentina will form a sort of summary and compendium in action for everything that has been articulated in this book. A first dream made concrete will offer us a way to dream further the future of a sustainable globalization.

The Political Situation

Argentina had a strong welfare state in the 1940s and 50s. This gave rise to Peronism, essentially the regime of a populist strong man, Juan Peron. The political ideal of social justice through armed insurrection touched the country in the early seventies through the ERP and the Montoneros. The former were originally a Trotskyist movement that successively embraced Maoism. The latter was formed by left-wing Catholic and Peronist groups.

In 1970, the Montoneros kidnapped former dictator Pedro Eugenio Aramburu (in power 1955–1958) and others who had collaborated with him: unionists, politicians, diplomats, and businessmen. Other important kidnappings occurred in 1974 and 1975, targeting politicians and business executives. In 1975, the group sank an Argentine destroyer and exploded a bomb in the Federal Intelligence Department of Buenos Aires, killing eighteen. For their part it is estimated that the ERP occupied 52 towns, robbed 166 banks, and stole over US\$76 million. The Montoneros carried out techniques of urban violence; the ERP acquired control over about a third of the impoverished Tucuman area. Both groups never constituted a serious political threat—due to the lack of popular support—and were the object of intense repression, sanctioned by the government of Isabel Peron. They offered, however, the pretext for the political repression in the years that followed—1976 to 1983—in what has been called the "Dirty War."

Estimates of human rights organizations place the number of people who disappeared at 30,000. They were the object of murders and torture of great cruelty. The repression targeted all political opposition, trade unionists, and students.

Under the atmosphere of continual repression, a new kind of movement arose: the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. These were women who met while trying to find out the fate of their disappeared sons and daughters. Every week for almost thirty years, they have gathered in the central Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires for a half-hour walk around the plaza, modeling a kind of humanitarian protest—one that took the regime by surprise. They wore white scarves as a symbol of peace and displayed pictures of their loved ones. The original association discontinued its efforts in 2006, judging that they had the support of the present government; a faction still seeks further recognition of the government's role in the abductions and murders. Three of the fourteen founders have disappeared.

The Economic Situation

Argentina's economic woes have deep roots in its political past. The origin of the latest turmoil lay at least as far back as the military regime, which contracted enormous debt for projects that were left unfinished and for the Falkland/Malvinas Islands War against the UK. In the eighties the state was unable to pay interest on its debt. Inflation grew and reached 200% per month and 3,000% annually in 1989. Carlos Menem came to power and implemented a neo-liberal agenda in alignment with the IMF, bent on labor deregulation and privatization of state companies—telephone, energy, and water among them. Argentina kept on borrowing, and due to a favorable exchange rate could import cheaply—which led to a flight of the dollar away from the country, an impoverishment of the industrial infrastructure, and consequently higher and higher unemployment.

The introduction of soy in Argentinean agriculture speaks volumes for the neo-liberal policies sponsored by the IMF. Most of the world's soybean cultivation comes from three countries: the US, Brazil, and Argentina. Together they produce 188 million metric tons, or more than 80% of world production and more than 90% of the soy produced for export.

This trend has resulted in the massive displacement of Argentine farmers, and the appearance of hunger and starvation in one of the richest agricultural nations. This is also accompanied by ecological devastation. To place land under soy cultivation, vast acreage has been deforested, making the soil more susceptible to flooding and ultimately desertification. Most of the soy cultivated is of the "Roundup ready" genetically modified strain, meaning

that it is routinely cultivated with high doses of Roundup herbicide, which it has been engineered to tolerate. At present, due to extensive monoculture, soy will be more and more susceptible to emerging microbial, fungal, and other attacks, such as soy rust, which entered Argentina in 2003.

