

~~Of degrees and villas. Writing and reading *testimonios* of high school graduates from a shanty town in Buenos Aires in their attempts to access and succeed in post-compulsory education studies.~~

**This is not a thesis.**

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, this work is entirely my own.

Pablo Del Monte

## Word count

78416 words

## Abstract

This work is a collection of chapters that revolve around the issues of representing and interpreting the educational experiences of students who live in a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Buenos Aires, in their attempts to succeed in post-compulsory education (higher and further Education). The work presents the story of a student from this population in the form of a *testimonio*, a methodological discussion on the nature and uses of *testimonio* in the light of Foucauldian genealogy principles, a proposal for the ethical exercise of reading and writing the *testimonios* produced, and three exercises of interpretation which address and problematize assumptions that operate in the understanding of *villas* and their inhabitants.

The methodological discussion draws on principles of ethnography and Foucauldian genealogy to consider the use and nature of stories for the purposes of doing research. It presents and discusses the Latin American *testimonio* as a form of account that intends to represent the voice of subaltern groups with the aim of contributing to social change.

The ethical discussion will look closely at the ways in which the researcher becomes a subject while doing research, both in his/her relationship with the object of study and in the relationship with his/herself. In this sense, it will look at the violence involved in the production of knowledge that is exerted in relation to an 'object' of study.

Finally, this work includes three exercises of interpretation aimed at re-thinking *villas* through 'using and troubling' conceptual tools in the reading of the *testimonios* co-constructed in this research. The idea of *villas* as neighbourhoods abandoned by the State, separated from the city and outside the norm is re-thought. The interpretations produced in this set of chapters will look at the complexity of the position of the students producing *testimonios* in their condition as inhabitants of *villas*.

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This work embodies many experiences, conversations with friends and colleagues, reading and writing in different places - “book-experiences”. They all were part of this PhD course, which was indeed a very significant journey to me, transformative in uncountable ways and unpredictable in every moment.

In the vicissitudes of these years I have met and shared moments with cherished people. I am especially thankful to my family, whose unconditional presence and support has been fundamental, as always. To Anita, for her generous engagement with this project and for her dear company. I cannot name all the good friends, but only say that all have been a great part of the joy in my life during these years, for which I am deeply thankful.

This work is not entirely mine, many people have contributed to it directly and indirectly. Stephen, my tutor, has a magnificent presence all throughout. His advice opened up possibilities for me to think, enabled the space for this (non-)thesis to happen. He has taught and inspired me with his kindness, patience, courage; which are all present in the interstices of the text.

The participants are central, without their voice this (non-)thesis would not have been possible. They are the anonymous co-authors, who I have had the huge pleasure to work with and to meet. I would also like to thank the community of the local parish church for integrating me during the months of field work.

The whole community of the IoE has sustained this work with its solidarity for which I am most thankful. They have done so through the Centenary Scholarship, to which the whole community contributes and which has allowed me to carry out this course full-time. I am immensely thankful to all for this and also for the always present disposition to share ideas, advice and encouragement.

I owe to the time and dedication of María Ester, Analía, Rachel and Helen, for their feedback at the last stages of this work, which was very helpful and contributed to the finalization of the text and the course.

*"Maybe you could begin your thesis saying 'this is not a thesis'<sup>1</sup>"*

Prof. Stephen J. Ball to me in one of our meetings.

The answer to what this is is elusive. I have tried to be consistent with what I am doing and producing while writing this text, and the question of what exactly that is has been recurrent. I have written a thesis, a thesis, a thesis, and I have repeatedly said 'in this thesis I am doing...', 'in this thesis I am attempting...', 'in this thesis I am...', etc., etc., etc. Each sentence is completed a different way each time I write it; if the text has been repeated, its meaning has not. But, with each sentence in this (non-)thesis, *I am*. And, probably, the reader *is* too. In this text different people have been and become, and it is about the experience and use of the text that I am primarily concerned with, rather than the affirmations that populate it. At a certain point in the course of my PhD I ceased to understand this text as a reflection of a signified accompanied by a reflection on that reflection. I have built this work on the basis of the hiatus between the signifier and the signified (Foucault, 2005), leading to the conception of this text as 'not a thesis'. I think of this text as experience, affect, exercise, fate...

But still, this is a PhD, and the PhD has enabled this text as such. I will fluctuate within this tension throughout the whole piece. I will begin by giving an account of how this work was thought out, and under what conditions it emerged. I will offer this as a form of introduction to the reader, since both the design of the project and the context in which I produced the design will form the basis of many of the main points of discussion in the following chapters.

## 1. Introduction

The story behind this research was very much influenced by the processes of education and professional development that I undertook and experienced in 'making up' my career pathway in the field of education – whatever that meant to me at the time. When doing my MA at the Institute of Education (IoE), University of

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<sup>1</sup> See Foucault (1983b)

London, I faced the challenge of writing a dissertation as part of the course. My memory will betray me at this point; the following is too simple a story. As I recall, I decided to study the situation of *villas* because I had been coordinating a group of volunteers in this environment and I felt committed to the educational challenges of the *villa* where I volunteered. I saw the image that inspired the questions that finally structured my dissertation on a shirt that I saw being worn by some fifth-year high-school students, who were about to graduate. It is common in Buenos Aires for students in their last year of high school to produce a shirt with the name of the school, their personal names and the graduation year printed on the back. I had my shirt in my fifth year of high school. The students of one of the schools in this *villa* had designed one that, instead of saying 'Graduated 2004' said 'Unemployed 2005'. This made me start to think about the expectations and plans of these students for when they finished school. What did the end of school mean for them? During the fieldwork for my MA I interviewed high-school graduates as part of my research design. Listening to their stories struck me for different reasons: I was impressed by their efforts, moved by the difficulties that they faced, ashamed of my privileged position, put into question and fascinated by the ways in which they dealt with the stigma and financial difficulties they encountered in their educational pathways. These interviews inspired the questions that then resulted in my PhD proposal, and my application for a place and a scholarship at the Doctoral School of the IoE. On the other hand, I recognize that reasons and meanings are often constructed post-hoc; perhaps my reasons were different or more complicated at the time – even more self-seeking.

My proposal was to analyse the practices of high-school graduates living in a *villa* in Argentina in their attempts to access and succeed in post-compulsory education and the labour market. That was going to be the title of my PhD thesis, until the end of the process of writing it. Two main aspects of this endeavour interested me. On the one hand, I wanted to produce a study and analysis of the conditions and practices of this population in relation to the educational pathways that could be used for the improvement of their situation (through feedback or actions at institutional or policy level). Secondly, producing such an account would also involve telling stories that are not often heard in the media about *villa* youth – these young people are mostly associated with crime, and their struggles in and for education tend not to be told.



The second dimension superseded the first, becoming the central node around which I produced the set of discussions that constitute this work. The first dimension was left incomplete, containing perhaps the germs of further projects after my PhD.

This project I propose is aimed at producing an ambitious piece of research focused on the educational experiences, problems and needs of young people in Argentinian shantytowns ('villas' or 'villas miseria'). These young people, who live in appalling social circumstances, are a sector of the country's population that has been stigmatized and excluded politically, economically, socially and symbolically. Their access to educational opportunities is limited in many ways, and yet education also offers opportunities for the social, political and symbolic empowerment of the youth of the 'villas'. The focus of the proposed study is to analyse the practices of youngsters – between 18 and 25 years old – that live in a shantytown located in Buenos Aires, as they seek to access higher education and/or the labour market. These are to be analysed in relation to the social structures that bear upon them at the global, regional, national and local level. Therefore, I hope that the research will make a general contribution to the understanding of, and debates about improvements in education in marginalized settings.

The 'villas' are segregated from the 'formal city' by social frontiers, among others. These are both formal, like the deficient provision of public services such as security and education, and informal – personal relationships become affected by stigma – and the impact of these on the economic and social capital of these neighbourhoods. In the case to be studied, schools are spaces of social and cultural interaction between the 'formal city' and 'villas'. Therefore, the end of the process of schooling becomes an issue, and institutions of higher education are seen by students as being 'outside villas'. The logics of the labour market, on the other hand, limit shantytown inhabitants to precarious jobs or unemployment. So, the end of schooling can be thought of as a deepening of the weight of exclusion in the lives of youngsters. This study aims at understanding the practices that high-school graduates develop to pursue their goals under these circumstances.

Shantytowns are discursively constructed from 'the outside' by policy and media discourses, which are biased, oversimplifying and, in many cases, stigmatizing. Existing research on education in the shantytowns is underdeveloped. There has [sic] as yet been no ethnographic studies of education in the shantytowns and thus no representations of the voices of young people themselves in research, nor

analyses of the structural and discursive mechanisms of stigmatization and exclusion that they are subject to.

(Fragment from the supporting statement I submitted in my application for the Centenary Scholarship, which funded my PhD.)

This fragment expresses how my research interests were coloured by my ethical and political motivations. In the statement I wanted to highlight why this research was relevant, referring to a sense of justice that informed my intellectual motivations. As I will repeat later on in this work, in the statement I was giving the act of understanding a positive political/ethical value. In the presence of disadvantage, stigma and exclusion, my proposal was to seek to understand practices and produce truthful representations of the voices of the population that I would study. I then redefined these assumptions in a series of discussions that I present in further chapters. These revolve around considering the multiple uses of knowledge, considering research and the production of knowledge as a dangerous rather than inherently innocent enterprise. I will also expand on why this is not a thesis, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas to deal with the discomforts involved in producing an object of study, and furthermore producing it as abject. In the cited statement I position this population as deprived, disadvantaged, as having multiple 'problems'. I was primarily concerned about having a positive impact on a situation considered to be problematic. However, drawing on Tamboukou & Ball (2003), Oszlak (1991), Ratier (1972), and Popkewitz, (2013), I began to consider the dangers of contributing to the construction of the 'problem of *villas*' or '*villas* as problems' through my ethnographic project. The social sciences have contributed to the production of the visibility of *villas* since they began to be studied in the mid-twentieth century (Ratier, 1972), and have contributed to the 'fabrication' (Popkewitz, 2013) of *villas* as 'problems' (Oszlak, 1991). With the question over the effects of my ethnographic project emerged a set of reflections on the nature and ethics of doing ethnography.

I develop this issue further in Chapter 2, where I draw on Levinas' notion of 'ethics as first philosophy' in order to position this work as an ethical endeavour. In this project I will intend to respond to the presence of an Other, dealing with the violence of turning the Other into an object of study. The outcome of that process will, then, be neither wisdom nor knowledge on the nature of being (the Other). The purpose

of part of this work is to carry out an exercise of thought in which the thinker (myself as the writer, and potentially the reader) allows for their own transformation through troubling their own conditions for thought. In this context I draw on Foucault's understanding of Descartes' practice of meditation, in which he conceives of thought not as a practice of logical reasoning but as a technology of the self, by which the subject produces and displaces itself, and the text as a tool for this task rather than as a set of logical propositions (McGushin, 2007, p. 181). I therefore propose, in the face of the testimonies of the students of the *villa* that I interviewed, to subject myself to change, to re-think myself, produce myself in a different way. In this way I trouble the practice and idea of doing a thesis, conceiving, using and experiencing this text as a technology of the self. And, as I will repeat later on, I invite the reader to use it in similar ways. I will present the design of an exercise in reading the testimonies that I have produced within this work; this exercise is conceived of as ethical, and consists of 'using and troubling' (Lather, 2012), conceptual tools for thinking sociologically about the experiences that the students of *villas* speak about in the testimonies I transcribed during my fieldwork interviews.

However, at the same time I acknowledge the conditions under which I produce this text: the fact that I am in a specialist higher-education institution doing a PhD course; the fact that I have been funded by that institution; the fact that I will be examined on what I produce. In that sense, I also acknowledge the risks that I take in creating a (non-)thesis. These conditions also intervene in the form of this text; they are part of the 'author-function' (Foucault, 1984) that produces it. They have also changed my biography and my destiny, and hopefully will continue to do so by giving me the qualification to become a researcher. So, in some ways, this text indeed intends to be a PhD thesis.

The question then becomes 'What is a PhD thesis?'. I offer the following as a first answer:

Words develop in meaning, and the word 'thesis' is nowadays commonly used to refer to the project report of the research undertaken for the PhD. Thus the regulations of your university may say that your thesis may be not more than a certain number of words in length, that it must be presented in black/blue/red binding, and so on. (Incidentally, these regulations differ for different institutions and they also change

over time, so it is important for you to check those that apply to you... (Phillips & Pugh, 2010, p. 41)

When I asked for the forms to submit my PhD thesis I was given some guidelines to prepare for the viva voce, that is, the oral examination in which I will answer questions on my work, and which, if my answers are deemed satisfactory, will allow me to become a Doctor of Philosophy. These guidelines include an annexe in which the criteria for assessing a PhD thesis are presented in nine points. Let us consider these points and try to generate responses to them, in order to understand some of the ways in which this text is and is not a PhD thesis.

1. The first point is *Presentation and Clarity*. Among other things, the text should be accessible to the reader, should not be repetitive, should include appropriate references that guide the reader through the whole work as well as accurate bibliographic references, and should have a certain length of approximately 75,000-80,000 words. I have attended to these points and these have given shape to the text in specific ways. So, the text will be replete with references, which could be helpful but also annoying to the reader. This represents an acknowledgement that this PhD research is the product of an author-function, both in the form of the bibliographic referencing and its content: it is a convention of academia as well as a sign of the conditions that have enabled the production of the text (access to certain literature, the content of that literature under 'archaeological' conditions, in Foucault's terms (Prado, 2008, p. 24)). The text will have a word length of approximately 70,000 words, although the content in various appendixes will make it longer. The appendixes, in that sense, are a rather playful way of troubling the length of this text. In a sense, they extend its length, but since they are not to be considered a necessary read in the whole work, they lie in an undecided space. I will use that space to confront the reader with decisions, as Cortázar (1987) did in his book *Hopscotch*<sup>2</sup>. I

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<sup>2</sup> *Hopscotch* is a novel by the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar, which tells the stories of the character of Horacio Oliveira, whose life is split between Paris and Buenos Aires. The book has three parts and 155 chapters. In a Table of Instructions at the beginning of the book, the author advises the reader that the book is at least two books. One can be read from Chapter 1 to Chapter 56, with the possibility of ignoring the rest of the chapters. For the 'second book', the reader should start with Chapter 73 and follow a sequence specified by the author – at the end of each chapter there is an indication by the author on what chapter to read next.

present the reader with the option of reading pieces of text that are part of this work, a game of choosing, and thus the possibility of making this text different, and contributing to its construction.

Cortázar begins *Hopscotch* saying “In its own way, this book consists of many books, but two books above all” (Cortazar, 1987). This work, too, is many and one at the same time. This is one aspect within the first point of the guidelines, *Presentation and Clarity*, on which I take a fairly unconventional stance. The guidelines say that the thesis has to “tell a story”. This thesis will tell several stories and it is aimed at being written over by the reader in the act of reading it, at being ‘writerly’ (Barthes, 1975). The whole piece is fairly fragmented; it is a disjointed and not necessarily coherent piece, composed of various stories, one of which is the one about it not being a thesis, which I am telling now. I have included a *testimonio* (Beverly, 2003) – first-person life story – told by a student whom I interviewed in the process of my fieldwork, in appendixes scattered around the text. This will interrupt, break, the scholarly reflections on methodology, ethics and social theory. *Testimonios* and commentaries will sit next to each other but separated, incommensurable, ‘othering’ each other, as my voice is necessarily Othering the participants’. So, the story will not be linear or necessarily coherent as a whole, but rather will take the form of a constellation, or ‘force field’ (Adorno, 1984), in which coherences and incoherences are plausible. I will construct coherences, but the text will remain open, cracked, for the readers to construct other coherences and incoherences. These breaks, then, will be a manifestation of this intention in the production of the text, as well as a provocation to use it in that way. They will constitute a disruption in which the reader will be faced with a choice. A choice that allegedly, in Cortázar’s terms, places the reader and the writer on the same level, since both will make choices in the production of the text. In my case, I have made choices both in the commentaries as well as in the transcription of the *testimonios* (see Chapter 3). I would not be able to sustain Cortázar’s words and make them mine, but I would argue that scattering appendixes throughout the work is an attempt to involve the reader in the production of the book-experience (Foucault & Trombadori, 1991) and to make explicit the presence of choice in its production (as a system of signs with meaning and also as experience).

The Table of Contents, which I have included at the beginning, will be a helpful tool in jumping from chapter to chapter and between appendixes.

2. The second point is *Integration and Coherence*. I have already mentioned how fragmentation and incoherence will be part of this work as a whole. However, I have constructed coherent stories about this work and made these coherences explicit through reflexive accounts of the production of this text. At some moments, I felt that I was being excessively explicit, that I would have rather produced a text that exhibited a *testimonio*, a title, a break without explaining it, for the purpose of its potential effect in the reading. At points these explanations might ruin the effect of the exposition of the *testimonio*, title and break, in the same way that a joke is often ruined when explained. However, as I develop in Chapter 4, I will attempt to justify the decisions and propositions that constitute this work through reflexive accounts of my decisions. This might work against some of the effects of the text in the reading, but, at the same time, constructing arguments on the nature of this work will be a constitutive part of it, and this will open the possibility to write over it, locate and question the writer, and, in my case, turn myself into a subject, producing myself in different ways.
3. The third point is *Contribution to Knowledge*. The guidelines here say that the PhD thesis should be “approximately equivalent in quantity and quality to at least two articles of a standard acceptable to a fully refereed journal (...)”, or able to “form the basis” of a book or research monograph which is accepted for publication on the basis of peer-reviewed proposals and drafts. I have structured this work as a set of chapters or sections which are able to stand alone, each bringing into play a different discussion drawing on specific literature. Although there will be references to the work done in other chapters, and some ideas (such as ‘this is not a thesis’) will be repeated throughout the different sections, each chapter is independent and (after a minor process of adaptation to the format of an article) I believe them to have reached peer-reviewed publication standards.
4. *Originality and Creativity*. “The research and the written submission should be the candidate’s own work”. At different points in this work I refer to the fact that this PhD thesis is a product of an author-function (Foucault, 1984), an emergence of a set of conditions and rules which I am a part of. I mention the

presence of my tutor several times, the seminars, colleagues, and also the conventions (I am doing that in this moment) and material conditions (scholarship, access to libraries) of this work. At the same time I have thought of this text as a technology for the production of myself. From this perspective, the author (me) is at the centre of the production of the text and of the text itself as author, instead of being a decentred author-function. I am not choosing one or the other, but both. I intend to produce myself as a student, a neighbour, a professional researcher through the writing of this text; however, the text and I are also both products of a broader set of conditions.

5. *Review of Relevant Literature.* The review of the literature will be presented as part of the whole piece, since throughout it I have ‘used and troubled’ conceptual tools to deal with the issues that emerged in my attempt to carry out the project outlined above. In this sense, there will be no chapter that does not review literature.
6. *Statement of a Research Problem.* The same applies to this point, since I will address several interconnected research problems, which are all somehow related to the ‘problem of objectification’ in the practice of ethnography. However, the problems that I will place most clearly in focus are not organized in a hierarchical or a linear way. They are rather a constellation of problems that inform each other.
7. *Methods of Inquiry Adopted.* In this work the choice of method is not as relevant as the discussion of methodology. In Chapter 3 I consider my intention to tell stories in the light of Foucault’s genealogical principles and look specifically at the tradition of the Latin American *testimonio* as a possibility for the production of the accounts of the *villa* students that I set out to elicit when I began this project. So, in that chapter I will look at the uses of knowledge, the uses of stories, and, specifically, the use and nature of *testimonios*. These will be one of the ‘products’ of this PhD thesis, on which I will comment in further chapters. By producing *testimonios* I do not intend to produce data, strictly speaking; that is, I intend not to treat the participants of this research as native informants or objectify their voices. The discussion focuses mostly on the epistemological status of *testimonios*, their co-

constructed and political nature, and their use in the framework of Foucault's project of genealogy.

8. *Analysis of Data.* In Chapter 4 I will present a strategy for reading the *testimonios* on the basis of an ethics of reading. I will present this work as primarily an ethical endeavour, rather than one that is aimed at the production of knowledge. As I have already mentioned, I will understand this text as practice and the analysis as exercise. On this basis, I will present an ethics of reading drawing on Simon Critchley's notion of *clôture reading* as a form of reading which attempts to open the text to a proliferation of meanings by exercising a double reading: a conventional reading and a second which problematizes the first from within. I will finalize the strategy by looking at Patti Lather's work, which deploys similar principles in the field of ethnography.
9. *Discussion of Outcomes.* One of the characteristics of this work is that it does not have findings, since the analysis is an exercise designed to be repeated indefinitely, without an end point. The end of the exercise is an ellipsis. It is through the lack of closure that it might be judged as successful, since the aim is to enable the proliferation of thought and meaning. Also, through this openness, both along the text and in its unclosed end, I intend to invite the reader to write over it, use its parts, bring them together, separate them, produce further meanings. It is in this way that I imagine it as a 'force field' (Adorno, 1984), its power existing in the space between its words and propositions.

Having addressed the criteria for the evaluation of this work, I have tried to make explicit some of the ways in which the conventions that govern a PhD thesis have produced this text, as well as the ways in which I have sought to negotiate with these and the risks I have taken in not writing a conventional thesis. I began this reflection by bringing forward a first approximation of what a thesis is, acknowledging that every relevant institution has a different definition. Having presented some defining notions communicated to me by my institution, I will now return to Phillips and Pugh's (2010) definition for further reflection. One of the sections of their book outlines some possible reasons for not being awarded a PhD, one of which is 'not having a thesis'.



[T]here is an earlier use of the word 'thesis' that is very important in the task of obtaining a PhD. A thesis in this sense is something that you wish to argue, a position that you wish to maintain (the word 'thesis' derives from the Greek for 'place' (...))

Your PhD must have a thesis in this sense. It must argue a position. At the minimum this means that the study must have a 'storyline', a coherent thrust that pushes along an argument, an explanation, a systematic set of inferences derived from new data or new ways of viewing current data. (Phillips & Pugh, 2010, p. 42)

According to this definition, I am not writing a thesis, and if Phillips and Pugh were to review my PhD work I would be unlikely to be awarded my degree. As I have mentioned, I do not have a position or story within which I construct an argument which culminates in a resolution of a 'thesis'. I have sought to transform myself through writing, and therefore my position as author is shifting and elusive; there is no single author that produces this text, but many actors. The proposition that is sustained throughout this work is that 'this is not a thesis', as I negotiate with, avoid, and submit to the conditions of my position as a PhD student studying ethnography. In this process my intention is to become a professional researcher, a Doctor in Philosophy, but I also intend to be something other. I seek otherness from within, as Lather says 'within/against' (Lather, 1991). In that sense also, this is not a PhD thesis. Nonetheless, I hope that the reviewers will read the work while considering the points that I have outlined, and will consider it to be of sufficient scholarly quality as to confer it the name of PhD thesis.

'Scientific' or theoretical vocabularies may distance researchers from the subjects of their activity but, at the same time, they also construct a 'gaze' that renders the 'landscape of the social' ever more visible and produce or contribute to discourses that create particular sorts of 'subject positions' for people to occupy.  
(Apple, Ball, & Gandin, 2009, p. 4)

In the supporting statement from my original proposal, presented above, there remains one last point that I would like to reflect on and in order to introduce the

discussions related to it, which are included in later chapters. In the statement I seem to draw a distinction between the *villa* and the 'formal city', between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. I seem to be thinking of it as delimited by 'boundaries' that separate it from the 'rest of the city'. My reading is informed by other studies on *villas*, where the tool of the boundary is often used to define these neighbourhoods and the conditions of their residents. It was on the basis of this idea – the 'boundary' – that I set out to write the stories of high-school graduates pursuing post-compulsory studies, for two reasons. The first was that I considered this population as one that had experience of crossing boundaries not only in a geographical sense but also in an upward movement of social mobility. To my understanding, the transition from studying in the local school in the *villa*, where the vast majority of students lived, to studying in a higher- or further-education institution in some other neighbourhood where the *villa* students were a minority, was an experience of crossing the boundary of the *villa*. I was interested in analysing that experience. On the other hand, I considered that telling these stories of border crossing contributed to the dissipation of these boundaries that separated the *villa* from the city. I considered that the practices and journeys of these students overcame both the symbolic and the material boundary, and telling those stories would be a way of participating in that act of overcoming. Telling the stories would help reveal the porosity of the boundary, and doing research on these practices would potentially allow for positive feedback for the participants or the informing of policy at college/university/public-policy levels. In the course of the PhD I reconsidered this second point. Instead of writing about the porosity of the boundary I decided that I would re-think the use of the category of 'boundary' when looking at the *villa* and its residents. Before explaining this last point I will briefly present in more detail the two points that inspired me to undertake to tell the stories of high-school graduates pursuing post-compulsory studies.

In this Introduction I am trying to present two decisions that shaped the whole of my (non-)thesis, and, in that process, to introduce the themes that I will develop in the following chapters. The first decision was to write a (non-)thesis, and the second was to write up the stories of high-school graduates from a *villa* relating to their attempts to access post-compulsory education. I will return to these aims throughout this work in order to set points of reference as I develop my reflections.

These points are as enabling to the text as they are limiting. In Chapter 5 I will refer to the exclusions that were necessary in choosing what stories to tell, and in Chapter 4 I will consider the choices and risks involved in writing a (non-)thesis. Having explained the presentation of this text as a (non-)thesis, I will now move to consider the second point, the choice to write up the stories of post-compulsory education students, inhabitants of a *villa*.

I have already told the personal story behind the decision – the idea came during the fieldwork for my MA dissertation, when I began to hear the stories of the *villa* graduates. I have mentioned how that experience troubled me, and the anger and shame that ensued. It was following those encounters, those feelings, that I began to set out the structure and rationale of this project. On the one hand, I understood that telling the stories would be a form of counteraction against the stigmatizing representations of *villas* and *villeros* produced outside the *villa*. But these stories would also express the experiences of overcoming the boundary of the *villa*, and would thus allow me to analyse the limit between the *villa* and the city. I will now expand on this rationale and introduce the last chapters of this (non-)thesis, where I use and trouble the notion of ‘boundary’.