Numbers give an idea of the progression of the crop: production reached 27,000 metric tons in 1970, 3.5 million in 1980, 10.7 million in 1990, and finally 34 million in 2004. Soy formed 50% of the country's grain harvest in 2003; rice, wheat, corn, and sunflower declined apace. Internal beef consumption declined by 16% between the years 2002 and 2003 alone.¹⁴

The production of soy is dominated by a few companies that have formed a de facto cartel, leveraging the infrastructure necessary for its growth from the government, while passing on social and ecological costs to the community. Between 1967 and 2001, under the pressure of the neo-liberal policies sponsored by the IMF, 260,000 family farmers went out of business; 160,000 after 1990 alone.¹⁵ Where soy reigns, the landscape has been depopulated of most farmers, practically made dispensable. The companies have mechanized much of their production and the local population depends on jobs that occupy them for only a few months a year.

To give an idea of what the changes meant for Argentina, consider that the country that had been called the "granary of the world" has started to know hunger and starvation, particularly after the 1980s. Between 1990 and 2003, the agronomist Alberto Lapolla estimates that 450,000 Argentines died of hunger, the equivalent of 55 children, 35 adults, and 15 elderly a day.¹⁶ The transnational corporations have transformed Argentinean lands into short-term investments. Benefiting from government-sponsored infrastructure, they can maximize their profits in a short span of years, then leave the local community to deal with the ecological devastation that happens particularly fast in ecologically fragile soils.

The precarious economic situation generated in the 80s was aggravated by a sudden reevaluation of the dollar, which caused prejudice to the country's exports and the source of dollars that they constituted. By the end of the 90's, the results of these policies were clear. Argentina entered a recession, while the government continued contractive policies that further hurt the poor and unemployed. Foreign investors withdrew their investments, and further capital resources fled overseas. That was not all—the 90s continued a trend of disruption and social fragmentation that affected the last surviving places of encounter: the neighborhood clubs or libraries, the unions, and the social services. Even the habit of meeting the neighbor over coffee was receding. In short, all sense of community was fading away.

The economic collapse culminated in a collective loss of confidence in the economic policies of the government. When the citizens started withdrawing their assets from the banks, the government froze their accounts. Yet here, what could have been a violent uprising and a spiraling of violence effectively gave birth to something new.

December 19 and 20, 2001

We have seen the precedent established by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. In the 90s, following the closure of industries, the unemployed started to organize first in the south, then in the north, and finally around the capital in MTDs (*Movimientos de Trabajadores Desempleados* or Movement of Unemployed Workers). They essentially created a movement without hierarchy, staging massive blockades of major road arteries and pressuring the government for unemployment subsidies. The blockades earned them the popular name of *piqueteros* (roughly translated: blockaders). It is of great interest to remark that the great majority—in places up to 90% of their ranks—were women.

Argentines speak of the 19th and 20th to refer to all that happened during those two key days of spontaneous uprising in December. These started with pot banging (known as *cacerolazos*), in which the population spontaneously marched towards the center of the capital. Along the way banks and foreign, especially American companies, were the object of destruction. The middle class, in effect declassed, found the inspiration to extend in solidarity towards the under- and unemployed, understanding that their common woes had their origin in the neo-liberal policies of the government. The accompanying slogan was “*Que se vayan todos*” (roughly, “We want all of them [politicians] out”), which replaced previous political slogans. Participants encompassed a large political spectrum. President de la Rúa declared a state of siege. In reaction to that, more pot-banging demonstrations followed in Buenos Aires and other major cities, indicating that the government was losing the support of the middle class. Those who did not take part in the outpouring often helped those who were.

On December 20, the protesters converged to the Plaza de Mayo in spite of the state of emergency. Five people were killed, and other violent incidents occurred throughout the country. Having lost political support, de la Rúa resigned.

A participant to the events recalls: “This was the beginning of a new sense of identity, and moreover of community. People started to regain the confidence to look at each other after the fear generated by years of military

dictatorship and economic devastation. In effect community began around the question of ‘how can we solve our problems?’”

Horizontalism

In the last ten years we have witnessed the development of social movements that do not act along the political premises of the past. Rather they show us the potential of the assertion of an independent Civil Society. One of the earliest was the Zapatista movement that began to involve the indigenous communities of Chiapas, Mexico from 1996. The indigenous communities have organized themselves at a grassroots level in a process honoring their cultural identity, independently from the state or political platforms. At another level, a similar development is promoted by the landless movement in Brazil (MST), reclaiming land left uncultivated. Other similar movements are rising in the Third World in the South African shantytowns, India, Ecuador, and Bolivia through the initiative of indigenous groups rising to stop the privatization of common resources (in particular, water) and destruction of the environment. On a smaller scale this is also taking root in Eastern Europe, Canada, and the US. What is unique in Argentina is the level of organization and the impact this new idea has on the economy with the formation of expanding networks.

Different concerns converge into the movement: struggles for the earth, life, work, health, and against hunger, bringing together people of revolutionary persuasions, feminists, LGBT, indigenous communities (Mapuche and Guaraní), and also many with no previous militant experience. The convergence has become something larger than the sum of its parts in the fight for dignity and freedom.

We have seen that the MTDs played the role of forerunners of the present movement. They started in the north and south of the country and organized against local governments and corporations. In great numbers they took their requests to the streets by blocking major roadways and pressuring for government subsidies. What was new was their recourse to direct forms of decision-making. Instead of designating a representative, the group decided that they would negotiate directly at the blockade. They thus obtained the first unemployment subsidies in Latin America. These movements created a loose network, called *Anibal Veron*, soon after the crisis of 2001. Over time another one was born in its stead, the *Frente Dario Santillan*. A shift occurred around 2003, when part of the MTDs decided to focus on self-organization and attempt to implement their own self-sufficiency, rather than depending on the state. Roadblocks lost a great part of their importance. Other forms of organization have acquired further importance in the

movement that recognizes itself with the two central ideas of *horizontalidad* (horizontalism) and autonomy.

The aftermath of the 19th and 20th of December saw the rise of spontaneous neighborhood assemblies in which many tens of thousands were actively engaged. Some estimate that there were about 200 assemblies in urban Buenos Aires in the month following the uprisings, each comprising from 200 to 300 people.

Often, writing on a wall or a poster would invite people to meet at a certain place and time, and an assembly was born. However, participation in the assemblies has decreased since the heyday of the 19th and 20th. The adversaries are state interference, other intruding parties pushing political platforms, and a lack of concrete direction for their work. The political parties have resorted to creating false neighborhood assemblies, then using the time they have to press for their agendas. This, however, further discredits them. Most of the neighborhood assemblies that survive are those that have concrete projects and/or occupy buildings.

Another element of the landscape of horizontalism is the *tomas* (“taken”). The word is used for occupied factories. It is consciously chosen over words with a political connotation, such as “occupied” or “recuperated.” The greatest majority of the *tomas*, if not all, occurred in places that were abandoned by the owners and in which the workers had not been paid, at times for up to six months. These were workers who had nothing else to turn to than their work and trade for survival. Many of the factories had also been partly emptied of machines and raw materials, or else had aging equipment. The assemblies also occupied buildings and banks that had been abandoned for a great number of years. No violence was done to the factories, no door forced, nor were the sites used for living quarters.

From a few dozen at the beginning of 2001, there are now a few hundred revived workplaces. Among these are: factories, printing presses, medical clinics, a four-star hotel, and a daily newspaper. These workplaces work very closely with the media and art or educational collectives, offering them space. Among activities offered there are: popular kitchens that feed over a hundred people a day, popular education classes, theater and music workshops, bakeries, cafés, and places for working with street kids. Popular kitchens are often the first step addressing the urgent needs of poverty and undernourishment. Others who have land organize organic gardens and raise animals for meat.

The *tomas* seem to have quite a wide popular support. The government is constantly trying to find openings and weaknesses in the workers’ vigilance or support in order to evict them. When the authorities and police come to

dislodge the occupants, support is offered in most cases by the neighborhood associations and other collectives, but also by people from all walks of life; for instance, the retirement home situated across Chilavert came out to defend the reopened printing press. In some cases, as for Zanon—one of the largest reopened factories—support included Internet articles from journalists and other individuals all over the globe. At present, many occupations have received variable levels of support through the legal system.