...[the cry of the slum] a cry that comes from behind the ‘invisible wall’ that now separates Villa Paraíso from the rest of society. The ‘real wall’ – a 10-foot cement barrier – constructed to hide the slum from the eyes of ‘respectable citizens’ more than forty years ago, has disappeared (some of its pieces are now part of the slum houses), but another wall has taken its place: during the last two decades an invisible wall of economic redundancy, educational exclusion, state abandonment and sustained stigmatization has been erected. (Auyero, 1999, p. 48)

I structured this project considering *villas* as un-urbanized pockets of poverty that had been fabricated as a ‘problem’ to be solved by the State. The solutions to this ‘problem’ had ranged from eviction to urbanization. A first characteristic that I had looked at was the urban conditions of these neighbourhoods. Part of the ‘invisible wall’ was related to the lack of water for human consumption, the lack of sewerage, bad smells, accumulation of waste, smoke, epidemics, lack of lighting, and lack of green spaces (Sindicatura General de la Ciudad, 2007, p. 7; Auyero & Swistun, 2007). This landscape is often described in similar terms to those of Auyero – the suggestion is that it has been ‘abandoned’ by the State. In Chapter 6 I will draw on

Agamben to reconsider this assertion, and look at the *villa* as a product, rather than an absence, of the State. Other characteristics include the irregular design of the *villas*' alleys, the extreme precariousness of the houses – referred to as 'shacks' in reports by Buenos Aires City Council (Isla Blum & De Gatica, 2003). But there are also other variables related to socioeconomic status that present 'boundaries' between *villas* and the city. Specifically, Groisman & Suarez (2009) studied the levels of residential segregation (territorial separations between groups in an urban space) in Greater Buenos Aires and concluded that in the period 2004-2005 "the probability of being employed among the economically active population is significantly lower for members of households that reside in precarious housing conditions" (p. 51). They also studied the correlation between household income and piped-gas coverage, finding that "for both the city of Buenos Aires and for the *partidos*<sup>3</sup> of the Conurbation, residence in urban surroundings with low piped-gas coverage indicates lower household incomes" (p. 52). Both precarious housing and lack of piped-gas coverage are characteristics of *villas*, so from this study it can be concluded that the probabilities of unemployment and lower income are higher within households in *villas*. This study's results, then, can be used to support the idea of a 'boundary', an 'invisible wall' that confines these neighbourhoods as separate pockets of poverty.

Regarding housing, an aspect that is often used as the defining characteristic of *villas* is that they are illegal settlements, that is, the houses are built illegally on lands that belong to the State or private companies (Varela & Cravino, 2006). This element brings a key relationship in the understanding and definition of the *villa* into focus: its relationship with the State and its normativity. I will consider this further in Chapter 9. In short, the State has intervened in the material production of *villas* as well as in their fabrication as a 'problem' (Oszlak, 1991; Ratier, 1972). Its policies have ranged from 'eradication' to assistance and urbanization (Jauri, 2011). In these processes, *villa* residents are also produced as specific subjects. As *villas* become objects of intervention they become objectified and their limits and boundaries defined. The idea of eradication appeared as a solution to the 'problem of *villas*' after 1955, the end of Perón's second administration. This construction was partly a political strategy of President Perón's opposition, and was based on the fact

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<sup>3</sup> Municipal jurisdictions within Greater Buenos Aires.

that the number of people living in *villas* had grown substantially (Ratier, 1972). The ‘problem’ was that *villas* were growing in number, and eradication was foregrounded as the solution. From 1956 onwards, successive administrations moved between assistance and eradication, like a pendulum. Nowadays, we can see actions being carried out in both senses: evictions, urbanization and programmes for integration are starkly different ways in which the State relates to *villas* and separates them from ‘the city’.

As I have mentioned, the residents of *villas* are also subjectified by the same actions of the State, which leads us to the final point – the stigmatization of *villeros*. Oszlack has outlined the main points of the campaign against *villeros* and *villeras* that was conducted in 1976 to legitimize the eradications that the military government carried out during the dictatorship:

- 1) “*Villeros* like to live in *villas*, a kind of ghetto where ‘nobody can enter’ and where they are integrated to a particular socioeconomic structure, with internal laws
- 2) We are talking about people of very low skilled jobs, generally foreigners from bordering countries that have a different cultural background and bring their traditions to the urban environment
- 3) They have enough means to access other forms of housing, since many of them have cars, businesses, lands and houses
- 4) They obtain benefits and privileges that other citizens do not have: they do not pay taxes or services, have clandestine markets or are part of organized mafias
- 5) Many of them are criminals that find refuge in *villas*
- 6) They are an easy target for parties and popular movements, which use them for demagogic practices.” (Oszlack 1991: 159-160 – my translation)

These stereotypes have been present since the first days of the *villas* in the 1930s (see Ré, 1937). Rosana Guber in 1989 described how the poor conditions in which *villeros* lived were attached to (im)moral meanings (2004, p. 117). She also pointed out the effects of the stigma of the *villa* in the lives of its residents, who were marginalized in the labour market, in schools, and in their love relationships, and learned from an early age to hide the marks or manifestations of the *villa* in the way they presented themselves to others. She understands *villas* as expelled from society rather than positioned as subaltern; they are positioned as ‘other’, incomprehensible, uncontrollable and threatening. Cravino addressed the same topic in 2002, adding that *villas* are fabricated as threats to security, both in terms of

crime and political activism (María Cristina Cravino, 2002, p. 38). The stigma of the *villa* is complex, but in all of its forms it strengthens the division between the city and the *villa*, both territorially and socially.

As I have mentioned, this PhD research project was structured on the basis of this separation, the boundary, the limit between the city and *villas*, the existence of an inside and an outside. The production of this division involves diverse actors (although the State is often signalled as the most relevant), and has material, social and geographical dimensions. My intention in the design of my research project was to acknowledge this complexity through ethnographic research. My ethnographic account, at the same time, would be political, since my aim was to contribute, through my research, to the 'pulling down' of the 'invisible wall', both by analysing the practices of the youth of the *villa* in their attempts to succeed 'outside' the *villa* and also by producing a representation that served as a counter-narrative to the association of *villeros* with crime and immorality.

So, for the research I chose a group that experienced the boundary by crossing it: high-school graduates completing their secondary education in institutions that were 'from the *villa*', that is, near their neighbourhood and with a population of students the majority of which lived in the *villa*. In the end, I did not stick to this last point, and included an interview with a graduate who lived in a *villa* but had gone to a school with students from different neighbourhoods (interestingly, he tells how the students from the *villa* would form a separate group in the classroom). This group was also attempting to access or succeed in post-compulsory studies, which positioned them not only outside the *villa* but also within a movement of upward social mobility – many of them were attempting to achieve educational qualifications that their parents did not have. I resolved to analyse how and in which conditions these young people cross the boundary and also move away from a subaltern position. In this context, the school could be seen as a source of cultural capital that enabled these movements. By shedding light on these practices I intended to provide feedback on schools and students, but also to give visibility to their stories.

I was also seeking to produce an account that provided a representation of youth from *villas* that was not associated with or founded on issues of crime or immorality, and that worked to counteract the reductive representations produced by the media

and public-policy actors. In this sense, there was a political dimension to the project at the level of representation. In Chapter 5 I deal with the exclusions inherent in my representing only some young people in the *villa*, who have access to education and have or will have perhaps a relatively higher socioeconomic status than more marginalized youth.

As my case study I chose a traditional *villa* in the centre of the City of Buenos Aires, characterized by its high visibility and by its being a site of struggle between *villa* neighbours and social movements on the one hand and local and national administrations on the other. In this struggle this *villa* has been the object of various eradication and urbanization policies as well as a site of protest – sometimes successful in obtaining the provision of services, programmes of inclusive education (in both formal and informal education), etc., from the State. Given its long history and visibility, it could be considered a typical Buenos Aires *villa* – though it is true that other *villas* in Greater Buenos Aires have worse urban and socioeconomic conditions, less visibility and a different history (Cravino, 2008).

My chosen methodology draws on ethnography, with the inclusion of interviews to provide access to the stories of the educational pathways of the youth of the *villa*. Since the aim was to analyse the individual practices and strategies of young *villeros*, personal stories seemed like an adequate resource for the analysis. Furthermore, I was able to use those stories for their rhetorical value, their capacity to reach a broader audience than the academic one and to persuade of their truth. I therefore resolved to carry out interviews and elicit stories, positioning myself as an ethnographer in my relationship with the participants (see Plummer, 2007). These departing points are further discussed in Chapter 3. I co-produced eight stories in a period of six months' fieldwork, which included gaining access to the neighbourhood and to the participants through volunteering in the community centre of a local parish church. I have included one full account in an appendix in order to introduce the reader to the form of account I am discussing, and which I set out to produce in Chapter 3. Due to the aims, word limit and time constraints of this project I have not included all *testimonios*.

I am making these points because they have formed the basis for the structuring of this whole project; these decisions about appropriate methods have shaped the text

and the process of producing it. In the following chapters these starting points will be challenged, modified to some extent, and the text will develop amongst tensions that will emerge from these initial attempts at 'doing research'. Again, one of the results and end points of this process will be the assertion that 'this is not a thesis', which is also structuring of the whole work.

One of the assumptions that I trouble in the last chapters is the concept of the 'boundary' as a tool to interpret the conditions of *villas* and *villeros*. I have already mentioned how the social sciences have identified a variety of significant dividing lines between the *villa* and the 'city'. I want to argue that these statements are 'fabrications' (Popkewitz, 2013).

During a great part of the 80s and 90s, the critical imagination and the sociologic literature adopted, both in the US [...] and in Argentina [...], the metaphor of the dual city to describe the effects that economic polarization has had and has in the urban geography and ecology. In spite of its many empirical and conceptual limitations, the image of a fractured and dual city (or, as O'Donnell suggests, a 'dual country') has the virtue of drawing our attention to the new inequalities [...] produced partly due to the elimination of thousands of jobs and the withdrawal of the welfare state, [that] not only characterize post-industrial cities such as New York and Chicago but also the cities of the so-called 'Third World', such as Buenos Aires (Auyero, J. in Loïc J. D. Wacquant, 2001, p. 11 – my translation)

The idea of 'fracture' or 'break' in the unity of a city has become very widespread. Auyero does mention, however, the limitations of this metaphor as a tool for research. In the frame of my ethnographic project I will consider these limitations as dangers, from an ethical perspective. In the last chapters of this work I will discuss the reading of the stories that I have transcribed, specifically using and troubling the idea of 'boundary'.

In Chapter 6 I will reconsider the idea of the *villa* as the product of abandonment by the State. Drawing on Agamben's paradigm of the Camp (Agamben, 1998), I will understand abandonment as a positive action, a condition that is sustained over a population by sovereign power. From this perspective, *villas* are not 'outside' the city, but functional parts of it, territorially fixed "fragments of the city without the status of the city" (Cravino, 2013 – my translation) . I will also consider the limitations of using the paradigm of the Camp by drawing on Laclau, and on the



literature of the mobilities paradigm. In this context, I will focus on a character from one of the stories, a scavenger, to reconsider the metaphor of the dual city and open the possibility of thinking about other cartographies. On this, Perelman says:

It is true that a lot has been written about the isolation of the urban poor on the basis of phenomena as residential segregation, which manifests in the development of *countries* [gated neighbourhoods] where the most privileged sectors live and, on the other hand, *villas* and informal settlements. However, the diversity of situations in the streets of the city, which has as protagonist the crossing between different social sectors in public spaces, falls outside the concepts of 'new poor' and segregation. The case of scavengers of the central zone of the city provides an account of that crossing, which takes place in parallel to the process of residential segregation that the city and its inhabitants have gone through. (Perelman & Boy, 2010, p. 399 – my translation)

Through the eyes of one of the participants looking at the scavenger or *cartonero*, I will consider the latter and attempt to look beyond the idea of segregation, beyond the Camp, addressing the mobilities of both *cartoneros* and students from *villas*.

I will also draw on the literature on waste and dirt in order to consider the dangers of understanding *villas* through negative categories such as the 'illegal', the 'irregular', as the absence of a positive, the norm in the city. Wacquant warns of the pernicious trope of 'disorder' as a common source for social scientists to draw upon in their descriptions of the American ghetto. I take that warning for myself. The use of 'boundaries' in the understanding of a dual, segregated or fragmented city can work as the basis for defining one of its parts as the negative of the other, thus reinforcing the latter.

[A]nalysts have accepted as a given that the ghetto can be satisfactorily analysed in essentially *privative terms*, by pinpointing its shortcomings and those of its residents and by specifying how (and how much) both diverge from 'mainstream' society as measured by putative 'middle-class' standards. (Wacquant, 1997, p. 345)

So, the idea of a dual city is productive and at the same time dangerous. I will approach the analytical commentaries of the stories that I have elicited such that, through the exercise of commenting, I will at the same time attempt to produce myself, to change myself – to make myself a different kind of social scientist,

perhaps a 'non-social' scientist, a philosopher or something else. In the successive readings of the 'data' that I have done in the course of my PhD I have always failed in dealing with the dangers I flag up. I have failed by producing 'middle-class' readings and choices, by objectifying and reifying the voices of the participants, by reducing the pains and struggles of many of the inhabitants of *villas* to categories, or by silencing them by excluding some of their voices. My tutor frequently quotes Samuel Beckett when facing failure: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better." Repetition is a relevant part of this exercise. The exercises of analysis I will offer are meant to be repetitive, for in that repetition difference might emerge. Old concepts and tools will be brought into play and applied repetitively in attempts to trouble them. Especially the two last chapters address similar situations and deploy similar concepts. The exercises' failures will be repetitive as well. I have chosen to go through the same questions over and over, failing over and again, in an attempt to think differently, to be different from before, to deal with the discomforts of my present condition. It is for this reason that I will not include a conclusion. This work opens up as it develops. I bring theories and ideas to bear and put them to work together, attempting always at the same time to reconsider what I set out to do, and to trouble it. For this reason this is not a linear text, but rather takes the form of a constellation, which expands from within. In the interstices of its words lie possibilities of new meanings and words, of another text that writes over the one I am leaving here for the record. It is intended to continue its movement of expansion indefinitely, through repeated readings, repeated acts of writing-over. A conclusion, then, would not add anything to this work in terms of ideas, and, in terms of gesture, it would act against the efforts that I have invested throughout the text in moving it towards a proliferating expansion.

## 2. B

*[Buenos Aires, 30 July 2012. B agreed to have an interview with me about her experiences in university. B was doing a journalism degree at a private university. She had a scholarship and also worked in the university. I had asked her for an interview a few months earlier, since a friend of hers, whom I had met while volunteering in the villa, had mentioned that she could be interested in participating in my research. I was volunteering in the local parish church in a group that provided support to young people who wanted to quit drugs. I contacted B through Facebook but she did not reply to my invitation at first. We then met by chance in the community centre of the parish church one day when I was volunteering. We had a brief conversation in which I explained what I was doing and she accepted my invitation to participate in my project to tell me about her experience in university.]*

*In the following transcript I have omitted some of my questions and fragments of small talk that could distract from the core of the conversation. However, I have tried to keep most of the text in order to respect B's words as a testimony that speaks for itself rather than for my editing and selection of themes. I have also tried to reflect in the text the oral nature of the interview, the breaks and unconcluded sentences. The intention is to produce a realistic effect that expresses the conditions of production and the characteristics of the speech act. I used recording equipment that has allowed this effect to be produced.]*

*Yes, let's start with high school. The question I often begin with is: What did it mean to finish high school? And that could bring us back to fifth, fourth, third year of high school. So: What did it mean to finish high school?*

Finishing high school. Wow. Uhm... I think that the moment when you finish you don't realize, you realize afterwards, when you're outside. I did primary and high school in the same school, which is in the neighbourhood, so you don't have a notion of what it is like to go outside. I wanted to finish high school, work and study for a degree. But once you're outside you think 'no, I want to go back to high school'. You

miss it a lot, things are different. To me, high school was very easy. I had friends, people I knew, the topics during breaks were the same, we understood each other. There was that complicit glance saying 'we speak and feel the same', and practically everyone wanted the same: go out, work and become somebody. It was what teachers told us: 'look...'. It's weird because in the graduation ceremony one of the graduates gives a speech and they always say 'enjoy every moment of high school because when you leave and you're out in the concrete jungle everything is different'. You don't pay attention to those words, that's the truth. But then, when you're the one who has to give the speech you think 'they were right'.

*You gave the speech?*

Yes [*she laughs*], and that's when you say 'I miss a lot and it is very different from what I thought'; when going out and looking for a job you realize that things aren't easy because when you prepare your CV you face the basic question, 'Do I include my address or not?'. If you put it you know that you have a percentage of chance that they won't call you. That's how it is, even though people say it isn't. It's like that.

*Who says it isn't?*

Sometimes you tell this and people say 'nobody is going to look at that'. And you, having experienced it, know that they will. Besides, you have already heard cases in which their CVs were left to one side for living in this neighbourhood. If they need you, well, they might call you. Or if you had the chance of running into people who don't care about the place where you live. But otherwise, you have to look for an address, a friend, a relative that lives far away or that doesn't live in your neighbourhood, and try to put somebody else's address. So, you find your first obstacle when you leave high school. Then, the thing of the degree, university is...it's a whole issue [*she laughs*].

UBA [*University of Buenos Aires*] is everyone's first choice<sup>4</sup>, but UBA also has its problems. I never tried to go to UBA. When I decided to study journalism I was told that in UBA the course wasn't focused on journalism but on marketing. Besides, I was very scared of CBC<sup>5</sup>. I knew people who had been doing CBC for two, three years, and were still there, trying, and the truth was that I was very scared. And at home nobody had done a university degree. My elder brothers finished high school and worked. So, I didn't have a model at home. I knew that I had the support of all my brothers but I didn't have the 'How did you make it?' or 'What did you do?', to ask someone close to me. That made it hard for me. My brother did many courses on locution, he tried many times to get into the school of locution, the last time he tried he couldn't make it only for one point and said 'that's it, never again, I'm tired, never again'. So it was a downer. The only thing he had was...poor him, he tried twice and couldn't make it only for one point!

*He tried twice*

Yes. So, I had the fear that something similar would happen to me, that I would get frustrated soon. I then started doing short courses. I enrolled in a three-year Protocol course, did a term and quit. Because I was working, I couldn't find a job outside, I was working in a shop in the neighbourhood. They paid per hour; I worked from three in the afternoon until 11 at night, and the whole day on Sundays. And, to study, it was...

*You went to class in the morning?*

Yes. And then I had the possibility of getting to know one of the priests in the neighbourhood, which gave me THE chance of studying in a private university. And that's how I...I was, on the one hand, really happy for studying in a private university,

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<sup>4</sup> I understood that the reason for this is because UBA does not charge fees.

<sup>5</sup> The introductory course at UBA, which lasts one year. Students have to pass in order to begin their degrees.

with its prestige and all that. But at the same time it was a huge burden, and I felt it. It was every day. Every day it was a burden. Everyone would tell me 'you'll get used to it as time passes'. I didn't feel that. On the contrary. I now have been going to university for almost four years, and even today it is difficult for me to go to university. So it's like...I felt that what I had at school, the complicit glance, the same stories, all that was very difficult to find here. And, while in high school I would wait for the break to stop listening to a teacher who drilled me with difficult topics, I now say 'I hope she gives the whole class in one go with no break so I can go home'. The first year was very strange. Sometimes I would wake up early and walk to university because it was close to my house. It was crazy to see the difference... You walk in my neighbourhood and see everyone rushing to their jobs because they're running late. The reality outside is different. Now the neighbourhood has asphalt streets, the houses are newly painted, but it used to be very different. And then, I would get to my university and it's completely different there<sup>6</sup>. If you sat for a minute to see the differences it was...wow...why so much?

*What differences did you see? You mentioned that people were rushing from the neighbourhood to work.*

Yes, I don't know. People were different downtown. I don't know how to say this. I didn't see sacrifice there. On the contrary, I saw people going to work, while my neighbours were the *cartoneros* [scavengers] who collected the food thrown away by the super restaurants. So it was very strange for me to be part of my neighbourhood and go to a university that I felt had nothing to do with me. Beyond the religious aspect, because I'm lucky enough to study in a Catholic university and be a Catholic. But beyond that, I felt that I didn't have much to do with what I had imagined of the course. It's true, I have teachers that are very good and are working for the best newspapers of the country, but I felt that it wasn't my place. That was what most struck me, because generally I am someone who doesn't talk much, reserved, it's very hard for me to start a conversation, so at university it was twice as difficult. So,

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<sup>6</sup> Her university was located in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods of the city.

many times I would wonder 'What for?', and end up resigning to talk and...I don't know, I would end up going from eight in the morning until one in the afternoon and not have spoken a single word. I would write and nothing else. Sometimes those things become heavy along the course, and for some subjects you have to work in groups, and I would hate them with all my soul. 'It can't be this way...' I would say to myself. For the modules we had to work in groups, with people that you hardly had any relationship with, with different times, and I was always at work. Some people devote all their time to their studies; they don't work, so it's easier for them. But I worked and my shift was from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. – I didn't coincide with anyone. I could only make it on the weekends. So, it was an issue. I remember that for one of the modules we had to make a documentary. I still have to redo that module. We were asked to do a documentary about a topic that was relevant but not much spoken about. So, my classmates, who liked rugby, suggested 'let's look at the injuries in rugby'. I hadn't watched a rugby match in my entire life! [*We laugh.*] I had no idea of what they were talking about! I saw that everyone had someone close to them who played or knew someone, or went to the club. I didn't have any of that, so at the time of collecting data, information, it was much harder for me than for the rest. At the time of going to the club, I had no idea where it was.

So, we went to watch a match; I didn't understand anything. But it's those little differences that you say 'Well...'. Anyway, I don't complain of my good fortune. Before I used to think very negatively about going to a private university. I saw it in a negative way because I had chosen journalism and the mentality... I felt that the people that studied journalism had to be different, open minded. 'I want to tell stories' and I thought that everyone would be open-minded. 'We tell this story from this perspective, we tell this story from this other perspective...'. I don't know, finding different people. And going there and finding that everyone was the same was 'Uh. Nothing to do with what I had imagined.' But the fact of being in a Catholic university helped me a lot. In the neighbourhood we always complain that we are labelled as lazy, thieves, drug addicts and it's very easy to criticize the other, but we also do say, 'Those posh kids all live in a bubble and have no idea of what's going on'. And I saw that it wasn't the case with every one of my classmates. It helped me understand people that have nothing to do with me. And realize that it's not how I thought it was. That we complain of something that we also end up doing – labelling people.

Although I didn't talk much to my classmates, I used to talk a lot to other people from the university – the educational psychologist, the authorities, my tutor – who were very different people, who knew what sacrifice was, who even had a different way of speaking, and although they had money and they could be labelled as 'posh', I learned they wanted to make good from the place where they were and that everyone is not the same. That their reality didn't end in the place where they lived, but they knew there was something different from that. I am thankful for that. I could understand it thanks to the fact that I am in a private university. Otherwise I'd keep thinking, 'These all live in a bubble and don't understand anything of what's outside'.

I didn't even want people from outside to come to help in the parish church. That was a discussion I always had with the priest.

#### *People from outside...*

Exactly, there were many people, young people, from downtown who came to help, and I didn't like it. It was my eternal disagreement with the priest. I'd say 'I don't understand why so many people from outside have to come here having so many capable young people in the neighbourhood who only need a place to help'. I didn't like people coming from outside. I'd say, 'Why? They're doing charity with us and I don't like it'. It was hard for me to understand that, 'They're not doing charity with us, they want to see another reality, they know there is another reality and they want to contribute with their bit'. It was very hard for me to understand that. I think I finally did it thanks to the fact that I'm in a private university; it's one of the few things that I can value from my experience. Otherwise, I find it really hard, and up to last year I was determined to drop out. I looked at the future and thought 'I don't know if I see myself with a microphone in my hand talking in front of people' or chasing the news, or being... I don't know, many say that in order to be a journalist you have to trample all over people otherwise you won't get the news.

#### *Is that what they say in university?*



Some teachers, others are more... I knew that I couldn't do that, I never liked to invade privacy, go and knock and be very overwhelming. I'm the contrary to that! So sometimes I think, 'I don't know if this is what I want'. I know that I like to write, I love to write, I love to see the world from a different angle, but I don't know if it is 'journalism'. There was a moment when I was very clear in my mind that it was, but now that I'm in the second year of the course I think, 'I can't be so impulsive as to leave everything that tires me'. I know that I now have to finish. I don't know how long it will take me because I keep failing modules, but I know that I want to finish and then decide 'I want to do social work'. I think I'd like it much more.

*Continues in Appendix 1*

### 3. Telling stories: possible approaches through ethnography and genealogy

In this chapter I explore the possibilities for developing a research design that includes both ethnographic and genealogic principles in my attempt to produce a piece of work that engages with the situation and lives of high-school graduates of a *villa*, but dealing with the symbolic violence that social sciences have exercised in naming those who have become objects of their words. This statement serves as a simple first presentation of the issue – but the tensions are complex and I have not been able to reduce them to one sentence. Peters and Fendler's contribution in *Dangerous Encounters* neatly presents an aspect of the issue from the perspective of disability studies:

Ethnographic work carries the ethical burden of constructing Disability by privileging and silencing selected images and voices, thereby giving voice and visibility to Disability. Disability, then, is produced as an effect of ethnographic assumptions and decisions. This is not necessarily bad. But it is dangerous.  
(Peters and Fendler, 2003, p. 124)

I see genealogy as a perspective that could help in dealing with the dangers of the ethnographic enterprise, but the two make a problematic couple. Whereas the ethnographic account is based on the modernist “assumption that disciplinary knowledge has a subject” (Tamboukou & Ball, 2003, p. 7) Foucault's genealogy seeks the “sacrifice of the subject of knowledge” (Foucault & Rabinow, 1991, p. 96); whereas the ethnographer produces representations and stories in the construction of its object, the genealogical project dissociates the signs that have been brought together in the construction of unitary identities (Foucault & Rabinow, 1991, p. 96). In attempting to establish a set of aims it becomes difficult to give unity to a project that is moved by two very different ontological logics. However, if put to work together, the two have the potential to guide me towards a more reflective piece of research.

This chapter is organized as a journey through two groups of literature, or two traditions. In the movement between the two I reformulate the issues addressed,

moving towards the definition of a set of aims and methodological principles for my research. It should be said that this 'definition' is not entirely 'definitive', since I intend to present principles, starting points, rather than objectives and expected outcomes. As will be made apparent later, given the exploratory nature of this project, these redefinitions are expected and are considered as constitutive of the research, rather than as problems connected to its design. Having acknowledged this, a set of principles will here be brought forward in an attempt to provide a sketch to start developing the research.

The chapter will start by presenting the main characteristics of ethnography from a historical perspective. Here I will try to find notions that may have surreptitiously shaped my initial view of my research. After addressing those principles and the problems presented by them, I will explore Foucault's genealogy in search of a response. Having presented these two positions I will try to apply their principles to the writing of narratives, questioning what it means to produce a narrative within each frame. In the case of the ethnographic tradition I will look at *testimonios* as a possible way of working with both ethnography and genealogy.

### Ethnography: some issues

Although it would be practical to have a single, straightforward definition of ethnography to draw upon, this form of research has been defined in different ways throughout the last century and the term has worked as an umbrella under which a wide variety of heterogeneous studies have been labelled (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 2). I will first present what Hammersley and Atkinson consider to be what ethnographers do, as a way of introducing this form of research, and then move to addressing the issues that are relevant to my research design.