The workplaces have started to network in order to support each other, initially through a system of barter of their products and services. The networking is starting to expand to a global level, facilitated by the tide of change that is going on throughout South America. In 2005, a “First Gathering of Recuperated Workplaces” was convened in Caracas, Venezuela, with representatives of 263 workplaces from eight countries. Networking extends to other aspects of the whole movement. The Argentines are weaving relationships with the Landless Movement of Brazil (MST) and are constantly exchanging ideas with the Zapatista Movement of Chiapas—for example, through visits of delegates to Mexico. Global networks have now been established, such as the People’s Global Action (PGA) and, of course, the World Social Forum.

We have reviewed the developments that characterize the Argentine revolution. Something has already emerged of what makes *horizontalidad* unique, through the new social structures that have been created. But, we will not find its key signature in a rigid definition. Horizontalism is not an ideology. It is more of a way of relating to one another in a direct democratic way. Another departure from classic ideology is that you will not find only one key thinker in the movement. This is why we will quote this or that voice, be it a worker in a *toma*, an assembly participant, or an MTD member, as they have been collected in interviews by Marina Sitrin.¹⁷

Another key word of the movement is *autonomy*. This word is used to differentiate the new phenomenon from the state or from hierarchical organizations. It has no relation with the Marxist understanding that the term covers, especially in Italy. Unlike older forms of autonomy, social change is not requested from the state or deferred to some future ideal condition such as seizure of power. “Autonomists” intend to change the world without taking power. In this they are similar to the Zapatistas. “To be truly autonomous is to come close to not depending on a specific plan. I believe that now is the point of ruptures, where plans are falling apart, and that little by little we will find ourselves without them,” says an unemployed worker

from an MTD. From now on we will refer primarily to horizontalism in order to refer to the movement as a whole.

The new movement emphasizes an experiential approach as opposed to utopian ideas and goals. “If one day we achieve true autonomy, we won’t be autonomists or autonomous, but will, in fact, be free,” claims Emilio of Tierra del Sur neighborhood assembly. Another individual echoes, “The reality of the situation is never subordinated to the ideal—like the concept of a correct assembly. We’re much more on the side of reality than the ideal.... We don’t celebrate the fact that there are assemblies in the abstract. We don’t find all assemblies interesting as a general rule.” The same spirit is found in the Zapatistas’ dictum: “walking while questioning, and moving forward with our reflections,” which implies a willingness to proceed through trial and error.

It is not surprising that Argentine horizontalism places great emphasis on the realization of concrete projects; starting a community kitchen or an organic garden is more important than laying a permanent blueprint for the future. “Thoughts and ideas are not solely the product of cerebral cogitation. Thoughts must also engage the physical body. Thoughts emanate from transformative practice,” says a member of an MTD. “[Horizontalism] is something that’s constantly under construction and reconstruction,” says one of his friends. In fact, people equate the experimentation with ideals to a sort of quest. Ultimately, no forms or techniques (e.g., assemblies or *piquetes*) are seen as universally valid. What is used today may have no reason to be tomorrow. There is a refreshing commitment to questions rather than answers, and this is reflected in how the participants express themselves in “I believe” or “I feel” and ultimately “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure,” without dimming their enthusiasm for a continued search. What is started is wholly new, a process of uncharted creation. It goes from traditional delegation to direct participation.

Another important feature of horizontalism is the idea of true dialogue without compromise or fear of different opinions—true consensus over and above weak compromise. Full discussion promotes participation; it does take more time, but the walk is important, and a new consciousness is created through it. Listening to each other is, in fact, at the center of the whole process. This is the process that awakens awareness of the importance of communication and the “new practices of sociability” that the movement is seeking to consolidate. This is the means for getting to the core, to what everyone has in common, rather than pitting one interest against another. All

of this is what the political parties cannot do when they try to join or co-opt the process, especially in the assemblies.

Horizontalidad counters the idea of one person—one vote as an idea of ultimate justice. Rather, it wants consensus, working to encompass differences. In this way, no central authority is needed—rather, facilitators or temporary leaders. When all voices are included, a true “group thinking” that does not sacrifice individuality can emerge. Thus, much of the support that people and organizations offer to each other starts just at the level of listening to and sharing experiences that can inspire. When a *toma* is threatened by eviction, the support and input of others who have gone through the experience can be a very important first stage. The attempt to encompass diversity is summed up by Neka, a woman from MTD Solano: “What we are as a movement is not about building a unified movement or hegemony, but a step toward creating diversity. . . . This [building horizontally across different movements] is much more powerful than building a single or universal movement.”

There is a diffuse realization in the new movement that classical political thinking is what caused the problem in the first place. Many will clearly indicate their distance not only with institutions, but also with all forms of political thinking. They may call their experience a process of “internal revolution.” Those who consider themselves political militants—and there are many—often express themselves in the old revolutionary language. However, two elements are grafted to it. The first is the reference to the new terms of *horizontalism* and *autonomy*; the other is a distance from institutions and a disillusion with party politics. If there is a model that is often invoked, it is the Zapatista precedent. Overall, this translates in the desire to move from the individual to the social levels of reality, rather than the reverse. The bridges to the new individual experience are the flexible social structures and networks.

Many groups consciously decided not to ask government for help—in some cases even foregoing help offered—in order to intentionally step into a space of autonomous initiative, rather than dependence upon the government for solutions. On the other side, the reality is that the unions and the political parties do not do much to offer support to reopened factories or MTDs.

An experiential approach, a commitment to questioning, and inclusiveness lead to another important result of horizontalism—the joy and creativity that exudes from many of the participants, in spite of an often-grim reality of need. This is how it is expressed by Toty of MTD La Matanza: “We are constructing with a happy passion.” “Happiness isn’t something you can postpone until tomorrow—we must live with total fervor

today,” echoes a fellow unemployed member. Everybody realizes that this was hardly possible before the present. “Under capitalism, we were giving up the possibility of enjoying ourselves and being happy,” remembers Neka of MTD Solano. But she adds for good measure, “The leftist parties try to destroy our differences. It’s a form of power to make us one thing. That form of power, of course, is false and fake and would have everyone obey a capitalist or Trotskyist boss.” One way to extend this joy is through solidarity with the least fortunate. Assemblies have taken initiative for helping out the *cartoneros*—the unemployed who survive by recycling cardboard and other recyclables—offering them hot meals when they finish work, staging celebrations and fundraisers, and so on.

Listening, creating, and spreading joy embolden many to express ideas that seldom find their way into the arena of social change. This is what has become consecrated with the term *affective politics*. “The movement has to be the thing that revives healthy relationships,” says Vasco of MTD Allen. Another fellow unemployed member expresses it even more boldly: “We try to love each other. It’s difficult. . . . This is part of our changing culture, and as we change we notice how much we really need to.” Many individuals interviewed by Marina Sitrin (in her book *Horizontalism*) recall with pleasure how far they have come along in modifying relationships of antagonism into caring and appreciative friendships. Over and over again they express the wonder of discovering something new about themselves or celebrating the reconciliation with the one who was perceived as an enemy. Affective politics is not just meant for internal consumption, however; people express wanting to extend it to the rest of society.

Building a New Culture

Horizontalism offers us the most concrete example of what it means to create social change from a cultural perspective. It is a departure from anything attempted in the past. “We are creating a new movement, and this movement doesn’t have much to do with previous ones” (Nicolas from Indymedia). And further: “We’re not creating the opposite, but are creating something else. We aren’t building the opposite to the capitalist system, that’s been tried and it doesn’t work” (Emilio from Tierra del Sur neighborhood assembly). We are entering an uncharted territory, and this is accompanied with the often stated “We don’t really know what we want, but we do know what we *don’t* want.” The creation of this newness explains the need to create new words or adapt old ones to express a new reality—one, moreover, that is rapidly shifting.

Carlos G. of Zanon—the largest factory occupied in Neuquen—says, “What the workers of Zanon are accomplishing represents a truly inspiring redefinition of values.” And further: “It is all part of a new reeducation. You speak with a certain confidence, you feel that it is a *compañero* that struggles at your side . . . and there you become more human. How are you not going to love him? Yes, you esteem him, you love him, and I am not exaggerating.” There is a diffuse consciousness that horizontalism is really about a whole redefinition of values, and further, that these values are not something definite and immutable. This lack of uniformity is itself the source of aliveness of the movement. Some see that this redefinition of values is what will lend strength to the fight against poverty and social ills. The difference of horizontalism with the alternative politics of the past is that the latter struggled for single issues or for material advancement alone. The new movement wants that advancement to be the result of new values and new relationships and not the other way round, because that is already a source of joy and transformation in itself.