The main characteristic of ethnography as a form of research is that it involves a researcher collecting data through his/her own experience 'in the field', i.e., the community that is being studied. This is done through a variety of sources, participant observation, informal conversations and field notes being the most common ones. The researcher's participation also allows for the redefinition of the research design throughout the period of data collection, since there is no artefact developed before the data collection that demands a structured design. The main

‘artefact’ for data collection is the researcher’s gaze<sup>7</sup> itself: the ethnographer is trained to interpret meaning and practices in different contexts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

This approach made its way into the social sciences in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, within the context of a positivist approach to scientific knowledge. Hammersley and Atkinson identify three approaches within the history of ethnography: the positivist approach, the naturalist approach, and reflexive ethnography. Within positivism, the aim is to discover the universal laws that inform societies, based on an ontology that considers reality as objective and scientific method as the most effective way of acquiring true knowledge. Ethnography develops within this context, pushing the boundaries of what is considered to be ‘scientific method’, but also inheriting an objectivist ontology. With naturalist approaches there is a shift in the focus of research, since description displaces the search for explanatory causal relationships. However, reality is still considered to be ‘out there’ and the researcher’s behaviour in the field is still very much influenced by positivist experimental methods, since s/he attempts to live in the field unadvertised, without disturbing the object’s ‘natural’ state:

Naturalism proposes that through marginality, in social position and in perspective, it is possible to construct an account of the culture under investigation that both understands it from within and captures it as external to, and independent of, the researcher: in other words, as a natural phenomenon. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 9)

So, three points are characteristic of ethnography before reflexivity and the postmodern critique: the social world exists, it can be known by the social scientist, and the main aim of social research is the understanding of this social world – in the case of ethnographies, the emphasis is placed on the discovery and understanding of ‘other’ cultures. The first two points were significantly present in my research design before I included Foucauldian genealogical principles.

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<sup>7</sup> An analogy could be drawn with Foucault’s understanding of the clinical gaze of doctors in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He sees doctors as having acquired in this period the authority to see beyond the surface of bodies, seeking truth in the understanding of the internal opacity of bodies through the mastering of a perception residing in the doctor’s body as a whole, of which the gaze is a part. “The gaze is no longer reductive, it is, rather, that which establishes the individual in his irreducible quality. And thus it becomes possible to organize a rational language around it.” (Foucault, 2003, p. xiv).

My intention had been to study the lives of high-school graduates in a *villa* in order to develop an account that incorporated their voices, therefore being representative of who they were. This account would be empowering for this community, so I thought, since it would provide a new authoritative representation that was more 'accurate' or authentic than others produced and reproduced in society. So, my perspective was to a great extent influenced by the idea that the high-school graduates from the *villa* were out there to be known and that my sociological method would provide me with the authority to claim that my description was closer to the truth than others. This would, then, function within a political aim, which was to work towards a fair representation of the students of *villas*. This third point is not a 'naturalist' aim, and it also has issues – what is a fair representation? Does the use of my method imply that my representation will be fair?

What triggered my search for answers in Foucault's work was the problem of objectification. In many ways, I was placing myself in a position of superiority in relation to my 'object'; I was constructing them as an 'other' and in aiming to elaborate a description of their identity I would be imposing another representation from the 'outside'. Following my supervisor's suggestion, reading about Foucault's genealogy provided me with a different way of understanding research that led me to aim at undermining the construction of the 'object' of my study. This finally drove me closer to what Hammersley and Atkinson would call a 'reflexive' ethnography – to which I will return below.

### Foucauldian genealogy: a critique and new ground

In his essay 'Nietzsche, History, Genealogy' (1991a), Foucault borrows a set of ideas from Nietzsche, presenting a form of understanding history that leads to a particular way of doing research. The essay provides ontological, epistemological and methodological elements which will be drawn upon.

Genealogy is considered as a domain of analysis in Foucault's work<sup>8</sup> that derives from archaeology, with some overlap (Prado, 1995). The two domains are similar in

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<sup>8</sup> Genealogy is considered as different from archaeology in that the latter focuses on the history of systems of knowledge, whereas genealogy focuses on the histories of modalities of power. Foucault thus moves from considering the shaping of practice by discourse to the analysis of the mutual shaping of discourse and practice (Prado 1995: 24). In order to work with genealogical principles it is necessary to address archaeology, since they the two domains overlap; however, the use of

that Foucault, through them, retells the histories of disciplines, institutions and practices (idem), comparing established with excluded and hidden texts, voices and practices, thereby troubling hegemonic histories. The development of such alternative histories is based on an ontology which holds the absence of essences, the absence of a teleological development of history guided by underlying continuous forces, and understands truth as a contested field which is the result of the struggle of interpretations. Traditional history is thus also the result of this struggle of its interpretations, claiming to assert general and atemporal statements as a way of sustaining their domains. The role of research, then, is to dissociate, to undercut what has been put together by disciplines in the construction of histories, identities and essences (Foucault, 1991a)

### Origins, descent and emergence

Foucault highlights Nietzsche's use of three concepts: *Ursprung*, *Herkunft* and *Entstehung*. The first refers to the idea of 'origin'. Foucault asks why Nietzsche challenges the pursuit of the origin of things, and provides three answers. Firstly, the pursuit of the origin is done as part of the 'attempt to capture the essence of things' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 43). Assuming the existence of an immutable essence of things, the pursuit of origin has become a means of discovering essences, since it is represented as a moment preceding the development of accidental changes throughout history. Secondly, it is considered as a stage of purity, where things are delivered in the forms wanted by their creator. Thirdly, the origin is represented as the site of truth, where things have an immutable form that makes them be what they are. A critique of origins is, then, a critique of the ideas of essence and truth.

*Herkunft* is translated by Foucault as 'descent'. This refers to the networks of marks that constitute the selves of individuals. An analysis of descent produces the dissociation of the idea of self, because it undermines the idea of its inherent unity. This form of analysis does not pursue the discovery of continuities that link the different elements of the self into one coherent narrative, but seeks for dispersion. This means that, although it is based on the idea that the present is informed by the past, the diverse imprints recognized in the present do not have any relation with each other, and are not connected by a general pattern. For this reason, the analysis

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genealogy is more appropriate for my research since my focus is on institutions and the individual practices that take place within them.

of descent is detailed and built on the minutiae of the object studied, since it does not disregard the particular in the search for the general (1991a, pp. 146-147). Foucault emphasizes that 'descent' is linked to the body, since the traces of history are imprinted in bodies. Discourse and practice are thought of here as interacting, mutually producing each other. According to Shumway (1989, p. 111), Foucault considers the body as a depository of habits, so practices exist in bodies, which are shaped by and participate in the shaping of discourses.

Finally, *Entstehung* is translated as 'emergence', the 'moment of arising' (Foucault & Rabinow, 1991, p. 147). It refers both to the relationships of domination that distance individuals in struggles with each other and with the space between them. This space is referred to by Foucault as a 'non-place', an absence of a common place for the forces that are put into play at a certain moment, dividing and separating them. Emergence therefore refers to the place and relationship that exist between embodied forces in a particular moment. These relationships of domination sediment over time and give rise to rituals, crystallized rules that channel the exercise of violence between the conflicting subjects, but that are also susceptible to being appropriated by them. Therefore, these rituals and rules are not immutable or continuous, but they are another manifestation of the dynamics of domination that take place within the process of emergence. Therefore, there is no hidden essential force that sustains them (Foucault & Rabinow, 1991, p. 148).

### Power and visibility

These three ideas should be presented in relation to Foucault's notion of power. This is a complex idea in his work, so I will only present one aspect to reflect on:

Power exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action, even though, of course, it is inscribed in a field of sparse available possibilities underpinned by permanent structures. This also means that power is not a matter of consent. In itself, it is not the renunciation of freedom, a transfer of rights, or power of each and all delegated to a few... (Foucault, 1994b, p. 340).

In other words, power is not 'something' that is held by a particular group, but exists in the actions of individuals in relation to each other (Ball, 1990). It exists in the form of flows that traverse individuals, constituting them as such, and in its disciplinary form it produces them in their individuality (Foucault, 1977a, p. 136). The boundary

between the oppressed and oppressor is then blurred, as are the identities attached to these concepts. Individuals are both subjected to and exercise power, and this subjection is as oppressive as it is constitutive.

An important aspect of the production of individuals by power is the requirement of visibility. With the establishment of the network of disciplinary institutions, the observation of the lives of common individuals becomes a practice embedded in the organization and control of societies (op. cit.). Therefore, it is not only those with notorious status or wealth that are visible (in monuments or paintings), but also ordinary people that acquire visibility, in files, reports, forms, etc. This movement also affects literature, shifting its focus towards the lives of 'infamous' people, towards the hidden, the forbidden, the scandalous (Foucault, 1994a). The stories of common people become interesting stories to be told within the expansion of a new set of technologies of control that constitute the disciplinary society. So, when considering the production of visibility of individuals (i.e., in documents, media or in my own research) it is relevant to analyse it as an effect of power, and also to address the technologies through which it is done in order to build an understanding of its meaning. In the case of my own research, my recording equipment, my notes, the interviewing skills I have learned at the doctoral training programme, my scholarship, the paper I might publish, the conference where I might present it, are all connected and play a part in producing the stories I will write and the interest in them – as well as contributing to producing me.

However, I understand the operation of technologies in the production of visibility as being contested by the individuals that interact with them. The *testimonios* of D (Chapter 5) and B (see Chapter 6) show how TV cameras operate in the *villa* in different ways, depending on the context and the networks of relationships in which they intervene. They show how the production of visibility is contested, for example how some residents avoid TV cameras so that their bosses do not see them on TV and find out that they live in a *villa*, how other residents constitute 'the voice of *villa* residents' for being powerful social leaders, or how D and her friends organize a riot after the killing of a teenager by a police officer, attracting the attention of the media – which gives strength to their claim even as the TV cameras are perceived as intruders at the teenager's funeral. This struggle was also present in the production of the interviews. Whereas D agreed immediately to an interview with me, B was



much more cautious, since she was aware of the 'dangers' involved in speaking to outsiders with recording equipment. In her *testimonio* she is explicit about her discomfort with the production of representations of *villas* by journalists, sociologists, religious missionaries, and the very social leaders from the *villa* that speak for her and the other residents. So, the production of the *testimonios* in this work are not to be considered as the result of a totalizing system of the production of visibility through specific technologies, but as the result of the contested deployment and enactment of, and resistance to these technologies, inscribed in the social sciences and the ethnographic tradition.

Foucault's genealogy presents an ontology and a sociology of knowledge that pose a critique of positivist and naturalist approaches, also providing a lens that redefines the role of research on a different basis. The epistemological premises are completely reformulated, since the existence of universal laws that rule society is disregarded, considering history as the result of the struggle of interpretations. So, what is considered to be 'reality' is a production of knowledge, knowledge that is historically created within relations of power channelled through institutions. The role of the researcher is to excavate these constructions and trace the histories of practice and the methods on which truth claims are founded, and thus to produce a critique of these truth claims.

From the above perspective visibility is an effect of power, in relation to which it should be considered neither absolutely enabling nor absolutely constraining. It is both. The starting point of my research was the assumption that the population I want to write about/write with is misrepresented and silenced, and that this is a case of *subalternation*. However, this needs to be analysed in more depth, since visibility has consequences that can be considered as positive or negative depending on the perspective and setting. B's and D's *testimonios* express how visibility can be empowering when raising public claims (in the case of the broadcasting of D's riot), but also associated with control and stigma, as in the case of B's neighbours, who fear being caught on camera because of the risk of being fired for living in a *villa*. On the other hand, avoidance can be a form of resistance to control but can also be intertwined with neglect and further segregation. This flags up the fact that my

narrative – if it becomes visible – will have consequences that are deeply intertwined with power, participating in the arena of history. I have tried to reflect this in the design of my research. In short, understanding is not as innocent as it seems under a ‘naturalist’ approach, since the production of understanding is embedded in institutions and power.

Several questions relevant to my research arise from this first approach to ethnography and genealogy. Ethnography proves problematic since it could contribute to producing a representation of young people in *villas* which could turn out to ‘objectify’ the participants, constructing identities rather than enabling diverse identities through the production of a description that claims to follow a scientific method. So, do I still want to tell these individual stories? What is the purpose of doing so? If I continue with the project, what will these stories mean?

### Life stories: what’s the point?

After making this short journey through genealogy it seems hard to make a case for writing life stories from a sociological stance. In the search for justification I will now look first at Michel Foucault’s publication of the story of Herculine Barbin, and second at the Latin American *testimonio* tradition in relation to politics and epistemology.

### Foucault and stories

I will draw on two texts by Foucault to approach his ideas on stories. The first, ‘The Lives of Infamous Men’, is a project meant for a book that would have been an “anthology of existences”, a compilation of short stories about infamous people (Foucault, 1994a). The other is the Introduction to the memoirs of Herculine Barbin, a French hermaphrodite who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Barbin, 2013).

In his Introduction to Barbin’s memoirs, Foucault reflects upon why the story is worth telling:

I have brought these two texts together, thinking they deserved to be published side by side, first of all because both belong to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that century which was so powerfully haunted by the theme of the hermaphrodite – somewhat as the 18<sup>th</sup> century had been haunted by the theme of the transvestite. Also because they allow us to see what a wake this little provincial chronicle, hardly even scandalous, managed to leave

behind in the unhappy memory of its principal character, in the knowledge of the doctors who had to intervene, and in the imagination of a psychiatrist who went in his own manner toward his own madness. (Barbin, 2013, p. xvi)

The writing of the memoirs, then, shakes the memory of the writer and the knowledge of the doctors and the psychiatrist who met her. Stories interact in the dynamics of the production of subjectivities, in the production of “the unhappy memory” of the principal character. On the other hand, individuals’ life histories are entangled in systems of thought (the ‘theme of the hermaphrodite’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). These stories are not only constrained within these networks, but also constitutive of them. So, they have value for themselves since they are active elements of the social world in which we live, and Foucault presents at least two relationships they establish: one is with the individuals and the other is with the systems of thought within which they are produced. It needs to be pointed out that individuals interpret the world through systems of thought, so these two are not strictly separate spheres. In this sense, the analysis of the relation of stories to systems of thought would incorporate the social relations and artefacts that are part of that discursive environment, not being reduced to the sphere of ‘ideas’.

In *Lives of Infamous Men*, Foucault presents a project for an “anthology of existences” – the book for which this text would have worked as an Introduction. He introduces a particular criterion for selecting the stories, which is firstly based on an “obsession”, an emotion (Foucault, 1994a, p. 159), which then leads to a system of rules. These rules are related to the fragment presented above, but provide a clearer view on the value of stories. The rules are:

- The persons included must have actually existed
- These existences must have been both obscure and ill-fated
- They must have been recounted in a few pages or, better, a few sentences, as brief as possible
- These tales must not just constitute strange or pathetic anecdotes; but, in one way or another (because they were complaints, denunciations, orders, or reports), they must have truly formed part of the minuscule history of these existences, of their misfortune, their wildness, or their dubious madness

- And for us still, the shock of these words must give rise to a certain effect of beauty mixed with dread. (Foucault, 1994a, p. 159)

Foucault's concern is with real lives of people, he is interested in "men who lived and died, with sufferings, meannesses, jealousies, vociferations" (Foucault, 1994a, p. 160). Not only is he interested in real lives, but also in real artefacts that were part of these stories and that tell us about them. The sources he is looking for are not accounts of distant observers (like an ethnographer) but texts that were part of the reality of these lives, such as reports, forms, and diaries. Foucault goes on:

Real lives were 'enacted' [*jouées*] in these few sentences: by this I don't mean that they were represented but that their liberty, their misfortune, often their death, in any case their fate, were actually decided therein, at least in part. (op. cit.)

The existences he was interested in were those of 'obscure' people, individuals who had no light shed upon them by any form of power, individuals who were not visible and would have remained forgotten if it had not been for that brief encounter with power that left their accounts written in the form of a report, a bureaucratic document. The briefness of the account tells of the anonymity of the individual. In this work I am also interested in the lives of individuals who are in 'obscure' positions, such as B, who hides the fact that she lives in a *villa* to deal with the stigma of that mark, or D, who organized a riot in order to be heard, or C, who suddenly quit his job because he was suspected of a crime he did not commit. Furthermore, in Chapter 9 I present how *villas* are obscured in the very way they are defined, since they are often characterized with terms that describe them as the absence of a positively defined concept (e.g., they are defined as irregular, illegal, lacking services).

Foucault adds that the anonymity of the lives he is interested in places the stories at the limits between fiction and non-fiction, since all that is left of these individuals is their story (a point to which I will return later on in this chapter):

[H]aving left no identifiable trace around them, they don't have and never will have any existence outside the precarious domicile of these words. And through those texts which tell about them, they come down to us bearing no more of the markings of reality than if they had come from *La Légende dorée* or from an adventure novel. (op. cit., p. 164)

To conclude, Foucault reminds us of the emotional component of reading a story, which is affected when the story is converted into a piece of analysis. The story produces dread and a sense of beauty, and that is valuable in itself. In telling stories of the *villas* I will engage with and intend to provoke senses of beauty and dread in the reader. As I have made clear in the Introduction, my interest in these stories emerged from emotions, and it is my intention in co-producing them to bring emotions to the text and to engage the reader emotionally through this 'book-experience' (Foucault & Trombadori, 1991). Although the arousal of emotion in the reading of the stories will be outside my scope of analysis, in Chapters 8 and 9 I will include reflections on affect, specifically on abjection, in thinking about the separations between *villas* and 'the city'. A second point in relation to my reading of Foucault is that stories are constitutive elements of this world and are related to individuals as well as ideas. There are social, psychological and symbolic phenomena in which stories take part; thus they also tell of the social world in which they are produced and read. This is why Foucault is particularly interested in the stories of 'obscure' people, since they tell us about those who were excluded in societies. Knowing about them is also knowing about the history of societies.

So, by telling the stories of the students from *villas* I intend to think not only about their transitions to university, but about the *villas* themselves and their status in the city of Buenos Aires. Yet although these principles are appealing, they do not fully develop my research design, since my aim is not to 'collect' stories but to be part of the production of stories. Foucault was referring to the value of rescuing forgotten lives that still exist in different forms of documents in libraries and archives. I want to intervene in the production of these accounts, and this places me in a different position. Therefore, my activity as researcher and my responsibility as such are different to the activities and responsibilities Foucault talks about in this context. I will be documenting lives and fixing them within the constraints of translated written text. These texts shed light on lives that have remained obscure to us as readers – but this happens in forms that emerge partly from the conditions I have set for their production. Again, this involves specific responsibilities and raises specific questions. One of these questions that I intend to think about is related to voice. Assuming my intention was to

provide, through an ethnographic approach, an 'insider' account of students who live in *villas*, and more specifically to tell the stories of these students, it is important to ask to whom the voice that speaks in these stories belongs. Is it the students'? Is it mine? Can I produce, through interviews, a valid representation of the authentic voices of these students? Does this research even have the power to 'give voice'? I will not answer all of these questions, but they can serve as a starting point. I will now turn to further reflections, drawing on the tradition of the Latin American *testimonio*. I have so far used the terms 'story' and '*testimonio*' interchangeably, but will now define the latter and reflect on issues that are inherent to it in relation to voice and authorship.

### Reflexive ethnography: *testimonio*

As I have mentioned, I want to write about people who are excluded and misrepresented. But what are the consequences of doing so? What does it mean for me, for them, for the readers? The answers to these questions will be defining for the 'what' and the 'how' of my work.

The third ethnographic approach described by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) relates to 'reflexivity'. They mention two critical shifts that take place in the history of ethnography: one that moves away from a realist ontology, and another that moves away from a value-neutral epistemology. In the first shift, 'reflexive' social research began to deal with the question of acknowledging the use of 'common-sense' knowledge at the same level as scientifically produced knowledge, and of considering research as a social activity and knowledge as a social product. The second shift involved an acknowledgement of the consequences that knowledge has in relation to a social and political status quo, that it cannot be understood as separate from power but only as intrinsically intertwined with it.

These ideas form the basic framework for my exploration of the use and writing of the *testimonio* as a possible source and product of my PhD thesis. Having looked at Foucault's criteria for writing stories I will now move to consider this particular form of narrative, first presenting a brief description of the *testimonio* before moving on to address some of the questions that it raises.

*Testimonio* is by nature a demotic and heterogeneous form, so any formal definition of it is bound to be too limiting. But the following might serve provisionally: A

*testimonio* is a novel or novella-length narrative, produced in the form of a printed text, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts. Its unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience. Because in many cases the direct narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, if literate, not a professional writer, the production of a *testimonio* generally involves the tape-recording and then the transcription and editing of an oral account by an interlocutor who is a journalist, ethnographer, or literary author. (Beverly, 2003, p. 320)

A last point should be added to this definition, which is that the "purpose of *testimonio* is social change" (Tierney, 2003, p. 298). The production of a *testimonio* involves the appropriation of 'voice' by the ethnographer or journalist in order to contribute to her/his own political agenda or that of her/his community. The most iconic *testimonio* is *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (Menchú, 1984), written by Elizabeth Burgos, which relates the experiences of Rigoberta, an indigenous Guatemalan woman who lived under the dictatorship and had a huge political impact advocating for the rights of the Latin American indigenous populations.

To organize my presentation of the *testimonio* I will follow Tierney (op.cit.) in considering three elements: purpose, claims and author. I thus intend to highlight the tensions between genealogy and ethnography I have described above.

### The purpose

I posed a question above that remains unresolved: 'What is the point of telling a life story?'. Having looked at Foucault's Introduction to *Herculine Barbin* and his essay 'The Lives of Infamous Men', I will now turn to the ethnographic tradition for new hints:

If part of the ethnographic enterprise is to take people's own words away from them and reconstruct them for our own purposes (Davis, 1993), then another part of the same enterprise must surely be to remain responsible for how those words may be interpreted by those who read them. (Coffey, 1996, p. 71)

The effects of ethnographic research are an issue that must be addressed in its design for any study based on the dichotomy between researcher and native informant. In this context, the researcher has an agenda and the informant does not, the latter being subject to the resignification of his/her words in the researcher's pursuit of his/her interests and purposes – however constructive and high-minded

these might be. This also involves a view of the researcher as a literate agent and of the native informant as a muted subject. On this basis, then, the native informant is held as abject, a subject that cannot speak for him/herself. I will return to this point later.

This is problematic from an ethical point of view if one intends to produce a piece of research that is beneficial to its participants, and even more so if it is intended to be somehow emancipatory. The *testimonio* here provides an alternative, since the researcher's aim in this form of production is allegedly the same as that of the participants, called 'speakers'. This form of literature has a clear political objective, namely to provide a space for the speaker to express his/her voice and, through this, to contribute to denouncing a situation of oppression or subjugation which is sustained over a community. This is a form of text that is produced to engage the reader:

What *testimonio* asks of its readers is in effect what Rorty means by solidarity – that is, the capacity to identify their own identities, expectations, and values with those of another. To understand how this happens is to understand how *testimonio* works ideologically as discourse, rather than what it *is*. (Beverly, 2003, p. 324)

There is thus a merging of researcher and informant not only in relation to the *purpose* of *testimonio*, but also in terms of *authorship*. The author is considered to be the speaker, not the writer. This is what appears to solve the ethical issue of misrepresentation, since writer and speaker can have the same political aim while maintaining different perspectives on the issues and the identities of the actors involved. But these differing perspectives can still lead to conflict and to the writers' hand bursting in and defining the text. I address the problematic nature of this 'solution' below.

### The author

As mentioned, the author of the *testimonio* is the speaker, not the writer. The writer's only function is to write down the speakers' words in a format that will be published, since the latter does not possess the means to be heard (due to the oppressive nature of the social context). This understanding of the role of the writer is similar to Apple's 'critical secretary', who engages in describing the counter-hegemonic actions and practices of individuals in order to acknowledge the transformative efforts that



take place and discourage cynicism (Apple, 2014, p. ix). As Burgos-Debray says in the Introduction to *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, “Rigoberta has chosen words as her weapon and I have tried to give her words the permanency of print”. (Menchú, 1984, p. xviii)

So, the claim is that the writer does not have an agenda and does not have authorship.

I will pause to reflect on two questions here: a) Can a writer renounce authorship? b) Can a person or group be completely muted?

Starting with b), the idea of a muted group or person is unproblematic where there is an oppressive group that holds power to dominate the oppressed groups, depriving them of capital, representation, etc. However, drawing on a Foucauldian notion of power the idea of an absolutely muted group becomes problematic, since according to Foucault free individuals participate in flows of power. This participation involves subjection to as well as exercise of power. The degrees of relative freedom that individuals have are arguable, but individuals are to be considered as both passive and active participants in flows of power if there is a degree of freedom in their conduct. In my examination of Foucault's life stories above, I mentioned his focus on 'obscure' individuals, referring to those who would have been forgotten if they had not had that brief encounter with power that left their written trace in a document. It is surely certain that other individuals did not have that encounter and have disappeared from memory. Power defines the conditions of visibility, the rules for distributing names and stories, and therefore also the rules for not distributing them. The fact that an individual is in the space of 'obscurity' does not mean that s/he is not resisting and exercising power, or that s/he is not also producing particular forms of visibilities. Therefore, in thinking about the 'silenced' we are not looking at a symbolic or relational absence in history, but at the constraints placed on speech within a particular set of relationships in which only the texts that conform to a particular set of rules are recorded and distributed so that they reach 'us', who construct 'history'. So, the action of the writer is the inscription of the voice of the speaker in specific circuits of distribution of knowledge. This leads me to the second point – but we must first make a digression here in relation to the *testimonio*.

It is important to note that, in theory, the speakers of *testimonios* tell their stories from the position of the subaltern (Beverly, 2003, p. 320). The speaker considers him/herself to be under subjugation, and therefore seeks to give testimony of this situation in order to change it. In this sense, the speaker is not being constructed as subjugated because of the relationship with the writer; this is considered to be a previous condition to whose modification the relationship with the writer should contribute. This assertion is also problematic, since in many ways the relationship between speaker and writer remains that between ethnographer and native informant. In the context of this relationship the speaker is being positioned as 'subaltern' from the outset, while the writer is not exposed – we will examine this point in more detail later on.

Returning to the construction of the 'silenced' and obscure, the same principle applies to those who 'have a voice' or are 'visible': they are produced as such by power. So, we can now turn to point a). On this, Foucault says the following:

...the author is not an indefinite source of significations that fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he [sic] is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him [sic] function in exactly the opposite fashion. (Foucault, 1984, p. 119)

Foucault presents the notion of the 'author-function', redefining what is usually understood as an 'author'. He argues that authorship and ownership of ideas are concepts that only emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (op. cit.). Interest in the identity of writers of texts appears only in modern times. The invention of the author-function serves, among other things, as a way of managing the proliferation of fictitious stories, representations, and interpretations, that is, as a way of avoiding the uncertainty that emerged from this proliferation and enforcing social control. Authorship is a manifestation of the intrinsic association between power and knowledge, of knowledge's inherent effects in the exercise of control. Foucault's political position, then, is to undermine the hierarchy whereby scientific knowledge is a construction that expresses truth 'better' than 'common sense' or fiction. The scientific author-function works as a way of reducing the possibilities for thought

because of the hierarchy of knowledges. For this reason, in Foucault's genealogy the task of the researcher is to cut out the associations made by science, by which particular identities and objects are constructed. To do so, s/he should make use of both scientific and non-scientific texts, allowing analysis of the processes of exclusion to which the non-scientific accounts may have been subjected to.