One example will be particularly meaningful for what has been explored within this book. In Argentina, the topic of abortion has been previously viewed within a traditional worldview, heavily influenced by Catholicism. At present, in the discussions that come up around abortion there is an urge for working with all its aspects and to treat them within the context of Argentina’s culture, rather than solely as a question of rights. Acknowledging the trauma of abortion is advanced as an important aspect: “To have an abortion is a terrible thing, whether you have the money to have one or not. It’s a horrible experience from a cultural point of view. It’s also awful because someone is messing with your body,” says Paula, of a feminist and LGBT collective. And she adds, “It would be a very profound cultural question, not only a legal question.” And Claudia, of an alternative-media collective, adds: “One thing that is clear though, is that the feminist discourse of the past no longer works. It’s old, and it needs to be revised to speak to our present condition as women.” Considering that this is said by women who have not hesitated to stand up where men had most often given up, these remarks cannot be passed off as submissive acquiescence. These views are often expressed by the very same women who are very active in changing the *machista* attitude that is still very present in the movement. Once again, this is part of a spirit of inquiry and questioning, rather than reliance on ready-made answers.

Looking at the Argentine backstage, we can further delineate the profound meaning of the present movement. December 19th and 20th are

described over and over again as a “rupture,” the equivalent of a collective shift of consciousness that made possible a new social birth. This goes together with the realization that what has most power is really the new consciousness. “Many people survived the crisis and began to think about how to rebuild their lives in a different way. It’s really incredible,” says Martin of a neighborhood assembly, referring also to himself. People relate the experiences predating December 2001 to their present life and see how they have changed by taking new, unprecedented steps. They link the change to their own adoption of new values. Many have found new abilities and skills they would never have suspected. Even those who were already politically involved will notice this: “I changed. For me, it wasn’t a political awakening, because from a practical and theoretical point of view, I was always involved. But what I did have was a really skeptical attitude,” says Carina of the Argentine World Forum mobilizing committee.

The new consciousness lives with the heightened awareness of being poised between two worlds, two diverging realities. “We all arrive here from the outside, having been beaten up by the outside world. . . . Whereas here [in the MTD] you may have a problem, but it comes out of work we’re engaged in, rather than your lack of something,” says a woman from MTD La Matanza.

The people in the new initiatives have the feeling that they are learning to be human from a wholly other perspective. They want new ways of being and thinking. They can point to larger implications of their personal predicament from diverse perspectives. “Capitalism produces sick people and sickness, in that order,” says a man from MTD Allen, adding, “That is because we live in a society where everybody is permanently desperate, and that makes people sick.” Another unemployed worker intuits that this matter has even deeper roots: “The problem of power cannot be attributed exclusively to capitalism. . . . Its historical roots lie in the totality of modernist thought and in the way humanity carved out its historical trajectory.” Ultimately, this is best explained by Neka of MTD Solano: “We have fought against and attacked the capitalists, but we didn’t know how to combat capitalism. . . . We can annihilate private enterprise and the corporation that symbolize all of that [system of domination], but if we don’t combat our way of relating—which reproduces all these things—it seems like we are fighting an empty battle.”

At bottom some feel it is cultural survival and the survival of our humanity that is at stake. “We’re at a point in time when the contradictions of capitalism presuppose either the dissolution of humanity or the creation of a whole new civilization,” states an unemployed worker. And Emilio, of the

Tierra del Sur neighborhood assembly says, “How do we change ourselves and our communities? This is as important as getting rid of the IMF. . . . More important, even,”

Cultural change of such a dimension is a slow path. In the words of Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos: “We take the slower path in order to construct something true, something that is representative of the people and the collective.” This indicates that nothing all-encompassing is awaited from the first steps. What horizontalism understands is that the self cannot find expression in traditional politics. It is lost in the abstraction of interest groups, social classes, or abstract thinking. Rational thought and directed action are valued at the expense of feeling, relationships, and what makes a person whole.

For all of the above reasons, taking power is a very low priority; exerting it differently is the key. Horizontalists pride themselves of holding assemblies and taking decisions in ways that are completely transparent. Power is felt in the individual’s ability to change the tenor of her relationships and build new social relationships and structures. It is seen as *capacity*, a potential. This goes together with the realization that what has most power is the new consciousness. “I dream that we recover our culture, that we recover the value of each other, and of merely being human,” says Gonzalo of HIJOS (a collective of the children of those disappeared during the dictatorship) in summing it all up.

It comes as no surprise that in the radical shift that horizontalism represents women played a very important role from the beginning. They also played a part in it before horizontalism was thought of as a new reality. In the dark days of the Dirty War, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo ushered in a protest movement that went beyond the political to essential human values and presented the first real rupture. Women in the movement are very aware of the role they have in shaping a new culture.

The creation of new values is the real threat to the existing system, and this notion is clearly expressed by how repression manifests itself, as in the case of Chilavert, a printing press of just eight people—the same who printed the book *Horizontalidad*. The attempted eviction of the press involved eight assault vehicles, eight patrol cars, two ambulances, and police with dogs. They had to retreat due to the overwhelming support the workers received from all areas of society, including the neighbors and even the elderly from the neighboring retiring home. In other instances as the case of Felix Salud, an occupied clinic, the police were present in numbers surrounding the whole building, and had brought in assault vehicles, fences,

firefighters, and helicopters. There, too, thanks to the outpouring of support, the eviction was staved off.

But the difficulties are not just external. Many realize that in order to create the new they need to resist fear, and that fear is the best weapon the government can spread against the movement. Fear and inner doubt naturally take over once the initial euphoria of change wears off. As Emilio of Tierra del Sur aptly puts it, “It’s much easier to believe in the system by voting for a leftist party, than to attack it.” Creating new values is challenging and exacting. Many unconsciously experience the difficulty of staying in the vacuum of the creation of a new culture, and some take refuge in what they know, the promises of political parties. This means that some people in the movement come and go, even return, challenged by the transformation that is needed at a personal level. Political parties know this, and will pay good money to enroll the most active participants—for example, at election time, offering them ten or a hundred times the money they are able to make on their own. Some offer examples of salaries of up to \$1,500—a considerable amount in Argentina—in order to buy off people, sap energy from the movement and cause division in times preceding the elections.

It is to be foreseen that the islands of new culture will coexist with the older culture, and that this may be the case for a long time. Creation of the new emerging reality can take place alongside the survival of the old. This is, in fact, what happens with an alternative economy that is set alongside the prevailing one, with which it has to have innumerable points of contact. It would be preposterous to postulate a parallel economy.

We have seen how the new economic initiatives seek strength in the collaboration of like-minded initiatives. They are seeking to do so in independence from the state, political parties, the church, and all of the institutions in general. Central to the new approach is the creation of flexible networks. Emilio of Tierra del Sur expresses it thus: “The traditional leftist configuration is like a tree, where the central committee is the trunk. . . . On the other hand, the relations we are experiencing between different movements resemble web-like formations. It’s like a network, a real network, where no single group leads. It’s a web of independent and interrelated communities, which don’t work around a single consolidated project; rather relationships form around concrete projects.”

The clearest example of the articulation of these networks is expressed by the revived workplaces. Chilavert, the printing press, has commitments with other reopened factories (for example, through barter), with popular kitchens

(printing free flyers for them), with neighborhood assemblies that came out in their defense, and so on. Its workers will show up when another factory nearby is threatened with eviction. However, there is an understanding of the limits of close cooperation among reopened factories. This works well between entities of comparable size and output, but not beyond that. The smaller networks can only address the first levels of needs. The future will require further experimentation and creativity.