From this perspective, authorship of the *testimonio*, although it explicitly belongs to the speaker (the author of 'I, Rigoberta Menchú' is Rigoberta Menchú), is still shaped by the writer's hand. In spite of his/her attempt to trouble the rules of authorship, the writer needs to adjust the words of the speaker to the set of rules that will allow the text to be published. There is a process of translation which transforms experience into written statements (and, in the present case, into a different language from that used by the speaker):

Academic rules help to shape life stories to such an extent that narrative texts cannot be seen as other than co-created. (Tierney, 2003, p. 303)

So, although the person recording the *testimonio* claims that they are 'merely' an instrument of the speaker and withdraws from authorship, the effects of the participation of the writer (who embodies functions, rules, and criteria of selection) in the production of the text cannot be denied. Even if the writer were only an instrument, being an instrument is not at all an innocent and neutral task: new forms of ethnography include the ethnographer's story in the text along with the speakers' story. It becomes a story of the encounter between two individuals:

These ways of constructing testimonial material (...) make visible that what happens in *testimonio* is not only the textual staging of a 'domesticated Other' (...), but the confrontation through the text of one person (the reader and/or immediate interlocutor) with another (the direct narrator or narrators) at the level of a *possible* solidarity. In this sense, *testimonio* also embodies a new possibility of political agency (...). But that possibility (...) is necessarily built on the recognition of and respect for the radical incommensurability of the situation of the parties involved. More than empathic liberal guilt or political correctness, what *testimonio* seeks to elicit is *coalition*. (Beverly, 2003, p. 332)

I consider this 'coalition' also as an 'emergence'. As mentioned above, emergence for Foucault is the happening in which different forces collide and, through struggle, produce history. The encounter between me and the research participants can be

considered as such an emergence, in which different forces struggle, are separated by their incommensurability, and produce a narrative through an exchange that is based on solidarity as well as conflict. The story told is then a trace of the descent of an emergence, which also tells of the parts involved.

This implies that my own political agenda will also be present in these stories. These elements will be included in my account, adopting a genealogical perspective and a narrative form. By including myself in the text, my study becomes a chronicle of the encounter between speakers and writer as well as a trace of the descent of both parts. It also provides a critical perspective on the process of knowledge production of my own research (Brown, 2003, p. 74)

### The claim

The question of what a *testimonio* claims to say – whether it is to be taken as fiction or solely as a political statement rather than as a factual historical account – is controversial and has given rise to heated discussions. An example of one such exchange is that which arose between Rigoberta Menchú and David Stoll. Stoll criticized Menchú for ‘stretching the truth’ arguing that the facts contained in her book were inaccurate and that she had in fact not been a witness to some of the events in which she claimed to have participated (Stoll, 2008). His criticisms raise the question of to what extent testimony needs to be accurate regarding historical events or speakers’ experience. Considering Stoll’s critique, Tierney argues that the relation between narrative and experience should be subject to analysis, and adds:

The challenge is not to dismiss the *testimonio*, but to engage the text in ways that enable authors to enact change by acknowledging the relations of speaker, writer, and reader to truth. (Tierney, 2003, p. 300)

The question, then, is, ‘What is truth?’. We will also need to distinguish the truth for the speaker, for the writer and for the reader. On this basis, Beverly rejects Stoll’s arguments, claiming that his is a political critique masked by an epistemological argument. He says that what Stoll is actually criticizing is the fact that Menchú has a political agenda, attempting to reduce her to a native informant (Beverly, 2003, p. 326). Beverly addresses the question of truth by drawing on the principle that “society is not an essence prior to representation” (Beverly, 2003, p. 329), i.e., the only tools that Stoll can use to respond to Menchú’s *testimonio* are other narratives,

narratives that say what he wants to be told. So, epistemology and truth are not an issue for Beverly; the issue is political, it is about the struggle for representation. From his perspective, “*Testimonio* is both an art and a strategy of subaltern memory.” (op. cit.)

Beverly’s view on history and the social sciences fits with the ontological premises of Foucault’s genealogical method and his views on authorship; for both writers, history is the result of the struggle for representation. The political aim of genealogy is to build a critique of the established traditional histories in order to dissociate identities and allow for a proliferation of narratives. The political aim of Menchú moves in the same direction, but from a different position. By enabling her story to be told she introduces a new narrative into the arenas of academia and politics, a story that troubles the rules of the social sciences, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction and the established idea of authorship.

However, Tierney’s concern with the relationship between narrative and experience is relevant and needs to be analysed. If one dismisses both the idea that the only author of the *testimonio* is the speaker and the idea that the writer is only an instrument, then the figure of the interlocutor appears, that is, an other providing the perspective of someone who engages with the speaker and her/his context, as well as the relationship between them. This perspective is not constructed in a way that is detached from the production of the speaker’s narrative, but in dialogue with it, such that both are related, producing and enabling each other. Thus, the researcher is not a sole instrument, but a subject that also resists, conditions and produces the speaker’s voice.

Elzbieta Sklodowska (1993) analyses further the issue of the realist construction of *testimonio*. The first issue is that the writer is erased from the text, creating the fiction of an account that is produced solely by the speaker while ignoring the fact that it cannot be conceived of as other than a co-creation. In this sense, Sklodowska argues that a mediated *testimonio*, such as that of Burgos, is based on principles of realist ethnography, and calls for reflexivity in the Latin American tradition of testimonial literature. In the first place, both researcher and participant define themselves in relation to the other’s ethnicity, which divides them. However, there is neither any attempt on the part of Burgos to overcome this divide through fieldwork,

nor any reflection upon it. Rather, there is an assumption of an understanding and confluence of interests or coalition. Sklodowska argues that this assumption hides the distance that separates Burgos from Rigoberta, and furthermore that Rigoberta's image becomes 'folklorized' under this assumption.

In short, Sklodowska (op. cit.) highlights the erasing of Burgos' voice from the text, 'monologizing' it such that it is presented as the 'true' voice of Rigoberta Menchú. The only references to the ethnographic contract with the participant are contained succinctly in the prologue. The presence of (at least) two different voices is ignored, although these voices present different truth claims: while Rigoberta's truth is based on her subjective experience, Burgos' text is presented as objective in order to sustain the primary text. However, the lack of reflection on the editor's work in sequencing and transcribing the text undermine its attempt at objectivity.

Sklodowska (op. cit.) adds that the text's intended audience belong to the same culture as the editor. The ethnographic contract is present here again, by which the subject of the study and the audience are separate and morally disconnected: "the first had to be described but not questioned, and the second informed but not implied..." (Geertz 1989, p. 142, quoted in Sklodowska, 1993). The rules of veridiction that shape the relationship between the writer and the speaker stem from the writer, from realist ethnography, since the aim is to capture Rigoberta's 'real' voice for 'Western' readers.

The points raised by Sklodowska highlight the mediated nature of Rigoberta's *testimonio*, which is denied by the editor of the text, Elizabeth Burgos. Burgos claims she has produced a piece of writing that is an authentic reflection of the voice of Rigoberta. But Patti Lather raises a further point in relation to this authenticity. Drawing on Benjamin, she argues that no historical truth is reproduced in the text, but that the text produces a 'truth effect', which is necessarily separated from the original historical truth by acts of translation, interpretation, and representation. There is no access to an original historical truth; the only truth is in the performance of remembrance or representation. The only access to historical truth is through these truth effects. Lather interprets Benjamin as follows:

His lesson is to give up on a knowledge one can catch hold of, to see truth as that which escapes knowledge and is graspable only through the detour of its performance.

This includes the performance of a reading that produces an interpretation via translation, a readerly engagement Benjamin hopes will be not comfortable but, rather, 'violently moved' (Jacobs, 1999, p. 3) by the very foreignness of the truth effect of what is read. (Lather, 2000, p. 155)

Later she concludes:

Translation is always producing rather than merely reflecting or imitating some 'original'. Given the transformative nature of translation/interpretation/reading, our hope is practices that enlarge both our own language and that of the original through echoes that reverberate the original's claim on us to engage with history in a way that puts the original in new motion, ripe to this present. (op. cit. 2000, p. 159)

Having addressed the mediated and translated nature of the *testimonio* and considered its use in social research as a thought-provoking product rather than a true representation, a further point needs to be raised in relation to its effect of realism. Lather mentions that Burgos' *testimonio* echoes the original voice of Rigoberta; it expands it through translation and interpretation, extending its reach to the readers of the text, and expands their (our) resources for thought. Therefore, the *testimonios* that I co-produce aim to be aesthetically realistic but not necessarily truthful. Riessman (1993) poses four conditions for truthful narratives: persuasiveness, correspondence, coherence and pragmatic use. The *testimonios* in this study aim to be persuasive in being produced through semi-structured interviews that propose no motivation to the respondents other than willingness to 'tell the story'. Following Beverly's understanding of *testimonio* it was my aim to be 'used' as an instrument for putting their stories into a public sphere – although I have already acknowledged the constraints of pursuing that form of relationship and the impossibility of achieving it. As I have already acknowledged, I was physically present, a face confronting the speakers and thus shaping the *testimonio*. I was an outsider who attempted to establish relationships of trust through the local parish church, which involved processes of impression management both on the part of the speakers and of myself, as well as attempts to tell the story to a broader audience. There were also 'facts' presented in the texts whose correspondence with other sources I did not check, since it was irrelevant for my reading of them; these 'facts', too, are part of the richness of the text.

However, the *testimonios* have the attributes of 'truthful' accounts in other ways. I put effort and resources into producing *testimonios* with a realistic aesthetic, and this was very much shaped by the technology that I deployed. I used a recording device which provided me not with a true representation of a speech act but a recording that echoed the voice of a subject, which was transcribed, translated, read and interpreted to become a text. In the transcription and translation I sought to be especially attentive to the breaks, the incoherences, the unfinished sentences. I was determined to present the openness of the text, the points where it lacks closure, and the absence of a unitary speaking subject behind it, as well as the coherence and plots of the narratives that the speakers produce in their interpretation of themselves and their history. In this sense, the text might not be perceived as truthful by a reader who associates truth with coherence and correspondence. However, I consider these points to be constitutive elements of a realistic aesthetic. In producing this effect I have made decisions to establish a grammatical and semantic coherence that makes the text readable and the breaks appropriate for the speech acts.

Therefore, I sought to produce a set of texts that strike the reader for their realism, and it is in this sense that these texts were meant to be 'writerly', inciting the reader to write over them to produce further interpretations.

### Effective history and the testimonio

As mentioned before, Foucault's genealogy aims at the dissociation and proliferation of identities. We shall now examine this in more detail, first by presenting the basics of his way of 'doing history' and then by introducing its uses.

Foucault points out at least two characteristics of his way of doing history, which he is borrowing from Nietzsche and which he calls 'effective history' (Foucault, 1991a, p. 88). The first refers to the fact that it does not seek continuities, and nor does it wish to find/construct them. On the contrary, it focuses on the minutiae, on the detailed manifestations of the object of study, which are not distant or above the researcher but surround her/him. For Foucault, here knowledge is not for understanding, not to be used to seek underlying general principles that explain the existence of things, but rather for cutting, for dissociating. However, 'effective history' affirms knowledge as a perspective (Foucault, 1991a, p. 90). As the historian is



surrounded by his or her object of study, rather than observing it from a distance, the knowledge the historian produces is produced in and from a particular context – in what Foucault calls ‘traditional history’, this is no longer acknowledged. Nietzsche’s perspective gives equal weight to the gaze of the researcher and the objects of this gaze; the historian does not produce knowledge which is ‘closer’ to ‘truth’, but rather knowledge that is another perspective on an object. If this form of knowledge acquires a higher status or authority it is due to the relations of power which it is part of.

In another part of the essay, Foucault points at three uses of the historical sense (1991a, p. 93): the parodic use, the dissociative use, and the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge. The first calls for the proliferation of identity types as well as the troubling of fixed, stable and solid models that are venerated. The second refers to the dissociation of identities, which means unmasking them, exposing the fact that there is no uniting pattern or essence unifying them. Thus, dissociation of identities is a way of achieving their dissipation. The third use involves the sacrificing of the subject of knowledge by exposing the exercise of violence through which certain forms of knowledge are imposed as the ‘true’ interpretations of things. Scientific consciousness is the product of the will to knowledge:

In appearance, or rather, according to the mask it bears, historical consciousness is neutral, devoid of passions, and committed solely to truth. But if it examines itself and if, more generally, it interrogates the various forms of scientific consciousness in its history, it finds that all these forms and transformations are aspects of the will to knowledge: instinct, passion, the inquisitor’s devotion, cruel subtlety, and malice. It discovers the violence of a position that sides against those who are happy in their ignorance, against the effective illusions by which humanity protects itself, a position that encourages the dangers of research and delights in disturbing discoveries. (Foucault, 1991a, p. 95)

As I have mentioned, Foucauldian genealogy moves in the same direction as the *testimonio* but from a different perspective (the one academic and the other subaltern), and manifested in different languages and textual forms (the argumentative and the narrative). However, I will take neither of these positions, rather seeking to construct a third position that borrows principles from both. This third position will be somewhat similar to that adopted by Foucault when collecting

the stories of infamous people, although my source will be neither documents nor institutional devices that recorded pieces of the lives told, but *testimonios*. It can of course be argued that *testimonios* themselves are both documents and institutional devices, since they will be produced within my doctoral studies and used as a record of participants' lives. While I do not wish to escape from this, I also consider that telling a *testimonio* is a social event, which is not entirely determined by the institutional frame and in fact exceeds it. As Beverly wrote, the *testimonio* is a strategy and an art, to which there are political and aesthetic components that will also shape the experiences of the production and reading. Besides trying to produce an intelligible thesis, within this project I am involved in the social world of the *villa*, a doctoral programme, my own history and the speakers' histories.

In this sense, I am also meeting Foucault's criterion of using documents that intervene in the lives of the individuals whose stories are being told – although he said he was not interested in the accounts of distant observers. In this sense, the document is the *testimonio*, and it becomes part of the lives of individuals in the frame of a doctoral programme, a *villa*, and schools, participating in a dialogue that takes particular forms, shaping the political and aesthetic nature of the text produced.

*Testimonios* as products of this research, then, will be at the limits of and include both the construction of memory and the production of history. I will not be writing either a genealogy or *testimonios* strictly speaking, but borrowing principles, forms of writing, and sensibilities from both, that will help me be in this liminal space. In spite of this, I do call the stories I co-produce in this study *testimonios*, since I am drawing on this form to produce them. Tierney provides the following insight into this interaction between memory and history, speaker and writer, analysis and narrative:

The life-history text (...) exists somewhere between history and memory. Memory is not a spontaneous word association. Speakers and researchers build memory from the shared perspective of the present. Memories are recalled for reasons that are important to someone – the speaker, the interviewer – in large part because of present contextual definitions of what constitutes identity, society, and culture. The life history not only represents the memory of an individual, it also produces identity. The challenge to us as researchers is to ensure that individuals are not the object of our discourses, but rather the agents of complex, partial, and contradictory identities that help transform the worlds they and we inhabit. (Tierney, 2003, p. 306)

## Appendix 1 – continuation of Chapter 2

*How did you choose your career?*

Since primary school I've liked to write. And I remember that in sixth grade we had to write a newspaper. We were studying the parts of the newspaper, so they made us write a newspaper in groups; we had to pick news and change them. We had to take news from a real newspaper and change everything. With the same picture, but changing the story. I found it easy; I really enjoyed it, so it was easy. It was one of those teachers who told me, 'You have a talent for this, wouldn't you like to...?'. Up to that point I was thinking of studying literature or philosophy.

*But when was this?*

Sixth grade.

*Sixth grade?? And you were already thinking of literature and philosophy? Wow.*

I really liked literature. I didn't have philosophy as a school subject, we never did, and a teacher told us that philosophy was good for thinking. So, I always had that doubt, 'I would have liked to have that subject'. And, afterwards, in seventh grade a teacher told me, 'Why don't you study journalism or something related to writing?' because I really liked to write. Afterwards, in high school too, I didn't find language and grammar difficult, which I now find very hard. So, it was because of that, mostly.

*Right. And in high school you were a good student, you were telling me the last time we met?*

Yes, I don't know, I was...I think it had to do with confidence. I knew that high school wasn't difficult; I didn't feel embarrassed. Now, in university, there are days when I feel like a little ant, when I see everyone much more capable than me, so I am scared even of participating in class. I know that the rest of my classmates had a broader academic training than mine, so sometimes I find it hard to participate and say even a word. At high school this didn't happen to me. I knew that everyone had the same education, some a little more, some a little less, but basically we were the same. Even in oral examinations, I never found it hard to go to the front of the class and be assessed. But because I felt that I had the trust of my friends. I didn't feel embarrassed in front of them, didn't feel less than them. We were all in the same position. This doesn't happen in university; in university I hate oral exams. I hate them with all my soul. If a final examination for a module is an oral exam I hesitate for a whole week to decide if I sit for the exam or not. Sometimes I study for it and when the day comes I don't go.

*Yes, I understand. It has happened to me [we laugh].*

I finished high school with a general average of almost nine out of ten. I didn't have any problems. I enjoyed it... I won't say that I liked studying because nobody liked studying, but I didn't find it difficult. I felt that my classmates trusted me and I could help them. And that was good. But not in university. I never found that in university. I don't know, the thing of studying... Everyone tells you to study in groups because it's innovative, but I could never find a group to study with. So it's like... Maybe it's only small details, but in the long run it adds up. I see that in the library everyone studies in groups, and the times that I went there I ended up studying alone. I didn't like it. I preferred to go home and study at home. And, also, when I started to fall behind in some of the modules I had to attend modules with different groups and so I never ended up being in one group. So, nowadays, I don't have a group and it makes it even more difficult. You don't get to know anyone and nobody gets to know you. It's complicated. Then, in the group assignments you always have to go and see where there is someone missing, and you can't miss a class because if they form groups when you were absent then you're on your own. And those things bother you... It's

not that they bother, but it's not nice. In high school I knew that if I missed a class I would always be taken into account. And now I feel that if I miss a class it's exactly the same for the rest. I know that I can't miss classes. And I find subjects much more difficult; I can't feel confident in any subject. Even though I study hard, once I get there my nerves betray me and the module for which I had studied for a ten, I end up getting a four. Everyone then tells you, 'You passed', but in the end you know that it's not good. I now look at my grades and I see all fours and fives, so it's like in the end you're disappointed with yourself. Because for everyone you're an average student, but you know that you can give much more, that you studied for more and ended up with a four. It's horrible to me. In high school I'd get a four and I'd cry for getting a four. And here it's, 'Well, but you passed'. Yes, I passed, but that's not the way in which I would have liked to get my degree.

*How was high school?*

Going to my school... I was lucky to do my high school with my friends from primary school. I have a friend nowadays that I met in first grade of primary school. She lives a block away from my house, so we would go to school together. She'd pick me up and we would go to school together. The same thing with another of my friends, who joined my school in second grade, so we've known each other forever. If any of us didn't go to class we would go to her house, give her the homework and chatted for hours. We were a small group; in first year we were around 30 and in the third year of high school we were 21. So, we knew each other very well, being so few. And in fifth year we ended up being 14.

*So, by the end of high school you were half the number of the ones who started.*

Yes.

*What happened?*

Well... They fell behind, had to do some modules again... Some changed school. My school didn't have a specialization and many of the boys changed to the vocational school; it helped them more to get a job.

*The vocational school is one year longer?*

Yes, but well... Our school had the religious thing; in my time it was very, very Catholic. The figure of the priest, the founder of the school... It was different from now. They helped you to stay close to your group. The Father came, told you off for anything stupid, but in the end you ended up laughing. It was different. Nowadays... We used to pay five pesos<sup>9</sup> and it was the Father who said, 'I won't oblige anyone to pay because I know the situation in the neighbourhood. I'll look for funders to help the school, but I won't oblige anyone to pay'. Nowadays it's completely different. My niece is there; she's paying almost 170 pesos per month. And if she doesn't pay she gets charged 10 extra pesos. If the Father was there that wouldn't happen. We, the old ones, know it wouldn't have happened. Things changed. They used to give priority to other things; the Father was very present in the teaching, the subjects. He might not have understood much, but he insisted that a teacher put the emphasis on studying. I took my first communion in the school. My classmates were my lifetime friends; we shared many things beyond school. You went to catechism on Saturdays, and if you didn't have any friends it was boring to go to catechism on Saturdays. My group of friends from high school is the best thing that I've got; we gather and we have the same memories, the same things, our efforts to go on a graduation trip – it's little things that add up. We didn't have the support from our school to do a graduation trip. The Father didn't support it because there were no teachers going and the school wouldn't put money into it. So we had to do whatever we could to raise the money. We organized parties in the neighbourhood, used to meet at 5 a.m. to cook empanadas<sup>10</sup> and sell them on the same day at school; it was difficult to make it to go on a graduation trip. We ended up going to the Iguazu Falls

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<sup>9</sup> A low sum, which in the period of her study would be equivalent to 1.5 to 5 US dollars.

<sup>10</sup> An Argentine food similar to pasties.

on a train in which you couldn't... It was painful to sit; the trip lasted 30 hours on a train that wasn't particularly nice. But we valued it because we had put in a lot of effort to get there.

*Let's talk about the train. Can you describe it? I think it deserves a space [we laugh].*

The good thing is that since we struggled to make it we valued it twice as much. We had been raising money for two years. We were very tight; we took the plunge without having the money. We got a house thanks to the aunt of one of my classmates, who lived in Misiones and helped us find a house that charged us five pesos per day. 'Thank God we found that house'. And getting to the Falls and seeing them was the best thing in our lives. You saw the faces of my classmates with tears in their eyes, saying, 'We made it'. We knew that the tears were because of the efforts we had put into it. Saying, 'It was worth it and we did it ourselves'. I think that high school was a lot about that. It taught us that things go well when you put effort into them. That was really good. I think that the people in the neighbourhood have that mind-set – 'The more you work for things, the better the reward'. You know that you don't have to wait for anything from above to be given to you, because it never comes. And if it does, enjoy it the most, because it doesn't happen often. We were taught to work every day... We all knew the sacrifices that our parents were making; none of our parents weren't working, not doing something for us to study. That also led us to leave high school and say, 'Well, now we'll work'. Even though we all wanted to keep studying we knew that we had to work first. That's what I think that high school was all about. My best friends are from high school.

*And this thing about parents doing something...about 'none of our parents weren't doing something'. What was that 'doing something'? To have a better picture...*

We knew that our parents worked all day and that at the time of doing things it would be difficult to have even one of our parents helping us. But if we organized parties,

our parties were on Saturday nights; we needed an adult. And that's when you realize that your father, your mother, has worked all day, but on Saturday at 9 p.m. we had four parents sitting down, selling the entrance tickets, and they would stay until 8 a.m. the next day. At the beginning we didn't like the idea of having parents, typical adolescents that don't want to have anything to do with their parents, but nowadays I think, 'How nice it was of them; our parents were tired from working the whole week; they also work on Saturdays and they were there helping us'.

*Can I ask you what your mother does?*

She's a cleaner.

*And she works all day?*

Yes, every day, although we don't want her to work because she's 64. But she's stubborn and there's no way she would stop working.

*What things did your teachers tell you when you were finishing high school...?*

The teachers highlighted the importance of studying. They explained to us that it is necessary to study. By that time you needed a high-school degree to get any kind of job. They'd tell us, 'If you need a high-school degree for anything, you can imagine what it's going to be like in a couple of years. You need to keep studying'. They always reminded us that things weren't going to be easy, but that it's worth trying. They said... For example, we had a Maths teacher who was great; he would bring us the exams that they take in CBC for the ones that wanted to study maths in university. He told us, 'Well, regarding maths there are many that fail, many that feel frustrated because they think that they aren't good at it. It's about trying, trying, trying'. I think that that's life – trying. They said those things. Maybe at that time you



didn't understand; it sounded nice but you weren't conscious of the meaning of what they were saying. I think that after some time you realize what they were saying about trying. Because in high school you think you'll go out, go ahead and take on the world. But then you realize that you can't, that you go out and you come across a lot of people that are different from you, with different values, that don't believe in the same things, that what is important for you is not important for the rest, and you have to learn to get along with those people. That's what I think is the most difficult when you go out.

*More than the differences at school? The demands, for example...*

Yes, because the thing with demands in the end is up to you. Although I get frustrated with my grades and I feel really bad sometimes... I say, 'It can't be getting these poor grades, this is not what I wanted...' I know that I need to be more confident and say 'I can'. But then I get there and everything falls apart because I end up giving more importance to my anxiety and other things than to what I had studied at home. But the thing about values and trying to understand other people is much harder for me. Sometimes it's very difficult to keep calm and say, 'Well, it's other people's opinion and everyone is free to think and express themselves the way they want'. I think that there are many people that are not conscious that when they speak they can hurt other people. That happens a lot in the university. Because everyone thinks that everyone has the same circumstances, so they end up saying things that end up hurting one. In the first year I would listen to my classmates saying, 'I'm late because there's a demonstration in the motorway'; then another would add, 'When you drive that way lock the windows because the *villeros*<sup>11</sup> will steal everything from you'. And I was next to them. So at that moment I was really upset, and I thought to myself, 'Well, everyone thinks whatever they want'. Even though it hurts you can't do much about it. They speak but they don't have a clue that there's a girl from the *villa* studying next to them. That's why it was very hard for me to say, 'I live in a *villa*'. I think it's harder to accept and relate to those people. I

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<sup>11</sup> Inhabitants of a shanty town.

used to suffer that a lot because in the first year it's all about, 'What's your name? Where are you from?'. And that 'where are you from' would be straightforward for anyone – 'Oh, we live nearby' was very common between them, and, 'You? where are you from?'. And I had to think a whole day what to answer to that question – 'I'm from downtown', and I left the conversation because I feared they would ask, 'Which part?'. That was the first barrier to establish a conversation and even more to be part of a group. It was really hard for me to say 'I'm from a *villa*' because I was very scared of the glances and prejudice. So in my first year it was very difficult for me to establish relationships, conversations, because I knew that the question would be there. It was obvious that the question would be there; it's normal. But for us, when they ask where you are from it's a whole issue. You start hesitating: 'Do I say it? Do I not? Will they understand? How will they look at me?'. So, it's a question that triggers a thousand things. The whole first year was like that to me. It was thinking a lot and saying 'I live downtown' and that was it. Nowadays I don't know if it would bother me so much to say it, but that's because I've processed it. I've been studying for four years; I don't know if it now bothers me the way they look at me or don't look at me because I think, 'Well, I'm actually not interested in having a conversation with you'. But it was difficult to get to this stage. I look at my sister, who is working now, and says, 'I have to give the address of my aunt because otherwise I won't get hired'. She was looking for a job for a year. I'm lucky to work at the university because I study there, because my tutor got me the job; otherwise I would also be looking a job for years. So, it's difficult. Everyone says, 'The issue of villas is more accepted now, people think about it differently now'. I've had teachers at university whom I've told that I live in the villa and they said, 'Villas are more accepted nowadays'. But it is still difficult for me. For many of us who live there the issue of discrimination is very hard to accept. In my case and my family's, none of us ever brought friends from outside to our house. Sometimes you think and say 'But, why?' – maybe it's stupid, maybe you tell people that you live in a villa and it's different. I see my friends... Well, I don't have many friends at uni anyway, but I never thought of inviting them to my house. I think it's a prejudice that I have. I went to my friends' houses and then think, 'Look at the houses that they have, I can't invite them to mine'. So, one ends up judging oneself. I would never think of inviting any of my friends to my house.