Another important aspect of horizontalism is what is emerging in education, information, the arts, and medical care. Many MTDs and initiatives are establishing schools with a wholly new curriculum, consciously different from the prevailing culture of domination as it is propagated in the public system. At MTD La Matanza, where the new school is supported by microenterprises (sewing, baking, silkscreen printing, and book publishing), a woman says, “We believe that in some way we’re going to change the education system from what we experienced. . . . All the things we’re taught are carried inside ourselves and they are difficult to remove later. We think that it’s more difficult to struggle with the enemy inside of ourselves.” Another woman adds, “Teachers are used as a tool for the government to promote the system, and we want to break with that.” Occupied workplaces and neighborhood assemblies often invite artistic collectives and independent media and harbor cultural initiatives under the same roof.

MTD Solano has taken similar steps and also foresees doing the same in matters of health care. As Neka says, “We also talk about producing autonomous health care and autonomous education. . . . We also have a lot of people working in libraries and with children’s projects.” For matters concerning health, the reopened clinics feel an urge to set themselves up in such a way that they can provide to the needs of all, regardless of financial resources, and strive to do so within their own constraints.

The thorniest issue at present lies in the relation to government and its institutions. The movement as a whole has taken a stance of “stand and resist.” Understandably, horizontalism needs to accumulate practical experience and find an understanding of its own unique contribution, before it risks being diluted or co-opted. The new that is being built needs to be protected and strengthened before the risks lying in the next stages can be taken. Most are aware of the dangers of co-optation and how capitalism has been adept at incorporating everything that supposedly threatened it. That may be the reason for refraining from engaging at this stage of the game. Some will admit that the relationships with the state will deserve due attention in a not-too-distant future. “This [relationship with government] is

really ambiguous terrain that intelligence can occasionally help you navigate,” says a man from MTD Solano. “We’ve chosen, at least within the movement, not to become auxiliaries to, or supporters of, the government. . . . We understand the limitations in this and know there are others who are doing it.”

On one level, these relationships are starting to be built. The judiciary is often asked to support the *tomas* and give a legal foundation to their enterprises. Local legislation, sometimes only temporarily, offers a framework for factories to continue in operation and explore how to legalize ownership—for example, forming a cooperative. In this realm it is clear that an adversarial stance would only lead to a dead end.

A new movement is showing the way in Argentina, Chiapas, and elsewhere. What is most prominent is the fact that it is organized primarily along cultural and not political lines. Nicanor Perlas, a cultural activist in the Philippines, defines what characterizes the new cultural arena of Civil Society in its being organized in a wholly new way.¹³ Much of what he expresses can be recognized in the Argentine situation. We will search in vain in Argentina for a new charismatic leader that inspires a unified line of thought or strategy. Leaders offer what best they have for temporary mandates that they receive; they have to prove their integrity through the tenor of their life and commitment. The movement itself is led by many; it is mobile and fluid. It works like a network rather than a tree, as is the case in any political party. The outcome is a fluid creation of new ideas and initiatives, rather than the creation of new permanent structures. This is a concrete example and inspiration for all culturally based initiatives aiming at social change in the future.

What is happening in Argentina may remind us of what we have heard of previously in relation to the tools of organizational learning, particularly Theory U. Without a clear awareness and a deliberate purpose, a Future Search or World Café of national proportions has been undertaken in Argentina. Or, we could say, for the first time a country—or rather a whole section of it—has gone down to the bottom of the transformational U and come back to the other side, prototyping alternative national economic, cultural, and political infrastructures. The way down the U was not consciously undertaken; it was more of the consequence of Argentina’s national abyss of the years of military terror and World Bank/IMF policies. Having the choice of plunging into total anarchy, a shift was undertaken into a new paradigm on the fated December 2001. It was a true state of collective

presenting as it emerges from the quotes offered above. There clearly is a pre- and a post-December 19 and 20.

In fact, the parallels with what we learned from Theory U go much further. There is no single Argentina but two diverging countries. The first is continuing the “cycle of absencing” dictated by the World Bank and IMF policies, leading to environmental, social, and cultural degradation. The second is surfacing alongside, from a collective listening to a future that wants to emerge. The consolidation of new cultural values will ensure its preservation and spread.