*Continues in Appendix 2*

#### 4. I have intended to produce an ethical (non-)thesis

These words, these signs, this diagram, all these things which occupy sheets and screens and other materials have become a main concern in this (non-)thesis. My concern with the meanings of the production of this text and its effects is the very thing that has driven its production. I have also been preoccupied with the habits, intellectual and bodily, which have constituted me as a 'researcher/writer', subject to the discipline of writing, as well as the general practices of thinking, reading and writing. However, my main concern has always been removed from the 'how' of these practices and signs, and focused much more on their ethical meaning.

It was the very process of the PhD that led me to think along these lines. I began sketching the methodological principles upon which the thesis would draw, and from which claims about its 'validity' would be made – and found myself discomforted by the project I was setting out to complete. Primarily this was because I did not want to turn the youth of the shanty town into 'objects' of my research. I did not want to face them simply and solely as a researcher. Ethnography as a practice, a role, discomforted me – by no means an unusual sense among ethnographers. Influential for me was my reading of Maria Tamboukou and Stephen Ball's edited book *Dangerous Encounters* (2003). My position and role as a researcher became core issues to deal with in the process of doing my PhD. I failed to resolve these tensions in the design of the research; I did not accept them easily, but they persisted during the fieldwork and also when I began to attempt to interpret the stories I elicited. I remember confessing to Stephen, my tutor, in one of our meetings: 'I am scared of writing about them'. I feared I would do harm to the students I had interviewed by writing them into this thesis. I feared I would harm all the inhabitants of *villas* by writing about *villas*. My tutor suggested that I look at Patti Lather's way of writing, 'using and troubling' concepts and analytical tools. I began to write about these; now, however, as I come to the end of the process of the production of the thesis, I realize that in these four years of work I have never really escaped the tension of wanting to write about *villas* without fixing their meaning or reducing them simply to an object of comprehension. Despite wanting to relate to the young people of shanty towns in my position of researcher – an imperative of ethnographic practice – I have remained

acutely aware of the dangers of doing so. What I have finally come to recognize that this is primarily a thesis about this relationship, rather than a thesis about *villas*. In Levinasian terms, it is ethics that forms the ground for knowledge.

Before undertaking my fieldwork I had to submit an Ethics Approval Form, which began like this:

This research is framed within the aim of contributing to overcoming the symbolic and relational frontiers that have excluded dwellers from 'villas' in Buenos Aires, in particular, the ones that affect high-school graduates. The challenge begins in the field of research, that is, by producing a study that from its very design does not innocently fall into this dichotomy. The research does not pretend to completely overcome it, but to struggle with this frontier and, in doing so, move towards the possibility of solidarity between participants, researcher and readers, around the issue of exclusion in Buenos Aires.

The study will present the narratives of the participants in their attempts to access higher/further education and labour, my narrative of my attempt to produce this research, and my analysis of both around the issue of exclusion, paying particular attention to the inscription of the division between 'villa' and 'city' in the identities of all the people involved in this research.

The main ethical issues to be acknowledged in the fieldwork are...

My Ethics Approval Form began with these paragraphs and continued with a set of reassurances in sections headed Confidentiality and Anonymity, Voluntary Informed Consent and Covert Research, Vulnerability and Sensitive Data, Deception, Researchers' Risks and Integrity and Relationship with Gatekeepers (see Appendix 1). My submission was given ethical clearance. I have used the principles and practices outlined in this document during the fieldwork in my relationships with participants and gatekeepers, and also when justifying my research to them. I will now re-write them, without attempting to undermine their validity, but possibly troubling them in my attempt to sustain the ethical question of this (non-)thesis and to produce further thoughts.

The first condition of the first as of the last of the just is that their justice remains clandestine to them. (Levinas, 1996, p. 17)

One might sketch the movement of Levinas's thinking (...) by saying that ethics occurs as the putting into question of the ego, the knowing subject, self-consciousness, or what Levinas, following Plato, calls the Same. (Critchley, 1999, p. 4)

What is at stake is putting consciousness in question and not the consciousness of putting in question. At stake is a movement oriented in a way that is wholly otherwise than the grasp of consciousness and at every instant unravels, like Penelope at night, everything that was so gloriously woven during the day. (Levinas, 1996, p. 16)

When I write I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before (Foucault, M. quoted in Ball, 2013, p. 7)

Foucault writes 'writerly texts', texts which invite the reader to participate in the making of meaning rather than simply be subject to it. Indeed Foucault's elusivity creates spaces for the readers and users of his work to be creative and to be adventurous. (Ball, 2014)

These quotes seemed to lead into each other by themselves: I was attempting to sketch the argument of the chapter and begin to explain that in this section I will draw on Emmanuel Levinas' idea of ethics as *first philosophy*<sup>12</sup>, as the condition for

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<sup>12</sup> Levinas think of this notion in relation to Heidegger; however, the definition of ontology as metaphysics and *first philosophy* can be traced to Aristotle. Aristotle sees metaphysics and/or *first philosophy* as the project of the study of the principles and causes of being as being. This project entails the study of "everything that is insofar as it is" (Gill, 2006, p. 348), which has been named 'ontology' by scholars, and also the study of divine substance, which are "the principles and first causes of motion" (op. cit., p. 348). Therefore, *first philosophy* refers to the study of the "causal structure" of reality (op. cit., p. 351), since its object of study is being as being, the most abstract understanding of being. Aristotle, therefore, understands this form of knowledge as "explanatorily prior to natural philosophy" (op. cit., p. 348), that is, *first philosophy* sets the conditions for the rest of the disciplines that study being.

ontology, forming the basis for texts that do not attempt to comprehend or represent, but rather to constitute a set of events which take place in its production and in its reading. Drawing on Stephen Ball's reading of Foucault, I will give importance to the effects of writing and reading this (non-)thesis. Fundamentally, this text intends to provoke the putting into question of not only the writer but also the reader. In my response to the face of an Other that emerges through this research I intend to go beyond merely acknowledging that I as the writer am put in question. Having said that, given that this piece is also being produced as a PhD thesis and acknowledgement is a constitutive part of writing this form of text, I will at points acknowledge questions and issues that emerge without attempting to respond to them, for the ends of acknowledgement itself. But, as Levinas puts it, seeking a resolution in the acknowledgment of being put into question would be a way of suppressing the shame that this entails by returning to myself, the knowing subject, the Same. Following Levinas, shame can be understood as a movement towards the outside of myself. Using Foucault's terminology, it is productive. It has certainly been one driver in the writing of this text. This text intends to constitute a form of 'sacrifice of the subject of knowledge', a sacrifice of the I and of the attempt to reduce the Other to myself by grasping it and delineating it through the themes and concepts of my understanding. This text will attempt to do and redo, use and trouble the knowledge that is being produced, in the exercise of thinking differently and attempting to be different through writing. But I also hope I can engage the reader in using this text, writing over it, producing new meanings and producing themselves differently. This is not an attempt to be just; it is a response to the presence of an Other whom I speak about.

"Lord: I can strike with my hunger but they cannot, because nobody can do a strike with their own hunger" (Father Carlos Mujica, quoted in Premat, 2010, p. 24)

As in Father Mujica's poem<sup>13</sup>, shame is a constituent part and a driver of this text. Emmanuel Levinas says that it is the face of a human being, its nakedness

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<sup>13</sup> Father Mujica was part of a generation of Catholic priests who advocated for the rights of *villa* residents. He lived and worked in Villa 31, a *villa* of central Buenos Aires during the 60s and early 70s, until he was murdered in 1974 in an attack whose motivations and authors remain unknown. He

and irreducibility, which confronts the I with the Other. It is the face of the Other which resists being captured and reduced by the attempts of comprehension with its sets of conceptual tools. This PhD project was first motivated by an interview that I carried out for my MA with a high-school graduate of a *villa* in Buenos Aires. This interview unsettled me; it troubled my prejudices about *villas* at the same time as moving me, confronting me with the struggles and failures of someone who had pursued the goal of a BA degree while undergoing much more risk and sacrifice than I was having to. I was someone who was 'studying' him in pursuit of an MA degree that involved much less sacrifice and much more enjoyment than he had gone through, only because my parents were wealthier. I felt shame.

This interview made me feel that I wanted to tell these stories that had moved me, in order to move other people too. I wanted others like me to feel shame too. Fair or not, this was sufficient reason for me to pursue a PhD, to tell stories like the one I had heard. The reader may ask why I needed to do a PhD for this, why I decided to pursue the accumulation of my cultural capital in this way. I do ask myself that question. At this point I will only say that there are diverse motivations, interests, intentions that provide the conditions for this text. One of these conditions is career oriented, and to that extent it is certainly my hope that a PhD will provide me with a qualification that I can use to become a professional researcher. Another is ethical, and this is what makes this thesis a non-thesis. These drivers relate to each other in tension, in compromise, to produce this text and my own personal history. This account of myself is not an attempt to be either coherent or complete. But in order to understand what I have written so far in my methodology and in my analysis in other chapters, I need to acknowledge the ethical discomforts that I have experienced, which have informed the nature of the text. This text emerges from the discomfort I have encountered in doing a PhD to empower/help an Other through comprehension, and thereby in some way to deal with, confess, bracket away, my shame. As I have already mentioned in the Introduction, I am still attempting to complete this PhD, writing a (non-)thesis, which attempts to sacrifice both

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has remained in memory as an icon of the defence of the rights of *villa* residents, and schools, streets and neighbourhoods in Villa 31 have been named after him.



itself as a thesis and myself as its author in the response to the ethical call that emerges in the presence of the face of an Other. I will now attempt to develop this further.

### Levinas and ethics as first philosophy

The refusal to write something that can be defined as a thesis finds a philosophical grounding in the work of Levinas; it is on this basis that I intend for the work to be meaningful as well as scholarly. The problem that is at stake, for me, is related to the implications of my intention to know the identities and lives of young people of *villas* who attempt to pursue higher or further education. My concern is with what it is that I am doing in trying to know and write about them. I applied to undertake this PhD with a project that proposed a set of questions that would structure what would be Said, but was then mostly concerned with the implications of Saying that Said (Critchley, 1999). My concerns about the act of Saying, about writing, gained an important place within my PhD project.

I will now begin by presenting the principles on which I am basing this (non-)thesis in order to then move on to considering the ethics of writing and reading in the process of carrying out the project.

1. Levinas' ethics as *first philosophy* draws on his reading of Heidegger, whereby he understands ontology – the knowledge of being *per se* – as being accomplished in the factual temporal existence of the knowing human being. Ontology is not considered as disconnected from the temporality and contingency of the knowing mind. Therefore, it takes place “here below”, within a contingent human condition which is not solely intellectual but also affective, social and embodied (Peperzak et al., 1996, p. 3). “To comprehend our situation in reality is not to define it but to find ourselves in an affective disposition. To comprehend being is to exist.” (p. 4)

However, Levinas also departed from Heidegger's understanding of comprehension, conceiving of ethics as *first philosophy*. Levinas' criticism is that Heidegger understands the singular being “upon the horizon of being”, that is, the singular is known through the knowledge of the universal. Levinas instead focuses on the particular relationship with the Other who is known, rather than on the relationship to the universal: “To comprehend is to be related to the particular that only exists

through knowledge, which is always knowledge of the universal” (op. cit., p. 5). He thus understands the relationship with the Other as the condition of knowledge. Any relationship between human beings, unlike relationships with other beings, is one of particulars, since in the act of speech the I encounters the Other in its uniqueness. Levinas considers the Other as an interlocutor as well as a knowing subjects: “In other words, the comprehension of the other (*autrui*) is inseparable from his invocation.” (op. cit., p. 6)

2. The interaction of the I and the Other through speech both constitutes and is a condition of the act of comprehension (op. cit., p.6). Therefore, expression and comprehension cannot be separated. However, this form of expression, as Levinas suggests, is previous to ontology since it consists in the invocation of the Other, in the “intuition of sociality by a relation that is consequently irreducible to comprehension” (op. cit., p. 7). There is no relationship of comprehension which is communicated to the Other through speech; the relation with the Other in the invocation or call through speech (e.g., through greeting) exists prior to any common understanding. It is the face and speech of the Other that summons the I.

3. There is an exercise of violence on that which is grasped by thought in the act and the will to comprehend it. In the production of truth, that is, in the act of *adequating* a representation to a being, that being is subjected to the limits and categories of knowledge. Being becomes “the characteristic *property* of thought as knowledge” (Levinas, 1999, p. 76). The production of thought which has the status of truthful representation reduces the external phenomenon to the perception of the knower. The knowing I, therefore, in the act of knowing, reduces the Other to the Same, to its possibilities of understanding (Levinas, 1996, p. 13). Furthermore, in the act of producing a representation the becoming of being is detained in a closed rational presence (Levinas, 1999, p. 77).

In the ethical relationship, however, the summoning of an absolute human Other (in the presence of a face or speech) subdues philosophy to failure, highlighting the impossibility of truth by putting the knowing I into question and opening it to the experience of infinity. The Other does not fit with the Same, does not adjust to the categories that signify that which is different, does not even adjust to the

category of 'infinity'. On the contrary, it exceeds them all. In this putting into question, the I reaches infinity in "grasping the ungraspable while nevertheless guaranteeing its status as ungraspable" (op. cit. 1996, p. 19). It is this learning which exceeds the conditions of comprehension, which "procures an exit from the straightforward grasp and power of consciousness" (op. cit., p. 20)

The reduction of the Other to the Same, Levinas argues, does not only take place in the act of comprehension, but also in the action of the State and in socio-economic processes in industrial societies, in war and administration. Levinas considers these processes to belong to the philosophical process. Later on I will draw on Michel Foucault and move on from this, understanding these processes from the perspective of the logic of power/knowledge. The notion of power/knowledge does not privilege either of the two (neither power nor knowledge), but understands both as mutually conditioning in their effectivity. Knowledge is produced through relations of power and power operates in the form of knowledge.

4. Levinas' argument is that it is not ontology but ethics which sets the conditions for wisdom<sup>14</sup> (Bergo, 1995, p. 37). He argues that the philosophical tradition has conceived of truth as the site of intelligibility. Therefore, *first philosophy* – the condition for wisdom and the wise – has been identified with the comprehension of being. Levinas argues that ethics is the summoning of the Other to the I in the interpersonal encounter with a face and speech. The question that sets the conditions for *first philosophy*, then, are not about the nature and existence of being, but on "how being justifies itself" (Levinas, 1999, p. 86).

One has to respond to one's right to be, not by referring to some abstract and anonymous law, or judicial entity, but because of one's fear for the Other. My being-in-the-world or my 'place in the sun', my being at home, have these not also been the usurpation of spaces belonging to the other man whom I have already oppressed or starved, or driven out into a third world; are they not acts of repulsing, excluding, exiling, stripping, killing? (op. cit., p. 82)

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<sup>14</sup> It is to be noted that in Aristotle's 'Metaphysics', the product of the project of metaphysics, or *first philosophy*, is wisdom (Gill, 2006)

This resonates with the brief account that I presented of myself in my position as a PhD student studying *villas*, profiting economically and culturally through 'studying' the lives of students in conditions of hardship. It also resonates with Padre Mujica's verse quoted above. The founding questions of this thesis, its founding conditions, have ceased to focus solely on the nature of the knowledge produced, its status and limitations. These questions are present, but the first condition of this text is the justification of the existence of its writer and of the text itself. This justification could be made explicit or not; in this text, however, I decide to bring it forward and put it into question. In my methodology, which is the first piece that I wrote for this work, I shift towards responding to this question through acknowledging the political dimension of my activity as a PhD student-writer. In the analysis chapters (8 and 9) I address this question by dealing with the dangers of reifying the subjects that I interview while reading their *testimonios*. And now, at the chronological end of my PhD thesis, I address and name the very questions that have summoned me throughout this course and have moved and shaken this text along with the provocations of my tutor. After four years of erratic writing I find some comfort in saying that this is an ethical (non-)thesis. I have ceased to understand the conditions for the production of this text only as relationships of knowledge; they are also ethical relationships.

## Re-capitulating and moving forward

What is at stake is putting consciousness in question and not the consciousness of putting in question. At stake is a movement oriented in a way that is wholly otherwise than the grasp of consciousness and at every instant unravels, like Penelope at night, everything that was so gloriously woven during the day.” (Levinas, in Peperzak et al., 1996, p. 16)

To summarize the above, Levinas outlines a critique of Heidegger’s notion of ontology as *first philosophy*, arguing for its replacement by ethics. I have drawn on Levinas’ thought to make sense of my own experiences during my PhD as part of my attempt to write a (non-)thesis. Levinas reflects on the relationship with an Other as existing outside the boundaries of comprehension – an ethical relationship. His work reflects and struggles with the limits of knowledge – his major work is entitled *An Essay on Exteriority*. Levinas’ notion of ‘exteriority’ was questioned by Derrida in his reading of *Totality and Infinity*. However, Derrida himself drew on Levinas in the development of his method of deconstruction. Levinas and Derrida engaged in a dialogue and read each other’s works: Derrida’s reading of Levinas in *Violence and Metaphysics* “might show how that problematic [the deconstructive problematic] arises out of a confrontation with a primarily ethical thinking” (Critchley, 1999, p. 13). Simon Critchley draws on this encounter to propose his notion of *clôture reading* – I develop this notion later in this chapter – in his book *Ethics of Deconstruction*, which has been my main guide through the work of both philosophers. Drawing on these three sources, I will now turn to address, from the standpoint of ethics, the main interpretative problem that traverses this (non-)thesis.

As we have seen, Levinas proposes ethics as *first philosophy*, establishing a separation between two forms of knowledge based on two forms of relationships between the knowing subject and the Other, an ethical and an ontological. The latter, he argues, involves a reduction of the Other to the Same, whereas the former involves a movement outside of the Same by the subject of knowledge. The boundary that circumvents the I and the Same is transgressed through the encounter with the Other, allowing the I to access a different form of knowledge, a higher knowledge that, in Levinas’ terms, ‘grasps the ungraspable’. Derrida understands Levinas’ writing as an attempt to transgress the logocentric tradition in philosophy

that remains within the logocentric tradition. Levinas addressed this challenge in his work 'Otherwise than Being', in which he attempted to outline the expression of the Saying, the act of writing the text, in the Said, the content of the text (Critchley, 1999, p. 12), in an exploration of the relational nature of the text. For Derrida, the transgression of logocentrism occurs in the deconstructive repetition of that very tradition, that is, a double-handed repetition. It is double-handed because it follows the tradition at the same time as it "locates a moment of alterity within a text" (op. cit., p. 28). The limits between the Same and exteriority then become blurred and are no longer accessible through an Other, passing into the realm of a different form of knowledge. The possibilities of the transgression of logocentrism lie within the text. I will draw on these principles to think about the stories that I have co-constructed in this (non-)thesis, in the context of the social sciences. I will move forward on this basis, drawing on Critchley's notion of *clôture reading* and Patti Lather's 'using and troubling' to comment on the stories. I will not attempt to break through the logocentric tradition, but only what I perceive as my own conditions for knowledge in the context of my PhD. I attempt to break through the I, myself, rather than the Same. I will not be able to define the limits of the Same in this work. Therefore, I will seek to be different from myself in writing, drawing on Foucault and on Ball's use of Foucault's tools (see Ball, 2013). However, this text is not only about me; it is about the relationships between the participants, myself and the reader. As I have said, I will also attempt to structure this text in a way that encourages the reader to 'write over' it, to produce further meaning from it, to put the text into question and allow the text to put her/himself into question.

I should admit that the production of this text has not been as logical and intentional as I am describing it. Neither have I been its sole author – this text is also the result of dialogues with my tutor, reading groups, attendance at courses, etc. The coherence I am constructing in this text for the purposes of attaining PhD standards is also a product of the conditions of the emergence of the text, a product of the "author-function" (Foucault, 1984) that governs it. This text is therefore also the result of "a set of beliefs and assumptions governing the production, circulation, classification and consumption of texts" (Ball, 2013, p. 11). This text intends to be a 'PhD thesis', and has been enabled as such within my course, my scholarship, my university, and the broader academic field in the UK. However, I will also attempt to

write within and against (Lather, 1991) the boundaries of the possibilities of the 'author-function' in this (non-)thesis. There will therefore be moments of compromise between my intention to produce a piece of work that intends to respond to the presence of an Other through a sacrifice of the subject of knowledge (and its function), falling outside the conventions of the PhD, and a need to acknowledge those conventions. The text, then, will be neither thesis nor non-thesis; it will remain undecided, it will be a (non-)thesis. The process of writing this text has been messy, driven by emotion, hunches, scattered pieces of advice, and many other hidden social and psychological processes which I will not be able to thoroughly reflect on. Its partial coherence and the reflexive account of 'what I am doing' in its construction are qualities and products that to a great extent are forced within this specific author-function.

### My self-writing

Before looking at the relationships with the speakers who have told their stories for this work, I will think about my relationship with myself and the readers through writing. At the beginning of his series of lectures on truth-telling or *parrhesia*, Foucault presents truth-telling primarily as a relationship to oneself in which the Other is experienced as a threat rather than as a responsibility:

When you accept the parrhesiastic game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken. Of course, the threat of death comes from the Other, and thereby requires a relationship to the Other. But the *parrhesiastes* primarily chooses a specific relationship to himself: he prefers himself as a truth-teller rather than as a living being who is false to himself. (Foucault, 2001, p. 17)

The act of truth-telling is performed in relation to an 'Other', the audience of the 'truth' told, who might exert an act of violence on the truth-teller in the face of 'truth'. It should be said that 'truth' does not refer to the understanding of an essence, but to what the teller "knows" and "believes" to be true (Foucault, 2001, p. 14). It is in this sense that the *parrhesiastes* exposes her/his own life and *logos* and *bios* become interrelated (Tamboukou, 2012, p. 855). In the Socratic *parrhesia* life and 'truth' become interrelated, since truth-telling is considered as a practice and a life-style, defined by the relationship that the *parrhesiastes* has to him/herself. In order to become a truth-teller, the individual must change his/her

life, engaging in a set of practices and techniques that give access to truth (op. cit. 2012, p. 107). So, knowledge and life become interwoven in the production and performance of truth-telling.

I do not intend to become a Socratic *parrhesiastes* in Foucault's sense, but I do wish to draw on his reflection of the interrelationship between *logos* and *bios* to think about my own process of writing this text and how this relationship has constructed the result. I have already mentioned that the writing of this (non-)thesis takes place in the relationship with other individuals, in the face of whom I resist the moves to reduce them to objects of my study – such as are often embedded in the production of a social-science thesis. This relationship is not only ethical but also affective, and therefore this text is produced within the sense of responsibility that I experience in relation to an Other as well as the affect that constitutes that relationship – I have already mentioned the productive dimension of my shame. But drawing now on Foucault's *parrhesia*, I now wish to work towards an understanding of this text as emerging from my relationship with myself and with my audience. The publication of this text, in a way, is an attempted act of truth-telling, that is, an act of frank critique in which I take on the duty of telling the truth, i.e., what I know and believe to be true. I began this project thinking that I would produce a valid and reliable representation of an Other through a realist ethnographic method, and am reaching the end of it considering that the truth I am to tell takes the form of a provocation – also a practice of *parrhesia* (Foucault, 2001). This act of truth-telling is interwoven with my life, with my *bios*; in the sense that it is a practice of thought, it is also a practice of speech, and I have taken risks that have affected my fate in writing it. These are the ideas I now wish to develop further.

Regarding the relationship of this text to my fate, I have mentioned before that I began the attempt to write a thesis because I wanted to gain a doctorate in order to become a researcher. I am interested in understanding inequality, social exclusion, etc., and want to dedicate my life to developing my understanding of these things. These are the reasons I travelled from my country of origin, Argentina, to the UK, applied for and received financial support from the Institute of Education with the award of a scholarship, and studied and learned under the mentoring of my tutor. This has been a learning process, which has mobilized financial resources and personal emotional investments in order to produce myself as a researcher. This text



is an expression of this learning process; it manifests the journey, the decisions I have made through it and the changes in my thinking. However, although this text attempts to constitute itself as a 'PhD thesis', and thus to be the product that gives closure to the process of my becoming a qualified researcher and academic, it is also not a thesis. I have argued in the Introduction that it is an original contribution to knowledge. But this is not a scientific or philosophical statement about an object of study. In that sense, I am running the risk of failing to produce a thesis that will make me a qualified researcher or academic. So, there are risks involved in the act of producing this text, in the act of 'telling my truth'. *Logos* and *bios* are interwoven in this work as far as I am acting as a truth-teller. The reasons I have decided to take this risk are ethical – both in my relationship with an Other and in my relationship with myself. I intend to think and write responsibly within these relationships.

This is related to the first and second points I mentioned previously: this text is a practice of thought and a practice of speech. As such, this text produces me in the same way that truth-telling constitutes the *parrhesiastes*. It is in my relationship to truth, the participants and my audience that I produce the set of practices that constitute this text. I, then, *become* in writing this text. I have often read Stephen Ball, my tutor, thinking with Foucault's quote:

When I write, I do it above all to change myself and not to think the same thing as before.(Foucault & Trombadori, 1991, p. 27)

Foucault uttered this phrase in an interview with Duccio Trombadori, reflecting on the nature of his writing – both as activity and product. He talks of the book as an experience, both of writing and of reading. His work, from this standpoint, constitutes itself in reading and in writing as an experience of transformation, of becoming different, of *askēsis* (McGushin, 2007, p. 181; Foucault, 2006b). In this sense he does not consider himself a philosopher or a historian, and does not resist the definition of his work as fiction. Taking inspiration from Foucault and the Foucauldian provocations of my tutor I intend to deploy my PhD and this text to become someone different, to challenge myself and my own possibilities. And, hopefully, to challenge the reader.

This leads to a further point: I conceive of this text partly as the emergence of a relationship with my audience. I have already mentioned the fact that I am preparing

ground for a tense relationship with my examiners. Foucault said that the “threat of death comes from the Other” (i.e., the audience of truth-telling); although this does not quite apply to my own case, I consider my reviewers to be positioned as a threat to me. But I would now like to consider the broader audience at which this text is aimed. There are at least two genres in this (non-)thesis: the commentaries, which are essay-like texts addressed to an audience knowledgeable in the social sciences, and the transcribed-translated *testimonios*, aimed at anyone interested in reading first-person oral stories of students who live in shanty towns. My relationship with both audiences is mediated by my ethical relationship with the participants of this research, who tell their own stories – a point which I develop further in Chapter 3. But also, both the commentaries and the mediated *testimonios* are intended to provoke some reaction from the reader, to challenge the reader somehow, to annoy or shame, to engage the reader in ‘writing over’ this text with their practices of thought and speech. In this sense, I am thinking in line with my tutor’s Foucauldian provocations:

Foucault writes “writerly texts”, texts which invite the reader to participate in the making of meaning rather than simply be subject to it. Indeed Foucault’s elusivity creates spaces for the readers and users of his work to be creative and to be adventurous. (Ball, 2014)

### Commentary, clôtural reading, using and troubling

Thought is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions it offends or reconciles, attracts or repels, breaks, dissociates, unites or reunites; it cannot help but liberate or enslave. Even before prescribing, suggesting a future, saying what must be done, even before exhorting or merely sounding an alarm, thought, at the level of its existence, in its very dawning, is in itself an action – a perilous act. (Foucault 1977, quoted in Ball, 2013, p. 124)

As I have mentioned before, I will not attempt to carry out a deconstructivist study in Derridean terms, since it is not my intention to transgress the boundaries of the logocentric tradition. I will, however, allow for repetition and double reading as a way of engaging myself and the reader in the exercise of seeking the openness of new meaning. This task is grounded in the problem of ‘objectification’, as presented above through Levinas and Derrida, which poses the practice of knowing as an

ethical practice. It also brings together two thinkers who were separated by a lifelong debate – Foucault and Derrida. In reading the stories that I co-produced in my fieldwork I will undertake an exercise of interpretation. As I draw on Foucault's emphasis on the effects of speech acts and of the production of texts, I will understand this as an exercise, a practice of thought that is intended to transform myself and the readers. On the other hand, I will draw on Derrida in conceiving of interpretation as an openness of meaning, as a way of dealing with the problem of reducing the Other through knowledge.

#### On commentary: Derrida and Foucault

I have mentioned the Levinas-Derrida exchange to present the ethical dimension of deconstruction. I will now draw on the Derrida-Foucault debate to deal with the ethical dimension of writing this text. In Chapter 3 I reflected on some possible ways of dealing with the dangers of ethnography, specifically realist ethnography, through a reading of Foucault's *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*. I deployed there some of the principles of genealogy to position myself as a researcher in my relationship with the participants and broader fieldwork. In Chapters 7 and 8 I offer some interpretations of the stories co-produced in my fieldwork 'using and troubling' theoretical tools in an attempt to trouble my own thinking and to open the text to further meaning. In this exercise, I draw on Foucault to practise an ethics of writing, and on Derrida to exercise an ethics of reading. I will now pause to reflect on the distances and approximations between Derrida and Foucault to present the nature and strategy of my own exercise of interpretation.

In the debate between Derrida and Foucault that revolved around their understanding of madness based on their reading of Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, both referred to the nature and practice of interpretation. Whereas Derrida's deconstruction works on the basis that 'there is nothing outside the text', Foucault's genealogy is an analysis of the empirical existence of texts as enunciations, documents, etc., within networks of power. Whereas Derrida works within the field of the text, the *langue*, or the Said, Foucault's analysis looks at the production and effects of the *parole*, the Saying, in the context of historical networks of power relations that he understands as *epistemes*, discourses, regimes of truth. Foucault offered a critique of Derrida that defined his practice of interpretation as the 'pedagogy of the commentary'. While Derrida considered that the meaning of a text

cannot be fixed with reference to any historical origin and must be sought within the text itself, Foucault argued that Derrida was reproducing a long-standing practice in philosophy, the 'commentary'. For Foucault, Derrida poses the origin of the meaning of the text in the differences between the meanings of its words (Campillo, 1995, p. 70).

In *The Order of Things* Foucault studies the practice of commentary in the episteme of the Classical period during the Renaissance. In this period, hermeneutics, the study of the meaning of signs, overlapped with semiotics, the study of the production of signs (Foucault, 2005, p. 33), since knowledge was produced on the principle that signs and things were related by resemblance. The question of the production of the sign was resolved by recourse to the notion of resemblance. Therefore, the quest for meaning was a quest for resemblance. Commentary was the practice of interpretation of a text which sought resemblances between texts, doubling the original text to infinite forms of interpretation with the intention of opening up its originary meaning: "The commentary resembles endlessly that which it is commenting upon and which it can never express" (Foucault, 2005, p. 46).

In the debate with Derrida Foucault argues that by disregarding context Derrida is resorting to the practice of commentary of the Classical age. Instead of reproducing the text through resemblance, however, Foucault says that Derrida doubles the original text in its "interstices", in its "words as crossings-out" (Foucault, 2006a, p. xxiv). Foucault argues that Derrida revindicates the legitimacy of the masters in the interpretation of the text as the origin of meaning:

I would say that it is a historically well-determined little pedagogy, which manifests itself here in a very visible manner. A pedagogy which teaches the student that there is nothing outside the text, but that in it, in its interstices, in its blanks and silences, the reserve of the origin reigns; that it is never necessary to look beyond it, but that here, not in the words of course, but in words as crossings-out, in their lattice, what is said is 'the meaning of being'. A pedagogy that inversely gives to the voice of the masters that unlimited sovereignty that allows it to indefinitely re-say the text." (Foucault, 2006a, p. xxiv)

Although in this work I draw on Foucault's genealogy, which addresses the conditions of the production of texts, I also draw on Derrida to carry out an exercise of interpretation on the stories I have co-produced for this (non-)thesis. In short, I will

be producing commentaries, but in Foucault's sense as forms of analysis. In the following chapters I will present the stories that I have co-produced in my fieldwork and will then comment on them in an exercise of 'using and troubling' theoretical tools. I thus understand this text as an exercise, at the intersection of *logos* and *bios*, of system and exercise (Foucault, 2006a), as Foucault has understood Descartes' meditations. It is for this reason that most of the words of the text are used in reflections on my relationship to it, as well as to the participants and the reader. In this process I am drawing on genealogy. However, I will open a parenthesis in Chapters 8 and 9 in which I will comment on fragments of *testimonios* without seeking explanations based on reference to the locus of enunciation or the conditions of production of the text. In this parenthesis I will be reading a set of stories and attempting to open the possibilities of meaning to be produced from them – an undertaking that is also related to one of the aims of genealogy, namely the proliferation of identities (Foucault & Rabinow, 1991). As I will explain later, I will take fragments of *testimonios* – which I will call 'testimonial paradigms' – and use and trouble concepts to read them in different ways. I will consider the testimonial paradigms as related to context through analogy; therefore, reference to context through other sources of data in the process of reading them will not be core to my strategy of interpretation. So, although I will be reading a transcribed and cropped text<sup>15</sup> without significant recourse to a context, I am still interested in context since I am interested in the exercises of reading and writing. I am also interested in context to the extent that the interpretation that I elaborate is potentially useful and may be deployed in contexts analogous to the one presented in the testimonial paradigms. It is therefore as an exercise that the analysis intends to produce an effect on myself and the reader, to intervene in history, understanding the text as experience as does Foucault in the interview with Trombadori (Foucault & Trombadori, 1991). I will now draw on Simon Critchley's reading of Levinas and Derrida in order to examine reading and interpretation as an ethical enterprise.

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<sup>15</sup> The testimonial paradigms are therefore artificial constructs purposefully produced to enable commentary. In this sense, I have recourse to a written (transcribed, translated) artefact, an aid for memory external to myself, in which I co-produce an account. As to the truthfulness of this account, I have mentioned in Chapter 7 its limitations and uses. I will use this artefact in an exercise of reading and writing that is intended to act on selves (mine and the readers'). In this sense, I suspend the parrhesiastic discussion on the relationship of this artefact to truth (Foucault, 2010, p. 331) and use it as a resource for a different exercise, an exercise of *askēsis*.

### Clôtural reading – openness and closure

I will first refer to Simon Critchley's notion of *clôtural reading* along with Patti Lather's 'using and troubling' in order to make sense of the ethical nature of the exercise of commentary that I will develop, and to set out the (loose) rules of the exercise.

Before moving to this task, it is important to mention that these commentaries will be made in the form of texts which I have produced as part of this (non-)thesis:

translated *testimonios* and testimonial paradigms. Translated *testimonios* are the transcribed stories that emerge from the interviews that I carried out with the high-school graduates in the *villa* in Buenos Aires, focused on their experiences of schooling, graduation and higher/further education. Testimonial paradigms are a construct that I have produced for the purposes of commentary, using fragments of translated *testimonios*. I will expand on the nature of these concepts in following chapters. I will now look at the ethics of reading and the problem of closure.

The first point that I would like to make is that reflecting on the ethics of reading involves understanding reading as an 'act' (Critchley, 1999, p. 61). It involves acknowledging that choices are made in the act of reading as to the interpretation of a text. In the specific case of my own reading of the *testimonios* and my production of an analysis of these, these choices are to a certain extent prescribed by the application of methods of analysis. In my own case, I began the reading of the 'data' using principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which to a great extent shaped that reading. In my use of Grounded Theory I delimited categories of analysis and attempted to attach properties to them. My initial categories were related to space: the neighbourhood, the university, the home. In creating these categories I was setting boundaries between them, and in attaching properties to them I was characterizing and dividing them. In this sense, I was contributing to the objectification of the speech acts of my participants and their neighbourhood, and thus fixing arrangements of meaning that closed down or 'saturated' the possibilities of interpretation of these categories. Following on from what I have presented previously in this chapter, the reader will understand my discomfort with this form of reading. This discomfort led me to a double reading, with a troubling of the first reading and a critique of the commentary (Foucault, 2005, p. 88), which put into question the assumptions of the first reading. Although Derrida argues that deconstructive double reading is not necessarily deliberate, in my own process of

writing I found myself facing several choices. Do I produce an account of students' experiences or do I trouble these accounts? Do I reproduce a first reading or do I raise a critique? In conversations with my tutor I decided to remain undecided, to read and write both ways. In other words, I decided to acknowledge the double reading rather than privileging either of the readings. This attitude, although I am defining it in Derridean terms, is also very Foucauldian:

If genealogy in its own right gives rise to questions concerning our native land, native language, or the laws that govern us, its intention is to reveal the heterogeneous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity.

(Foucault, 1991, p. 95)

Both Derrida and Foucault work within formulations of our history and systems of thought as well as 'against' them, seeking the opening of these formulations into alternative possibilities for thought and being. One difference is that while Derrida works within undecidability in the reading of the text, Foucault works on the problematization of the conditions of the possibility of the existence of the text and its reading.

Having said that I would work within the tension between the openness and closure of interpretation, I will now look at the ethical dimension of the choice of undecidability for this piece of writing. I will introduce my analysis chapters (8 and 9) at the same time, and predispose the reader, as a preface does to a book (Foucault, 2006a). There is more in those chapters than a choice for double reading and undecidability, drawing on Critchley and Lather's work. They also present a concern with the position of the residents of *villas* within the city and their material living conditions, along with other lines of enquiry. Those chapters can speak more or less for themselves, however; this section should be seen merely as the elaboration of a declaration of intentions. Here I am simply reflecting on their dimension as exercises, on the experience of writing and the experience of reading, on the confusions and hesitations.

The search for openness, as I have embodied it, is built on the 'problem of closure' and the 'problem of objectification'. There are other takes and traditions which address these 'problems' (see Badiou's (2002) critique of Levinas, for example); however, I have set some limits on my possibilities, mostly due to the fit between my

reading of Levinas and Foucault and my discomfort about doing ethnography, and also because of the possibilities for thought that opened up in my conversations with my tutor. Let us look at 'closure' as a problem from a Derridean perspective in order to think about the 'archaeological' conditions of my reproduction of this problem.

Simon Critchley reflects on two dimensions of the notion of closure: a spatial dimension and a temporal dimension. Spatial closure "is that which encompasses and encloses all the co-ordinates or constituent parts appertaining to a given, finite territory..." (Critchley, 1999, p. 62). Temporal closure, on the other hand, refers to the "activity or process of bringing something to its conclusion, completion or end" (op. cit.). He emphasizes that temporal closure is not to be identified with an 'end'. Keeping this distinction in mind, he moves on to look at the origins of the problem of closure in Derrida's work, and refers to his reading of Husserl in the essay *Genesis and Structure*, where he draws on Husserlian phenomenology to make a critique of structuralism, in which he understands philosophy as the "infinite opening beyond the closure" (1999, p. 67), implied in the idea of structure:

The closure of an exact science is the completion of a finite totality, within which all the propositions, hypotheses, and concepts of that science are contained and '*nothing further remains open*' (op. cit., p. 67)

Later in his intellectual life, in the second version of *Violence and Metaphysics*, Derrida returns to the 'problem of closure', but from a different perspective (op. cit., p. 69), where he approaches Husserl's phenomenology within metaphysics and problematizes the closure of metaphysics. In this context he understands his work as an overcoming of metaphysics within metaphysics:

The whole Husserlian itinerary is affected by this ambiguity: it holds us back within the field and within the language of metaphysics by the very gesture that carries it beyond metaphysical closure and the limits of all that is in fact called metaphysics (Derrida, quoted in Critchley, 1999, p. 71)

At this point Derrida proposes a different way of overcoming closure, which does not deploy tools that are drawn from beyond the closed system (using phenomenology to deconstruct structuralism) but produces a breakthrough within the language that constitutes a closure to the thinking subject. He is thus thinking of a form of closure; Critchley relates Derrida's thought here to 'spatial closure'.

However, Derrida describes closure neither as a closed linear circle encompassing



a homogeneous surface, nor as the discontinuity of a circular line. Rather, he understands the breakthrough of closure as follows:

...the text that is deconstructively read possesses a surface that is fissured and flawed by the traces of an alterity which it can neither reduce nor expel (...)  
Deconstructive reading leaves the logocentric text as a scarred flawed body  
(Critchley, 1999, p. 74)

It is traces of an alterity that *scar* the surface of the text, not alterity itself, so the trace “constitutes the *possibility* of an exit beyond the closure of metaphysics” (Critchley, 1999, p. 75, my emphasis). Successive deconstructive readings, undecided in a double reading, transgress the text without ever reaching conclusions, without ever closing the text to a further deconstructive reading. Critchley calls this *clôtural reading*.

I will consider the ‘problem of closure’ in relation to my understanding of social exclusion later on in my reading of *testimonios*. I will seek to problematize thinking about exclusion using linear boundaries (us vs. them; the I vs. the Other), and attempt to examine the condition of exclusion in other ways. I will look at the production of the *villa* inhabitant as a stigmatized Other and attempt to challenge the idea of the Other as an absolutely separate being; I will also question the practice of research as placing *villa* inhabitants in positions of abjection. So, the question of spatial closure is present in this work when thinking about the reading, but also when considering my understanding of the arrangements and social processes of the city of Buenos Aires in relation to *villas*. As Simon Critchley suggests, the problem of spatial closure can be posed in different contexts:

The word ‘closure’ appears in many contexts; one speaks of the closure of a college, a hospital, or a university department, the closure of a debate or a parliamentary session, a kangaroo closure, the closure of a mathematical set or the principle of closure in logic, the closure of a body of propositions or a set of axioms, the astronomical closure of the solar system, the closure of a poem or work of literature, the closure of a language or a linguistic system, the closure or confinement of the ‘mad’ and the poor... (Critchley, 1999, p. 61)

The other dimension to closure is temporal closure, which I have briefly referred to above. Closure in this sense means the act of bringing something to an end. This sense of closure also relates to the structure of this (non-)thesis, since it relates to

the question of its conclusion. The transgression of temporal closure is produced through the repetition of double reading. It is the possibility and effect of repetition that allow the breaking through of the conclusion of a text. In this sense, when a text is 'saturated', when the conditions for the production of meaning from it are considered to be exhausted, it is always capable of being re-read. It is in "massive" and "endless" repetition that the breakthrough is possible (Critchley, 1999, p. 88). The concern with the production of concluded accounts has been addressed within the ethnographic tradition in the context of a 'crisis of representation', and different versions of ethnography have dealt with this 'problem' in different ways (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Derrida distinguishes between 'closure' and 'end' when engaged in reflections on the 'end of metaphysics'. In his reading of Heidegger's *Overcoming Metaphysics*, the 'ending' (*Verendung*) constitutes the domination of the conditions of thought set by metaphysics in contemporary modes of thought and social order (Critchley, 1999, p. 78). Derrida understands Heidegger's thesis not as an announcement of the end of metaphysics but rather as its closure, as the exhaustion of its possibilities and its completion in the domination of thought, which could remain indefinitely. The conditions for thought set by metaphysics are a specific understanding of Being, which I have already mentioned in previous sections. These conditions are summarized by Derrida as follows:

Heidegger (...) says that the thinking of Being was lost (...) when, at the birth of philosophy, Being was determined by metaphysics as presence, as the proximity of the being (*étant*) before the glance (*eidos*, phenomenon, etc.) and consequently as ob-ject. This determination of Being as *pre-sence* (pre-sence) and then of presence as the proximity of the being to itself, as self-consciousness (from Descartes to Hegel) would outline the closure of the history of metaphysics. (Derrida, 1966, cited in Critchley, 1999, p. 80)

Derrida echoes Heidegger's thesis, understanding *Verendung* as closure rather than end, but also produces a double reading of it, considering that there is no unitary metaphysics or logocentric tradition, and no social order. He argues that Heidegger assumes ancient Greek metaphysics was received in modernity as it was produced, and that it was produced to be received in the way that modernity

has received it. I do not wish to go any deeper into this topic here, only to refer to Derrida's double reading of Heidegger, by which he reasserts Heidegger (or rather, his reading of Heidegger) in his distinction between closure and end, but at the same time seeks a breakthrough in his reading of Heidegger's text. Temporal closure involves ceaseless repetition of the text and the ellipsis that emerges from this:

The relations between Derrida and Heidegger need to be situated in the space between repetition and ellipsis, where the textual exigencies of a repetitive exegesis approach the necessity of thinking something wholly other. (Critchley, 1999, p. 88)

Having presented the notion of temporal closure and Critchley's understanding of Derrida's notion of deconstruction through his concept of *clôtural reading*, the reader might question how this set of notions affects the present work. I have already mentioned how this text will go on to further think and struggle with spatial closure in the analysis of space, drawing on poststructuralist literature. Regarding temporal closure, this text, in its attempt to deal with the 'problem of objectification', intends to enable further and different readings rather than enforce a single or dominant closed reading. It intends to be 'writerly' (Barthes, 1975, p. 4), to be 'written over'. I have mentioned how I conceive of writing as a tool for self-production and change. This (non-)thesis intends to be a tool for writing as well as a tool for *clôtural reading*, a reading that engages with the text in a way that breaks through the enabling conditions of interpretation of the text and the reader. As I have mentioned, I do not intend to transgress any tradition, only myself. In order to do this I have drawn on Levinas to identify principles of *first philosophy* as ontology, and heeded his call for an experience of thought that takes ethics as first philosophy. I have then looked at Derrida and his search for an other, distanced from the logocentric tradition (ontology as first philosophy) and located within rather than outside language and our own possibilities of thought. The attempt at breakthrough, then, lies in this text, within the conditions of thought that enable it. To sum up, and return to my initial point: this text seeks ellipsis through repeating the reading of *testimonios* but also through inviting the reader to undertake further readings, and through the pursuit of the breakthrough of the objectification of the speaker of the *testimonio*. My own repetitive commentary of the text might fail in

achieving such a breakthrough, and so might the reader's. It is for this reason that the value that I find in this (non-)thesis lies in the exercises, the acts of reading and writing. The products are repetitions to be repeated, and between those repetitions the ellipsis might emerge, both in the meanings of the text and in the subject of knowledge. In that ellipsis the subject of knowledge might produce a breakthrough of the Same and the I, and produce itself through writing.

### Using and troubling: validity and reflexivity

I have had to confront not the ways in which I might be determined but the ways in which I might be revocable (Ball, 2013, p. 3)

I have so far considered reading and writing as ethical praxis drawing on Foucault and Crichtley, and although I have already thought these in relation to this work, I will now draw on Patti Lather in order to think the presented principles in relation to the 'scientific' nature of this (non-)thesis. This text is the product of reading and writing as well as a constitutive part of the experience and production of reading and writing. But also, it is inscribed in the *episteme* (Foucault, 2005) of modern social sciences, more specifically in poststructuralist qualitative sociology of education. In this sense, I am drawing on a set of scientific tools which validate the assertions in this text as scientific, and in an age where science is being put into question in some social-science studies, partly by the principles that I am drawing on to produce this work (Lather, 2012). I will now position myself with/in the field of ethnography in order to think the ontological implications of my ethics.

The methodological discussion that Patti Lather develops in relation to her research in *Troubling the Angels* very thoroughly covers and responds to many of the questions that I pose in this research project. She faces the challenge of writing about the experiences of women struggling with HIV/AIDS and 'getting lost' in the production of meanings of their testimonies, while at the same time seriously engaging with the real experiences of this group. She deals with the challenge of thinking the Other with/in post-structuralism and ethnography by 'doing and troubling' ethnography, writing within/against. Her take on this set of issues is much influenced by Derrida, whose ideas I have presented above through

Critchley's understanding of deconstruction. In this research, drawing on her work, I have attempted to 'use and trouble' (Ball, 2014) theoretical tools to read the *testimonios* that I have co-produced with the speakers. I am not deliberately trying to trouble the ethnographic tradition, although I consider that this work can be associated to other works which repeat and seek the breakthrough of 'new ethnography' (Lather, 2012). But I am trying to produce a reading that problematizes its very assumptions, or rather, that uses concepts as tools to interpret a text and that at the same time troubles the tools and reading. Derrida wrote about a dominant (first) scholarly commentary that was unsettled by a double reading. Within my commentaries there will be no dominant reading, none that accomplishes the rules and tropes of a certain tradition – I use theoretical tools rather than 'do' specific traditions or authors. But there will be double readings, that is, I will produce interpretations using specific theoretical tools (e.g., Mary Douglas' 'dirt') and trouble the use of those tools while seeking to reassert the products of their deployment. I will also work in between authors, that is, in the middle of their discussions and debates, undecided between their oppositions, in the distance that separates them. The aim is not to achieve a 'better' methodology to overcome the problems that I reproduce (Lather, 2012, p. 8), but to work with/in the unresolved tensions of 'doing' ethnography, at the 'end of metaphysics', in 'postmodern' times. So, the outcome of my readings of the *testimonios* will be a work on myself as well as a work on the epistemic (Foucault, 2005) conditions within which I think. Regarding the latter, I will repeat theoretical constructs and tensions (also when 'troubling') and do not expect the resolution of these tensions. However, as stated above, within repetition lie the possibilities of another text.

Considering that this is a PhD thesis, a reference to the 'problem' of validity (Lather, 2012, p. 119) will be of value at this point. Validity in the social sciences has been defined on the basis of an understanding of knowledge as a correspondence between the sign and the signified. A claim or argument is then valid if it measures what it intends to measure or if it investigates what it intends to investigate (Kvale, 1994, p. 3). There is, then, correspondence between the claim and the phenomenon that constitutes the object of the claim. The early stages of my analysis of *testimonios* were driven by my reading of Strauss and Glaser's *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where an inductive

process of analysis is built on the basis of realist ontological assumptions. This assumes that there is a correspondence between reality and data, on the basis of which, through a process of questioning and comparison, abstract categories can be built that constitute theories. The validity of the theory lies in the process of questioning and comparison of data. There are no rules to guarantee validity; this relies on the process of investigation of the research, which is made explicit (Kvale, 1994, p. 4). In this process participants become native informants and they produce data which are analysed for their correspondence with reality. Also, the author-function's conditions of production are excluded from the analysis. Validity, then, is constructed by the researcher's reflexivity in the production of analysis, excluding an account in its own production as a researcher carrying out the analysis. In my first round of analysis of the 'data' I read the complete set of stories using NVivo and divided it into codes. The following is a brief account of my early experience of coding:

I am considering two ways of addressing my own thinking on the interviews. One is through the coding that I have made in my first reading. This was mostly intuitive; I did not have explicit categories I was looking for, but through analysing the codes that I thought of as I read the interviews I attempt to see implicit categories that might have guided me while doing the coding.

Another way of addressing my own presence in the interviews is by analysing the themes I introduced through questions during these. So, although I did not bring a grid to the interviews, I aim at seeing how my own background influenced the interviews (memo, 18/02/2013).

In this fragment it is evident that in the very early stages I brought myself into the analysis, both considering my own presence in the construction of the categories that 'emerged' from the 'data' as well as in the bias in the latter, in the interviews I carried out. This was the point where I began a different form of construction in the analysis, ceasing to seek an inductive process of construction of knowledge and moving towards 'using and troubling'. I then started to understand the data rather as *testimonios*, as the traces of the voice of a speaker that confronted me and spoke her/his truth, in an exercise of reading and writing that was intended to problematize the ways I interpret those texts. I then worked with/in the separation between *testimonio* and commentary as incommensurable genres, commentary being both

repetition of and excess to *testimonio*. The validity of my commentary lies in the process of its own development, in the questions that it poses to itself, and therefore its validity cannot be conceived of as a reassurance of the truthfulness of the claims, but rather as Patti Lather understands it:

This ability to establish and maintain an acceptable dialogue with readers about the construction of reality involves making decisions about which discursive policy to follow, which “regime of truth” to locate one’s work within, which mask of methodology to assume. What follows is, in effect, a call for a kind of validity after post-structuralism in which **legitimation depends on a researcher’s ability to explore the resources of different contemporary inquiry problematics and, perhaps, even contribute to “an ‘unjamming’ effect in relation to the closed truths of the past, thereby freeing up the present for new forms of thought and practice”** (Bennett, 1990, p. 277) (Lather, 2012, p. 120, my emphasis)

## Appendix 2 – Continuation of Chapter 1

*How was your arrival at the university?*

To be accepted you had to do an introductory course, two subjects in two months. I remember I got lost in the building the first time. I was late to the class. The first time I arrived everyone looked the same to me. That was the feeling. You arrived and everyone was dressed the same, with the same hair styles; even the boys were all the same! 'What happened here?' Or maybe I was used to something different. It's true that many people think that everyone in my neighbourhood looks the same, and that all the ones who listen to cumbia are all the same... But in this case they were really all very similar. It really struck me: the same trousers, the same labels, the same clothes... Even the same way of speaking and behaving. I expected to see something different because I was there to study journalism. I wasn't expecting to see hippies, but something like that. I don't know, I was expecting to find weird people, with a different view on life, interesting people. I listened to their conversations – 'Where did you get those trousers?'; 'What label is this?'. I had no idea of labels; in my house we never spoke of labels. The least important thing in my house was clothes. The fact that they paid so much attention to clothes, even boys, was very strange to me. I don't hear my brother talking about what labels of clothes he's going to buy. That was my first impression: they're all the same.

When I went for the first time to enrol with a friend of mine, my friend said exactly the same thing to me. I asked a friend of mine whom I've known since the first year of primary school, 'Would you come with me?'. We saw all the students and she asked me, 'Are you going to study here?'. I said, 'Well, at least I'm not the only one who thinks this way'. I thought it was wrong to feel this way. At that moment I said, 'I must be prejudiced'. I tried to tell myself not to be prejudiced. But it was very difficult for me to understand the importance that certain things had for them, things that to me had always been superficial. And it was very hard for me to be in a group in which they were talking about that because I didn't understand anything. I didn't understand and I wasn't interested in understanding. It was really strange. I saw that



everyone looked at each other to see the way they dressed. And, for me, more than the fact of being interested in the way they were dressed, I couldn't understand the fact that everyone looked the same.

*Did you start to care about how you dressed?*

I think that I did in the long run. With the difference that I knew that I couldn't change my style very much. I couldn't go home and say, 'I want a pair of trousers that are worth 300 pesos', because those 300 pesos in my house were for food or for more important needs. So I couldn't go home and say that. Also, I felt that it wasn't necessary. Nowadays I think that if I buy a 300 peso pair of trousers it won't be because of the label but because they'll last forever. At home we never bought good trainers, those trainers with springs that everyone wears; people don't understand how poor people buy such expensive shoes.

*Why do people criticize that?*

There's this thing of, 'These people say they don't have money but they buy clothes that...'. To be honest, I don't understand it myself; at home we were never like that. Maybe because my mother was always someone who worked hard and understood that there are things that don't make much sense. She always taught us to give importance to things, but not in a superficial way. We know that if we can afford something we'll buy it because it will last a long time, and not because it's fashionable.

*Do you have friends who wear trainers with springs?*

Yes, I remember that in high school we cared about those things. 'I'll get the Nike suit that costs 600 pesos and it's super cool'. You would look at him and say 'but,

why?'. But between boys it was more frequent because it was important in the neighbourhood to generate a certain respect. If you dressed badly everyone would look at you as an inferior. Not as poor, because we were all the same in that sense. But among the boys there's this thing of wanting to belong to a certain group. And in order to belong you had to dress in a certain way. I felt it was related to that. In high school it was very important for them, for my classmates. They cared about not being outside. You felt really bad if you felt you were outside. They tried to take part in that way, through trainers, sports suits, music. It was all about, 'We are hanging out at the street corner, with the lads, they know us'. The boys who hang out at the corner would know them, so my classmates would know that they wouldn't get hurt by them because they were part of the group. I think that was what it was about.

*Were there other spaces? There was this group...*

I don't know if there were other spaces.

*The school?*

Yes, but the school wasn't... At that time the school didn't have those spaces yet. Nowadays you have many things; you have the groups in the parish church, the retreats, other things. It wasn't like that. It didn't exist at that time; you couldn't choose between many options. My classmates didn't end up in drugs or badly. You knew that you had the choice to dress like the others, talk like the others – but draw the line there. No one ended up stealing or anything like that. In a way they managed to place limits. It was more about how they looked to the rest, for people to see that they dressed like the rest, that they belonged and that they were respected.

*You say that your classmates would place a limit in relation to 'them'. Who were 'they'? Kids from other schools, from other parts? The street-corner boys?*

The thing is that in my school...we would wear a school uniform. You wear a uniform, it's 'the private school', so the rest thought that we were the stupid ones who went to the private school. And I think that the boys were affected by that. And in order to overcome that they tried to connect with the rest. That's my way of looking at it; maybe it has nothing to do with what I say. The ones who went to the state school had a different situation. They were more...they didn't have many limits, I think. Every day you would hear that they would get into fights. Everyone knew that they were different and that the kids in my school didn't have as many rows. So, we would go out at the weekends and, in order to belong, the boys in my group dressed like the rest of the people that live there.

Continues in Appendix 4

## Appendix 3

This research is framed within the aim of contributing to overcoming the symbolic and relational frontiers that have excluded inhabitants of *villas* in Buenos Aires, in particular those that affect high-school graduates. The challenge begins in the field of research, that is, to produce a study that in its very design does not innocently fall into this dichotomy (i.e., the opposition of *villa* to city). This research does not pretend to completely overcome this frontier, but only to struggle with it, and in doing so to move towards the possibility of solidarity between participants, researcher and readers, around the issue of exclusion in Buenos Aires.

The study presents the narratives of the participants in their attempts to access higher/further education and the labour market, my narrative of my attempt to produce this research, and my analysis of both around the issue of exclusion, paying particular attention to the division between *villa* and 'the city' inscribed in the identities of all the people involved in the research.

The main ethical issues to be acknowledged in the fieldwork are:

### **Confidentiality and anonymity**

Considering that a substantial part of this research project consists of writing the life stories of participants, their confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed in order to reduce the personal consequences of any publication and to provide a space of trust between the researcher and participants. This will be done through the use of pseudonyms in the presentation of the data.

It is to be noted that the participants will be encouraged to produce political testimonies about their struggles for integration. I will present myself as a researcher whose aim is to disseminate their perspectives in academic writings as well as narratives that may be published in books. Therefore, the intimate or private dimension of the participants' lives will not be the focus of the research; when approached, it will be from the stand-point of speech that is aimed at the public sphere.

**Voluntary informed consent and covert research**

My identity as a researcher will not be hidden at any point in the data collection. Since this is an ethnographic study, participant observation will be used in data collection, for which honesty and transparency with regard to my research agenda will be assured throughout the whole process.

Where interviews are carried out, the participants will be informed about the aims, funding, and publications that may be part of this research, as well as their right to withdraw from the research at any point in time. Forms of coercion will be avoided and power asymmetries reduced to the minimum possible, both in presenting the invitation to participate and throughout the whole process. In the initial invitation an information leaflet will be given along with a voluntary-consent form to sign.

Given the exploratory quality of this research, the methods and forms of access will be subject to change after the pilot study. The use of incentives may be a possibility to be considered. In this case, a new ethics form will be sent for approval. No incentives will be used for the pilot study.

**Vulnerability and sensitive data**

The participants will be young adults, for whom there are no special considerations in relation to possible situations of vulnerability to which they may be subject throughout the research process. However, the rights and well-being of the participants will be looked after, and if situations of vulnerability emerge, the necessary care will be taken.

With regard to the possibility of collecting sensitive data, the focus of the research does not necessarily lead to it; however, given that this is an ethnographic study, this may arise in the interviews. If I become a witness to the violation of the rights of any individual, I will assess the actions to be taken, considering the power relations within the context, and aiming to produce an effective improvement of the issue. This improvement will be defined in the dialogue with the individuals involved, considering

their priorities and interests as well as making explicit the rights that are being denied.

### **Deception**

As I have stated, my identity as a researcher will be transparent in the relationships I will establish. Part of this identity involves becoming an instrument of the participants' agenda as far as possible. This will be negotiated in the field. If I accept any responsibility in the social dynamics taking place in the *villa* that exceed my duty as a researcher, I will commit to meeting it in time and quality. The acceptance of such responsibility will depend on the implications that it may have for the production of my research, its consistency to the political aims of the research, and my values as a social researcher.

### **Researcher's risks and integrity**

Given that the neighbourhood where the research will take place is considered to be dangerous due to the presence of gangs and petty and organized crime, access to participants will be gained through a snowball technique. The main gatekeepers will be school staff and the local priest. These individuals are responsible for spaces of youth participation, and through accessing these spaces I will attempt to meet young people interested in participating in my research.

No unnecessary risks will be taken.

### **Relationship with gatekeepers**

My research agenda will be communicated to the gatekeepers, and their support will be based on their readiness to contribute to it. If I establish connections with new gatekeepers for my main fieldwork that present ethical issues, a new ethical form will be submitted for approval.

## 5. Exclusions: D's story

Why am I so keen on bringing D's story forward at this point? An important issue in this work is the understanding of exclusion. In the course of the research I have made various decisions and have myself produced a number of exclusions, which I have made explicit in the research design outlined above. I will here briefly acknowledge the effects of choosing to tell the stories of students who have been successful in their school trajectories and want to pursue further studies.

I set out to tell the stories of high-school graduates in their attempts to pursue further studies. D's story does not entirely fit into this group because she did not continue her studies after high school. She became employed, then quit her job. But that is the reason why I want to include her – because her story is an example of the kind of stories I am excluding in this work. Stories led by other choices, stories of the impossibility of schooling, stories of those excluded from the system of education. I am concerned with this exclusion, particularly with stories of the deeply marginalized, whose depths cannot be penetrated from the shore where I stand. I am thinking of the stories of *ranchadas*<sup>16</sup>, stories of subjectivities developed in prison, speech under the influence of *paco*<sup>17</sup>. D's story presents an illustration and a memory of some of these conditions. At points her story gives us insights into situations of marginality in the *villa*, while at other times her memory becomes blurred, especially under the effects of drugs. At points she tells us about places that she has not been but her loved ones have, like prison. But, as she says, she has lived 'many things', many of which would not be included in this work if I strictly followed my initial project.

So, D's story exposes the limitations of my sample, of my case, by speaking from its limit. D finished high school but did not continue her studies, although she wanted to. By including her story I not only intend to expose the limits of this work, but also, somehow, to blur them. D's story is within my work, but outside it as well. I want to introduce her *testimonio* to present and include the excluded in my focus, and, by doing this, acknowledge those exclusions and challenge and question them.

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<sup>16</sup> Groups of teenagers living together in the streets.

<sup>17</sup> Coca paste, also called 'basuco'.

When I went to the community centre for the first time, for my pilot study, I talked to a volunteer, a PhD student specializing in Public Policy. She was therefore someone whose opinion I valued, because she had already achieved what I am trying to achieve with this work, and she knew the *villa* better than me because she had been working there for a long time. She told me that the main problem of education was the drop-out rate, not access to higher education. The same point emerged in a conversation with a priest who had been living and working in *villas* for four decades. I thought about changing my topic, but decided not to. This work is not about the main problem of the shantytown. In fact, it is trying not to be about a 'problem'. However, I remained concerned about the voices I was excluding in a research design that has already been criticized as being too 'middle class', that is, a design that tells the stories of successful students who are participating in upward social mobility and have aspirations similar to those of middle-class young people. I hope this work does not fall into that category, at least not entirely. This is not the product of a project that emerges from the *villa* to the *villa*, I am not from the *villa* and have thought this research in the context of an English university for an academic audience. However, the speakers are from the *villa*, and I wish not only to listen to their views and perspectives, but also to re-think myself as I write down their views in this work. I will not aim at reflecting their voices, but rather at providing a translation of them (these voices were recorded a year ago in a series of conversations). I do not wish to go into any further depth on this point; I will only say that D's story speaks from the limits of my research design, which can be criticized for not dealing with the 'problems' of 'the' youth of 'the' *villas*. In this work I will consider both youth and *villas* as constructed problems, problems that affect this work but which I hope to be successful in acknowledging and troubling. This work attempts to open possibilities for thinking differently, for being different; it attempts to be nomadic.

Regarding the nature of my work as 'middle class', I will not deny this – but I do not think it a problem. This work is the result of the encounter between a middle-class student and working-class students, mediated by a globally prestigious institution and published for a literate audience. But it is also about troubling my 'middle-class-ness' and their 'working-class-ness', as uncomfortable positions. However, these class critiques have helped me think about my design, and I introduce D's story partly because of their input. I decided that I needed to acknowledge that I am



excluding the stories of young people who are more 'excluded' than the participants I have chosen. I acknowledge that I am not comfortable with this, and the participants expressed similar feelings. In my first interview with participant E, he begins saying that I should talk to D if I want to listen to stories of disadvantaged students. I then asked myself whether the aim of this research was to write the stories of the disadvantaged. No, it is not. In the *testimonios* there will be stories of experiences of disadvantage in education, but other stories too. There are stories of travels, migrations, solidarity, activism, etc. By introducing D's story I present the limitations of my positioning and seeking a momentary shift – both as writer and as reader. It is also an invitation for the reader to momentarily displace themselves from the limits that I have set in this project.

As you will see, the interviews with D include many stories. I present here only a set of interconnected stories about her experiences and struggles at the margins of schooling, the law, and life. The first interview was partly about struggling within the system of education. The stories that followed were about the struggles of living outside the system of education and the labour market. Reading D's *testimonio* provided me with a more detailed sense of some of the above-mentioned dangers of the *villa*. It also made me feel anger. And, at first glance, I can see a relationship with the media which is different from the one that B presents in Chapter 8, describing a mutual 'use'. Also, a different form of solidarity in the neighbourhood is seen, one that is not organized by institutions or outsiders, but which emerges in reaction to an act of violence from the police. These differences are part of what I want to expose, an 'etc.' at the end of the enumeration of characteristics comprehended within this study, an ellipsis.

*Buenos Aires, June 2012. This Thursday we had a late interview. D had had a meeting with the priest and they had finished after five o'clock. I had stayed in the community centre that afternoon but was about to leave. Since D was suddenly free I stayed and we went to the chapel to talk. D sat against a wall. We started chatting about I don't remember what, and suddenly the conversation was becoming a story, so I asked her if she minded if I turned the recorder on to have the interview started.*

*We were talking about the previous interview and I was telling her that after reading the transcripts I felt that her pregnancy, in her last year of high school, was something that was not accepted. I tried to say that it was not accepted at school, but I think she understood that it was her who hadn't accepted it. She replied as follows:*

Right, I wouldn't tell anyone in the sense that...

*You didn't tell anyone at school, so I got that feeling...*

Because I was pregnant... At first I wouldn't accept it, as you've said. I didn't accept it, and the other thing was that, with all the problems that I had, I felt that my life was going to get more complicated. Worse than it already had and... Well, with the studies – I was already in fifth year – it wasn't so worrying because... *[Because she was about to finish high school.]* But what worried me was that I wanted to become an accountant and I knew that it wouldn't be the same now. It was still possible, but I was taking it that way because with all the problems I had... I knew that if I hadn't had children I would have finished high school, got to work and got to study. And helped my grandmother with my brothers. But having a baby changed everything. I had to stay with him. I told you that I finished high school with a six-month pregnancy. Everyone went on graduation trip; I didn't. I knew that the next year was a beginning, and I was beginning maternity. My son was born in April; I had to be with him. That year was lost because I would spend the whole day with him. And well, the next year I had to go to work. I had no choice other than working because of my situation. *[D was the eldest sister of four siblings; their grandmother was in*

*charge of them all and she had always had domestic responsibilities at home.]]*

couldn't work and study at the same time, I felt I didn't have the time. I didn't have it because I worked during the morning and I worked during the afternoon, so that the income would be enough for myself, my siblings and my son.

*Right, you had a year to be a mother and then the next year you started working as a cleaner in the... How was it? The supermarket in the morning?*

Right, so I started working as a cleaner in March, just when LT, my son, was going to be one year old, in April. I first started as a cleaner. I went there... A friend recommended me, I went to work in an office. It wasn't much – four hours, five to nine. I liked it; also, I said, 'I don't have other choice; whether I like it or not, it's a job'. I had to accept it. LT was bigger; he was a year old, no longer a baby. I wasn't leaving him. In August of that same year I wanted to work in the morning. I was very qualified. And LT wasn't breastfeeding anymore – because he breastfed for a year. I started work; he breastfed for one more month and then he stopped. I then started weaning him slowly and gave him the bottle. He still drinks from the baby bottle, but he doesn't tell anyone. He's embarrassed because he's bigger now. Every morning he gets up and wants his chocolate milk in the bottle; that's what wakes him up.

*He's five now.*

Yes (...)

So, one afternoon I went to the cemetery, to see my mother. I went to her grave, to bring her roses, flowers. I just passed by a supermarket. I've always wanted to be a cashier. When I was a child I used to play and imagine that I was a cashier, I remember. I liked the technique, the register, to charge people. Well, I went there, I asked how I could look for a job, to fill out any forms, or just how to do it. I had to fill a form and leave it there, they told me. I was given a paper, I filled it in – I was with a friend. Sometime later they called me. Not much time, just a week or two (...) They

told me 'you've got a place, it's from eight to twelve'. So, it was four hours, near Roca neighbourhood. So, I started working; my mother would take LT to kindergarten. He went to a kindergarten of the neighbourhood. I would pick him up because I finished work at twelve and at one I was already at home (...)

So, then I was offered the position of manager of the branch. [*I asked about the salary; she didn't give as much importance to that as to the promotion.*] The salary was almost the same. I remember my former boss, the one who coached me, used to tell me 'look all that I do and my salary is the same as yours' (...) Well, so I learned many things about business; I got the experience. They liked me because I was fast. They love fast and productive people. I never let people spend too much time at the till. Overall I spent one year at the supermarket.

I remember that the day I was offered the promotion I was really happy. I had only been there for five months; it was too soon for me. There were things that I didn't know. 'Don't worry, you're good, you've got the skills, you learn things fast'... They convinced me. I agreed, but I didn't want to feel pressured either, because when you feel pressured everything goes wrong. I had a training week...

And, well... I told you that I then had a problem.

*Yes, you told me...*

I had emotional problems. I was having problems with a person. He had been with a friend of mine. I was very sad at that moment. I was going out with him, then he took revenge and went with my best friend. I was somewhere else; I don't know where I was. I was going to the training courses, I was getting promoted... And... This guy confused me. He did something and I became dumb. I wasn't thinking for myself, I was depressed. So, one day, I fell into addiction again. LT was still little. Until then I had been well, I was working, doing things well, went out dancing every now and then but not consuming. I'd stopped consuming when I got pregnant.

So, I leave work. It was a Sunday, I remember. My first workplace was in Roca, but they had changed me by then, to Central. It was closer, but at the same time it was located in a worse area. Roca was more affectionate, rich people. It's not to discriminate. I live in a *villa*, but in Central it was all people on benefits. They had no education; you had to be careful not to get robbed or assaulted. I was scared.

Anyway, so one Sunday I closed at ten, I cleaned, and by eleven I had to be out. Central was full of scavengers, full of carts, because there's a train there for scavengers. I was leaving; all that was going on. And I consumed pills, I remember. I bought a coke and took five pills at the same time.

*When you say pills you mean Rivotril?*

Yes, Rivotril, the one that makes you dizzy.

*I've never consumed, I don't know it...*

But it's disgusting. Don't try it, it's really ugly.

So, I took the train that came to my neighbourhood. I walked from the station to my house *which is about an hour's walk across the villa*. I came smoking my marihuana. I used to smoke marihuana, but I didn't consume cocaine or pills. I was walking back... And that's when I got lost. I got lost because... That happened on a Sunday... And on Thursday I left.

On Monday I had the day off work; that's why I decided to do it on Sunday. I thought, 'On Monday I don't work, so I have Sunday night for myself'.

*So, you had everything planned...*

Yes, I had everything planned. I was so sad that all I wanted to do was party, cry and take drugs – that was it. So, I looked for a friend of mine, who is no longer with us – she died. I don't know if you remember the conflict with the Prefectura, that they killed a friend of mine...

*Uhhh... I don't know much. I know that there's a girl called Raquel...*

Well, her, that's my friend who was killed by the Prefectura. I was with her, listening to music, high, I fell asleep. I don't remember much about that. What I can tell you is what my mother told me. I had a room that I had squatted in the *villa* with other friends. There was this place; some people had occupied it and I had taken a room for myself just in case. I was told that my mother looked for me there at about three in the morning. I was there, sleeping, all drugged. My friend had gone to sleep at her house; we were so high we didn't know where we were. My mother took me home; she says I slept for the whole Monday. She said she would go every now and then to see if I was breathing, if I was OK. She was worried. Remember that I had my little son.

Monday was my day off. I slept for the whole day. At night I get up. I go out, I don't remember where I was. I then remember that I was with this guy. The guy was after me, and I was so blind that I went back with him, because of the bad he had done to me. And, I don't know how, but he convinced me and I left for Salta. [*Salta is a province in the North-West of Argentina, approximately 1200 km from Buenos Aires.*]

So, one day I went to receive my salary and the bonus. I left the salary to my mother and kept the bonus for myself. I was crying because I was leaving my son. I wanted to take my son with me and my mother did not let me take him 'You leave, but leave your son here. I cannot let you take him because you're not well, not in that state'. I was fighting with her for my son and she... I don't remember.

*Right, because you were...*

I was lost. I tell you, I started with five pills but I can't tell you with how many I ended.

I left crying, my mother says; she looked after me from the door of the house and she called the police, but they couldn't do anything because I was an adult.

*Before you start telling me about your trip, tell me about this room that you had.*

Oh, right. Yes, I had a room.

*So, when was it – more or less – that you squatted the place?*

Let's say June or May of that same year. I was already working in the supermarket. They took the place and I could take a part for myself. My room already had a toilet, it had everything. I took the best place; I was lucky.

*But you didn't move there.*

No, I never lived there on my own in the end. Because when I was leaving I left it to someone else, to a guy who was a friend of mine. I was in a very bad state but I didn't want to lose my room. So I told him 'stay there'. He had just left prison, his family was in another neighbourhood, so I told him, 'Take care of my place here'. He thought, 'She's never coming back' – he saw that I was in such a terrible state. 'Yeah, I'll stay'. And I left and he stayed there.

*Was your plan to move there at some point?*

Yes, but when I felt well. Because the place was good, but it needed work. The metal sheets weren't good. It needed a door, it needed plastering. But it had a toilet, it had the main things.

*What was that building before you squatted it?*

It was a CMV, a Council Commission of Residents. A place that did what delegates do now: if your house got flooded you went there for the CMV to call the trucks; if your light went off, you went to the CMV. They were people that got paid somewhere else to work there. Apparently they didn't get paid for a long time; I don't know what the problem was, but they left and the place was left empty. So the people got in. I took the best part.

And this guy then took care of my place. Afterwards I sold it, but I invested again in another place here in the neighbourhood. That's where I'm building my house. But, still, everything is very expensive at the moment. You can't have it all. It's been one year since I left the place. Besides, I had bad memories because of this girl that had died...

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*Was she also in that place?*

Yes. That place was...perdition, let's say. Why perdition? Because me as well as Pedro [*her current boyfriend*]... So: he had also taken a room there; we've always been friends. He's my neighbour; he lives in front of my house. At that time he had another girlfriend.

Anyway, his room was next to mine. And there was also this girl, Pedro's girlfriend, Rita. My friend went to rob with this girl and she got killed. You understand? That's why.



My friend and this girl went to rob; the girl was wounded and my friend lost her life. The Prefectura shot at her without thinking twice; he took his weapon and shot. It was a case of trigger-happy police. Why? Because, OK, I understand that a person might be scared if someone comes to rob you, but...someone who is a security officer can defend himself. Against a man or a woman. They are the first ones that have to shout 'freeze'; they have to give the warning. Then, they should react according to what you do. And another thing is that the impacts she had were over the waist, and they should be below the waist. And the way in which he killed her was cruel. She wasn't well; she was high on pills as well. I guess that she must have woken up in heaven; she must have woken up to consciousness and must have said, 'Where am I?'. I think it was like that. It was crazy; I don't know how to explain you. She was someone close to me. I mean, she was my best friend. I remember many things from her. From when we were kids. We were brought up together since we were kids, do you understand? And many bad memories were left in that house.

So, when we squatted the rooms we used to have parties every Saturday, especially in Pedro's room. It was partying, we would go there. And I already had issues with this girl, Rita, because she was jealous of me. It seemed as if she already felt that Pedro was in love with me, so she would always have a bad vibe. And when I left for Salta, that's when Raquel and Rita became close friends. Because it was me whom Raquel started taking drugs with. At the beginning Raquel was consuming marihuana, hiding from her mother. I'm not saying that this girl is the reason for Raquel's death, but she influenced her addiction. Because all of a sudden Raquel was loving pills and consuming *pasta base*<sup>18</sup>. That never happened with me.

So, I came back from Salta. I spent two weeks there. I had lost my senses. When we arrived there he went to prison and I'm left alone. We arrived at Salta and we were completely high. Imagine, I can't even remember how many pills I took. I remember that it was raining pills. It was about two weeks, 15 days, but of all that I can only remember four or five days. The rest, I don't know what I did or didn't do. What I do remember is that his family was giving me a dirty look, and I was thinking, 'I must have done something wrong for them to look at me like that'. They weren't mean. They didn't give me food. I deserved it, anyway, because I had left my child. I had

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<sup>18</sup> A form of drug produced with the residue from the production of cocaine. Its effects are similar to those of crack.

lost my head. He was little at that time, but as a mother I thought, 'What have I done to my child?'. You understand? Once I was back home my mother would tell him, 'Tell her that you forgive her'. He was so innocent, and would come and tell me, 'I forgive you'. He didn't even know what he was saying. My mother was telling him that so that I would feel better, that's what she said. Because I arrived and the first thing that I did was go to look at him. I looked at him and would tell him, 'Forgive me, forgive me, forgive me'. And one day when I was having tea he comes and tells me, 'I forgive you D' – he calls me D, he doesn't call me Mum. I cried because of him, being so innocent, telling me that... My Mum told me that she had done it, 'So that you feel good, so that you realize that your son needs you'.

*Did he stay imprisoned in Salta?*

He is still in prison, apparently. I don't know much; I don't ask much because now I have a boyfriend. Pedro is going to be annoyed if I'm asking about another person. But I hear the gossip. I think that he got ten years. It's already been three, four years.

*It's ten years but it can be reduced, right?*

I think so, but he's got records. He's up to his ears. He was in a reformatory as a child, he was in probation. I don't know if Salta is the same as Buenos Aires, but I know that some of his records in Buenos Aires reached Salta.

And well, the only thing I remember is that I arrived there, we went to a room of his mother's. That he was robbing, always going out to rob. I spent the whole day crying for LT. I do remember that, that I was crying too much. I was very drugged but I still remembered LT. I remember that we bought Rivotril, but the liquid one. It's a bottle. If you have a drop or two it's like having a pill, you know? We were drinking it straight from the bottle. And I went dancing. And when I went back home I was all skin and bones. Imagine, the guy was only a week with me, and the rest of the days I was left alone. I didn't know anyone. I was in his mother's house but I knew that I had to

leave. But I couldn't because I didn't have money for the ticket. I didn't know anything, I didn't know what to do, nothing. I got money for the ticket and...

*How?*

I found his cousin there. I knew him because he had come to visit the *villa* before. He must have thought, 'She needs help'. I don't know, he was kind and he helped me. I had a TV and a couple of things that he had left me, so I sold them with his cousin. He knew where to sell them; we bought the ticket, he took me to the bus station, and I came back. He wanted me to wait for him; he was saying that he'd only be a month in prison. I was telling him that I couldn't, that I had realized that my son was waiting for me. I asked him to forgive me, but... I was conscious then, I was not drugged; I was thinking for myself. I was telling him that my son was waiting for me, that he misses me, that he calls me, that I can feel it. I was crying every night, Pablo. And I was alone, far away, in a house that I didn't know. I couldn't even go out, because then I'd have to return, and how would I do it? That's how I was, until I sold the TV. That day I ate very well. I was so hungry, I ate a lot. I felt as if life was returning to me. I bought a yoghurt with cereal, a dozen *empanadas*<sup>19</sup>, juice, I was eating crackers. I was so hungry. I'm serious, I was only having tea those days. Nobody would give me even a piece of bread. I thought, 'There's a reason why this is happening to me – I deserve it'. And well, I came back, I came back in July. By the end of July. And my friend died in August.

There, in the highway.

*In the highway...*

I come from my house, running. The first thing I do is look at her. She didn't have any blood. I didn't understand anything. She didn't have blood, so I think, 'She's fainted or is hit'. I start looking for any wound she might have. When I first saw her

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<sup>19</sup> A traditional Argentine food.

she was already pale. She was dark-skinned but she was looking too pallid. And her eyes were up. It was really bad to see a friend... I cannot forget her face. And sometimes I feel anger, and sometimes I think, 'Poor girl, look how she ended up; she was such a nice girl'. 'Why do these things happen to the good people?'. So, I lift her t-shirt up – I didn't care about anything, and in her chest I see a little hole. I didn't see the other hole. Vicky was also high; she was throwing herself on her, crying. 'She needs air!' I was telling her. I think she was already dead. I think she was already away from this world. So, the Prefectura officers came, and this officer came to her with his gun in his hand, looked at Raquel and shook his head. I yelled at him, 'What have you done to her you son of a bitch!'. I thought they had done it! I wanted to beat the policeman. Raquel's cousin, this big guy, started grabbing stones to throw at him. Everyone started saying, 'No, please don't do it, it wasn't them, the guy who shot at her left in a car'. But, Pablo, you know, something really impressive happened: when I arrive running, my dog, which was running beside me, cries to the sky, 'Uuuhhh'. It was shocking to me as well. He saw her soul, or anticipated her death. You know that if a dog cries it's for something. Well, he got there and cried to the sky. I kicked him; I didn't want him to do that. She was there, with her eyes up, all white. I never forgot her face. And the other shot was here.

*At the back of her head.*

Yes, because... Imagine the avenue. The car is in the avenue. Raquel approaches it from one side and Rita from the other. The guy had the windows up. She was holding a replica, approached the car and told him, 'Give me everything'. I don't know exactly how it went. So the guy rolls down the window, takes his weapon, and she was the first to get shot.

*So the guy that they were going to rob grabbed a weapon...*

And shot her. From inside the car. They went there, they pointed at him with the fake gun. The policemen then found the replica, on the other side of the road. So the guy felt scared, he took his weapon, I don't know where he had it, probably under the chair, I don't know. The thing is that he grabs the gun and shoots Rita first. And she only gets hit by a piece of smashed glass. The bullet didn't hit her. And to the other, he hits her, bang! 'Raquel! Raquel!', she shouted. Vicky and this guy who was staying in my room were smoking a joint by the little Virgin Mary statue. When Vicky hears the first shot, the one for Rita, she looks towards the highway and sees Raquel getting her first shot. She shouts 'Raquel!'. She ran, and then the second shot. They got to the highway; the car was still there; my friend stands in front of the car: 'Get out and help!', he yelled at the driver. And the guy ran over him. Fortunately he didn't kill him, but it was a 'move or I'll run over you' kind of thing. He went to the hospital, he was purple everywhere, traumatisms, everything.

So, Pedro called me when all this was happening. We had to get to the hospital. The guy from the shop had a van. Only some went in the van – we got Raquel in it. By then the police were arriving, the Prefectura as well, nobody understood anything. The Prefectura was asking the police and the police was asking the Prefectura. 'What happened?'. They were all there with their guns in their hands without understanding a thing. Everyone was there. 'Sons of bitches!'. The ambulance didn't arrive. 'She's dying!'. The policemen were really nervous. So we all put her in the van. Raquel's mother was devastated. Poor woman, she was crying dry, she couldn't cry more. You know when you have that thing in your throat? I feel so sorry for that woman. She was saying, 'God, please don't'. She cried; I felt this thing in my throat for her, it was this feeling... Because Raquel went 'pf pf', but it was because they were giving her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. I don't think she was alive. She was already cold. I was in the van and I was holding her hand, trying to give her warmth. I was saying, 'Raquel, no, you're young, hold on, we're getting there'. We got to the hospital; both go to Emergencies. Rita leaves in a wheel bed with nurses all around, running. 'Get out of the way!'. It was an emergency. Raquel never left Emergencies. She was taken inside with Rita; Rita left Emergencies, Raquel never left. That's why I tell you that she was dead when we reached the hospital. My friend was already dead. I feel it, I know it. And that hospital was chaos: there were policemen from that

jurisdiction, Prefectura officers, cops everywhere. They were all scared. 'What happened here?'. Nobody understood anything.

At the time we didn't know that the guy who shot her was from the Prefectura; apparently he was going to work. They caught him afterwards, made him confess. He went to jail, but he's now free. He must have been in prison one year. In the records it says that he was going to or leaving work, but that he was not supposed to be in that area because he lived in Provincia. Something was not right. But when they found out that it was because they were attempting to rob him the case was set as, 'She died robbing'. And nobody can do anything. You understand?

*So, the guy was from the Prefectura but there was no reason for him to be there at that moment.*

Right, so I don't remember whether he was going to work or leaving work, but the point was that it didn't match why he was there at that time. Either of the two, it didn't match.

All the policemen were there, I saw the whole sequence. Some came from one way, the others from the other. We got surrounded. The boss arrives: 'I need the parents of Gonzalez; I need the parents of Perez'. Raquel Gonzalez, Rita Perez. 'Gonzalez parents, follow this policeman'. They left with a cop. When he said, 'Well, I need you all to give a lot of support to the family of Gonzalez...'. When he said that we didn't need to know more. The kid had died. We started to break everything; we started to throw things at the hospital.

*How many were you?*

Many. Because some of us were going in a van, others in a car, others however they could, all to the hospital.

*In the ambulance?*

No, the ambulance never arrived. The van of the guy from the shop. When we were going a police car opened the way for us, the van and then two other police cars behind us. The driver was so nervous, because she was dying – they say she was still alive, but I don't think so – that he got stuck at some point and couldn't start the engine. He was paralysed, so nervous. Rita was going in a police car with others, Raquel in the van with us, and then others in the other police car. We arrived in police cars at the hospital.

Until they gave us the news. We made a huge fuss. You can't imagine. We couldn't believe Raquel was dead; she was seventeen years old. She used to say, 'When I'm eighteen I'll go dancing', because when you're a minor you can't go. She had so many hopes... And you think about all those things at that moment, and we cried harder. I couldn't sleep that night. I was scared. I was thinking, 'Look where pills take you, where they leave you'. And the next day...

*She went to rob for...*

For drugs.

*To get more...*

Because she didn't have needs at home – her mother was working, she had the shoes she wanted...She did it for the drugs.

So, well, the next day we had channel 9, channel 11, channel 13, all of them in the highway. They were coming to us to ask what had happened. I, as always, stepping forward, gathered all the young people, 'We're going to block the road, we're going to protest'. I blocked this avenue; the police came. This road is in the police jurisdiction; the other road in the Prefectura jurisdiction. The police came; the chief

came and told us, 'Don't block this road, block the other one; it's them who are guilty'. 'We didn't do anything; we're here to help you'.

So I started the attack: we started breaking the windows of the cars, of the trucks; everyone started to step back. They didn't know how to get out of there. We blocked all the roads. The Prefectura couldn't do anything. We went to the cabin where the officer had hid and we burnt it. We made a huge mess.

*You burnt the cabin?*

Yes, we burnt it. When the cops saw that, they all ran away to gather outside. The whole place was ours. All the TV channels were there; we had banners saying 'trigger-happy police', 'murderers', 'sons of bitches'. They were calling us 'niggers'. They threw stones; we threw stones as well.

*Who threw stones?*

The Prefectura. They were throwing stones. All of them were there in a row. We were there, and they were retreating. Afterwards they really repressed us, they beat the hell out of us. Badly. I was scared. I was scared of getting killed like Raquel; I imagined they killed me and threw me into the river. Because when we were there shouting, 'We want justice!', two vans full of Prefectura came, with those helmets, all prepared, with pepper gas, also this thing that sets off smoke... What do you call it?

*Tear gas.*

That thing, that horrible thing. You couldn't see anything. I was looking for my sister and was choking. A bus driver gave me a t-shirt; I covered my face because I was suffocating. He gave me water, I was telling him, 'Help me because I'm dying'.



So we were repressed and beaten up. Women, men, my uncle who had a sign that said 'trigger happy'.

I managed to get away. I got in a street and took Raquel's mum with me. The Prefectura had grabbed her by her hair and wanted to take her to their side. I took two stones and threatened them, and my aunt was hitting them with a stick. They were dressed normally, but they were from the Prefectura. They were the ones who grabbed you and threw you to the bad ones, who beat you up. My aunt was also there; she is lame, she couldn't run fast, so she threatened she'd hit them as she ran. I had lost my sister. 'Sis!'. Everyone was everywhere, everyone like crazy. My sister! I had already gotten away. 'Sis! Sis!'. When I couldn't see her I thought, 'She's there' [*where the cops were*] they had already taken the whole place. We had all retreated back to the neighbourhood. They owned the whole place. I was crying, 'Not my sister'. I was scared of what they might do to her. I don't know... When they've already killed one of yours you can only think of the worst. So I went, I asked for a bike, and went on my own, told him, 'Please, I'm here on peace, love; I was wrong, I want to be with my sister'. Also, she was on medication at that time. 'Don't worry, come on, nobody is going to do anything to you', one of them says. I was so stupid; I believed him! A few minutes ago they were throwing stones at us, and they wouldn't do anything to me?! I suddenly felt them grab my hair, pull me off the bike, I'm in the air and the bike falls down. I never got to see that guy's face. The Prefectura van comes and they throw me inside, through the door that opens in the middle. The only thing I could see was the black boots. So, they started. Pah, pah...

*They started to hit you...*

Yes, and in one of the blows they hit me somewhere like in the lung, because I couldn't breathe. I was saying, 'Please, I can't breathe, please, I swear I'll never bother again!'. They held me on the floor and they didn't want me to look at them. All I could see was black boots. Fortunately they didn't kick me. It was only blows to my back and head, not to my face. I was against the floor feeling everyone's blows; I was thinking, 'These guys will kill me and throw me somewhere'. Because while they hit you, you see the open door; one of them was driving, I was seeing the van go

away; I didn't know where they were taking me. When we arrive at the place, I see Raquel's mum, my sister, my uncle. Everyone was there, everyone on the floor, handcuffed. The bike that they took from me, they never gave it back. And it was borrowed – the owner was asking for it every day afterwards. And they took my uncle's camcorder. He was recording when they repressed my sister and my cousin. They hit my cousin's teeth against the guardrail, she said. One of them grabbed her by her hair, smashed her against the guardrail; she protected herself with her hands but her face was smashed. My uncle had recorded it, but the camcorder never appeared. Since he was the only man, you can't imagine how much they hit him. You know when they hit you in the stomach and you can't breathe? They hit him with their knees, with their palms, everything. They were calling to us, 'Fuckin' *negros*, you like to throw stones? Dirty *negros*.' That's how they treated us. I was on the floor shouting, 'Assassins, assassins, assassins'. Because by then I was in detention with the rest of my neighbours; if they wanted to kill me they had to kill everyone. When I was alone I told him, 'I'll never bother again'. But when I was with the rest, I was saying, 'Killers, thieves, where is the camcorder?'.

We were jailed there for a couple of hours. They filmed us; we signed a paper, everything...

### *Finger prints?*

Everything. Well, so, then they brought us back and let us go. We spent the whole night protesting.

And finally, the cop was freed. He spent a year in prison. I think he lost his job in the Prefectura. Anyway, it would have been a joke if he had returned to his job. But he's now in the streets.

We found out where he lived; we wanted to go and throw eggs. Not killing him or anything violent. But I had my son and didn't want to get into those things anymore. It was a struggle. Poor girl, finally... Poor in the sense that... I don't know, maybe if we'd have had this space it would have been different.

*What space?*

Here, this group, the Father.

*At that time this...*

This didn't exist. The group for drug prevention. There was nothing. So we had no-one to help us, nothing. We felt that we didn't have a way out, you understand? Like, 'Well, this is how we are, this is how we'll die'. I always tried to bring a positive attitude, to believe that we could, that we only needed the will. But even if you have the will or even if you do things right, there's always something bad that will get in your way. It's always like that, even when you're well, there's always something bad that happens. Another thing, and then another thing. And you have to be there, moving those things to the side. But well, she couldn't. She was younger than me; maybe that's why she didn't think the same. But I always talked to her, 'Raquel, clean your house, do the washing up, your mum comes home tired from work'. 'Let's cook'. We would cook...

They did something wrong when we were at Raquel's funeral. They were filming us. The media. That was bad. I mean, you can turn off the cameras and then ask your questions, but they didn't even respect her at her funeral. When we were going there the Prefectura were throwing kisses at us, they waved. We took it as mockery; we wanted to get off the bus and fight. When we passed by them on the bus we shouted, 'Murderers! Sons of a bitch!'. The whole bus shouted. And they threw kisses. They should have looked down or stayed still. Because, alright, you didn't kill her, but your colleague did. He made the mistake. We're in pain. You shouldn't do anything. Raquel's uncle, who is a quiet guy – he doesn't take drugs, he's an adult – he got off the car and wanted to beat the cop up. Raquel's mum didn't have any strength, not even to say, 'Ah'. She didn't care. It was like that; it was really tough. I

always think that when she woke up, after the whole mess she had in her head, she opened her eyes and thought, 'Where am I? In which world am I?'. She's now in another world, she's not with us anymore. She died on pills, she died drugged.

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As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, I have introduced this *testimonio* to include an illustration of what I have been excluding, to expose the limits of my design. As I will develop in the next chapter, exclusions intervene in the production of the abject.

I will nevertheless proceed to examine this *testimonio* further and attempt to raise questions based on my reading of it, introducing the discussions that will follow in the next chapters. A first broad question that has haunted me throughout the whole process of doing this research has been, 'How do I conceptualize *villas*?'. Answering this has involved looking at the conditions of existence of these neighbourhoods and the conditions of the lives of their residents. *Villas* are a defining element of this research project, and from the beginning I have faced the need to characterize, define, set the limits of the term. At the same time, I have resisted responding to this for the reasons I have mentioned, i.e., the reduction of the inhabitants to objects of study and the violence involved in that act. However, the question of definition is relevant and will be partially addressed in the following chapters. I will provide a reading of D's *testimonio* considering her illustrations of the *villa* and her experiences there, seeking to highlight a set of questions relevant for my search for theoretical tools to make sense of the condition of *villas* and their residents.

D's *testimonio* tells the process of how she lived under a condition of exclusion, what she experienced in that condition, how she left it, and how she dealt with some of the losses that she experienced in that time. There is a plot in her story, with a set of conflicts and their resolutions. One of them begins with her pregnancy, which entails a conflict, followed by her difficulty in accepting it, her denial and escape from that condition, and her final acceptance and reconciliation with this identity and role. In the detour of her escape she participates in a series of relationships within which a tragedy occurs, the death

of one of her best friends. Her friend is the extreme embodiment of the condition of exclusion to which D was also subject. D is alive to tell the story of the marginalised young people of the *villas*. In the following I will produce a set of initial reflections on her story and propose reading Giorgio Agamben's work to think the production and condition of *villas*, a task which I will develop in the next chapter.

So far I have spoken of exclusion as a condition, but will now begin to question that notion and start looking at the conditions of the production of exclusion. I will look at an extreme expression of this condition emerging from D's story, which is Raquel's murder. This episode of violence takes place in a particular context, involving a set of practices and spaces produced by this group in the *villa*, which they inhabit on the margins of the city and the margins of the *villa*. They squatted a building; not just any building, but an abandoned CMV office – a State agency that used to provide social services in *villas*. They thus found the physical space to create a place to live in the ruins of State social provision. It was a place where D could live in the rejection of her condition of employee, mother, sister, as well as a place where she could forget the emotional issues that she was experiencing in her love relationship.

D's *testimonio* begins with her exclusion from the system of education. She was successful in completing secondary education (compulsory education) and had aspirations of becoming an accountant. However, she tells how the aspirations around that project, which involved pursuing further studies, were frustrated when she became pregnant. In the context that she presents, where she has responsibilities in her home taking care of her siblings and working to contribute financially in the household, being pregnant implied that she would postpone her studies. She would have wanted to study but understood that she could not access higher education due to the complex set of domestic responsibilities. Higher education is a first exclusion, which conditions the rest of her story.

Her pregnancy also meant a new sense of identity – being a mother, which began with her pregnancy, entered into crisis when D decided to leave her home, and finally was resolved on her return. D's life was busy after she gave birth to her child: she found a job and took care of her son and her siblings. She had a

set of responsibilities which revolved around her home and workplace. She did well in her job, and her role in her family was clearly defined. An event disrupted this order – a love problem. Her love life had not been part of her *testimonio* until this point. She began a relationship with a new partner, which produced a second moment of exclusion, a new moment in her story, a moment which I want to reflect upon. D says that she was sad because a partner of hers hurt her feelings, and she says she was depressed. Her second assertion is of relevance, because it opens the possibility that her depression could be related to other factors aside from her love relationship, as a trigger of her crisis. Her motherhood, her job, her position in her home were put into crisis, and D decided to travel far away with her new partner, leaving them behind. She used drugs to forget. The second exclusion is the exclusion from the set of relationships and space of her home and her job. I do not want to suggest that there was a force or mechanism that expelled her, but to understand it solely as being positioned outside both of these systems of relationships (which entail a physical space and material resources), with and/or against her will and desires. This second moment of exclusion involves the introduction to a new story, the story of Raquel's death. D frames Raquel's life and death in the context of a set of exclusions. She presents different identities (student, mother, employee, daughter), her disavowal of them all and her experiences in the disavowal of those conditions. This new moment that D presents, outside education, work and home, is characterized by the consumption of drugs, squatting a building, the existence of a love relationship and peer relations. I will call this set of relationships and practices the 'CMV', which refers to the physical place that D at points uses, signifying this lifestyle and condition in her story. Her first act of rejection of her subject position as a mother, employee and daughter was not intended to transform her whole life; it was only meant to be a long weekend to have fun with her friend and forget her situation. She used drugs to do so; she called her friend and went to the CMV. In that space she was not a mother, employee, daughter, or sister. Her 'escape' was meant to last one day, after which she would return to work and to her home. But the story did not follow as she expected, and she left her job, her home and her neighbourhood, leaving the city with her partner. This could be considered as a third moment of exclusion. The space of the squatted CMV was not a comfortable refuge, as it was traversed by conflict and struggle: there was

struggle over space (who keeps what part of the building), struggle over love relationships (the tension with Rita over her boyfriend), the exposure to the violence of the police, the experience of 'being lost' and the dependency on consuming drugs in that context. D calls the CMV a place of "perdition". D, in her trip to Salta, was also rejecting this place and set of relationships. This way of reading her *testimonio* looks at the processes of loss leading to an increasingly bare existence, deprivation of protection and sense of identity. D would then 'recover' her lost identity, relationships, possessions.

Another way to read the text would be to emphasize the conditions for the production of D's experience in the CMV. That is, to understand the CMV as a specific production rather than as the result of the absence of the school, employment and family. In this sense, as I have already mentioned, there are several elements that intervene in its constitution. I wish to look at this more closely to introduce a set of theoretical tools that I will deploy in the following chapters in readings of other *testimonios*. Again, the scene of the CMV is constituted of a series of elements, such as an abandoned building, a peer group, drugs, love relationships, music. In D's story there are relationships of ownership of space and of exclusivity in relation to love relationships. Each individual owns a delimited portion of the space, and relationships are said to be monogamic. In the context of that apparent order, the CMV is also described as a shared space (all the inhabitants would meet in a room belonging to a member of the group) of mutual friendship, shared music and fun. However, a further question that could be posed, going beyond how the CMV was constituted, relates to how it was produced, and under what conditions. This is an exercise of supposition, only intending to explore one way of reading D's *testimonio* that looks at the CMV as a production rather than as the sole result of lack. Although D mentions that at the time that Raquel died they did not see any other choices for existence, and refers to the fact that the church had not yet started the support group for drug consumers, this absence of options can be considered as a political decision rather than as a lack of resources, a lack of urban planning or of know-how. That is the perspective that a group of Catholic priests from *villas* took in their document 'Drugs in *villas*: factually de-penalized' (Premat, 2010, p. 287, my translation), where they say that *villas* are lawless zones where networks

of drug trafficking can operate freely. This is seen as a political decision: *the villas* are referred to as “liberated zones”, as territories where there is no law enforcement regarding the commercialization of drugs. A similar point could be made in relation to the occupation of the former CMV building, since D's *testimonio* presents a form of ownership of space which is not defined either by legal procedures or the market, but by its use: ownership of space was defined only by occupation and the agreed division by the occupiers – it is to be noted that D then sold her space, so the mechanisms of an informal market started to operate then. This could be understood as a political decision, whereby law does not rule this kind of ownership. But the most shocking expression of the production of the lives of the young people of the CMV is the death of Raquel. She was killed by a security officer in what D talks about as a case of ‘happy triggers’. Regardless of whether it was such a case or not, Raquel and Rita were in the position of the citizen whose death is justified – the citizen who attempts to kill another – without being that citizen. They became a replica of that citizen in order to rob. If they had had a gun they could have killed the officer, but they did not have one. With Giorgio Agamben, “they could be killed but not murdered” (Ek, 2006, p. 367). Although this assertion is not entirely accurate, since the officer did go to jail for taking their lives and the act was labelled as ‘murder’, D's *testimonio* concludes by saying that there was no further justice to be sought for Raquel's life after the case was defined as an act of self-defence in the context of an attempted robbery. This acted as a mitigating circumstance that justifies Raquel's murder. However, Raquel was not actually making an attempt on the life of the officer, only pretending to do so. She was accepting the position of the citizen who can be killed for a potential small amount of money, which, from D's perspective, she needed in order to buy drugs. So, Raquel was in the position of a citizen whose life has no political meaning, an abject citizen. Giorgio Agamben's work considers the production of the citizen whose life is dispensable as an effect of the action of sovereign power. From this perspective, it is the openness of *villas* to drug trafficking, the political decision not to provide assistance to families, the violent actions in relation to the *villas*' youth by security forces, and the factors that cannot be addressed from D's *testimonio*, the effects of sovereign power, which set the conditions for the production of young people as abject citizens.



I have here only attempted a brief exercise to explore readings of D's experiences in order to think the condition of *villas* and their young residents. I have attempted to think of their condition in relation to the lack of institutions and also as a specific production in which the State has a central role. I only intend for this exercise to serve as an illustration and introduction to the following chapters. In Chapter 6 I will expand on and use Giorgio Agamben's work and its critique in order to read and interpret *testimonios*. His set of conceptual tools will be at the basis of the work that I will develop in the rest of the chapters, analysing the subject position of the speakers of *testimonios* in their condition of *villeros* and *villeras*. I will select fragments of *testimonios* to reflect upon and will think of them as 'paradigms' in Agamben's terms, also referring to his notions of 'grey zone' and 'camp' in my commentary.

## 6. The Camp, the paradigm and villas

In this section I will aim to present a set of theoretical tools to look at the condition of 'exclusion' of *villas*. I will begin by considering some definitions of *villas*, which are built upon the assumption that a boundary can be traced between formal and informal parts of a city, the legal and the illegal, value and waste. In this chapter I will present theoretical tools to reflect on the production of the 'informal', 'illegal' and 'wastage', drawing on Agamben's notion of 'grey zone' and Laclau's critique of his work. I will begin by considering a characterization of *villas* drawn from Maria Cristina Cravino (2008), which is built on the basis of a review of definitions produced by state agencies, public service providers and international organizations. From this review she produces an outline of how *villas* are characterized by these agencies, for the purposes of intervention. Cravino argues that these definitions and characterization begin from the distinction between a 'formal' city and an 'informal' city. I will pick up on this point to draw on Agamben's work and Laclau's critique, to think the 'greyiness' of *villas*. In the course of doing so I will also recall some basic theoretical tools (such as 'power') that I deploy throughout this work.

### Definitions of *villas*

Varela and Cravino (2006) provide an account of the complexity of naming these neighbourhoods, which comes as a result of the diversity of definitions provided by different agents, and also due to the stigmatizing connotations that the terms have acquired. They reflect on the uses of the terms 'informal' and '*villas*' from the point of view of urban studies. Defining *villas* as informal settlements, they say, implies considering society as dual, as a spatial binary, and *villas* as neighbourhoods that are not part of the city (i.e., informal settlements). They argue that at the empirical level this division is blurred: there are grey areas, many intersections and interactions between the 'formal city' and the *villas*. However, they decide to use the term nevertheless, albeit cautiously and critically.

Before introducing these authors' definition of a *villa*, I would like to mention that they use the term because it is the name that has been appropriated by the inhabitants, therefore avoiding the stigmatizing connotations that other terms such as '*villa miseria*' or '*villa de emergencia*' might have. I also refer to them as '*villas*'

for the same reasons. Varela and Cravino (2006, pp. 56–57 my translation and bold hypertext) provide the following definition:

**Informal** urbanizations (or auto-urbanizations) that are the product of the occupation of vacant urban lands or the use of fiscal lands by the State to locate families in a provisory way:

- a) they produce an **irregular** urban design
- b) they are in a position of good access to centres of production and consumption, areas where land is a scarce good
- c) in Buenos Aires (the Capital and Greater Buenos Aires,) they are **[illegally]** settled, primarily in fiscal lands
- d) they respond to the sum of individual practices throughout time, unlike other settlements that are planned and created only at an initial moment
- e) the houses are built with precarious or **waste** materials
- f) they have a highly dense population
- g) their population is mainly composed of low qualified or **informal** workers – although there are manual workers in direct relation to the productive activities of the surroundings
- h) the places of origin of *villas*' populations have led to the association of *villeros* with 'migrants'
- i) their inhabitants bear a **stigmatized** identity
- j) they have scarce or null green spaces and non-built spaces within the private properties (gardens)
- k) they have an infrastructure that was self-provisioned at the early stages, but that is now provided by private companies; such is the case with electricity, for which the city council subsidises consumption.

Varela and Cravino thus define *villas* by their informality, irregularity, illegality, stigma (abnormality) and waste (the negative opposite of good). Throughout this characterization, then, they are defined as a phenomenon which exists outside the boundaries of the law and the norm. All of this make *villas* unrecognizable, unintelligible (Butler, 1998, p. 281); they are certainly not defined positively for what they constitute. Varela and Cravino, as I have mentioned, adopt a critical perspective on these definitions, acknowledging that the boundary between the formal and informal city is not clear and does not impair every form of connection.

The separation between the formal and the informal produces *villas* as an object of study and intervention in particular ways, one of which is that these are neighbourhoods which are outside the norm and whose inhabitants live in abnormal conditions. In this section I will present Agamben's toolbox to think of *villas* as spaces produced by sovereign power as neighbourhoods that are outside the norm, and their inhabitants as individuals who live in abnormal conditions, who are in a position of abjection (Butler, 1998).

I will draw on Agamben's work to think *villas* as a production of the State rather than as something that lies outside its norm and law (the informal, irregular, illegal), and will then look at the presence of waste in *villas* as an example of the ways in which the State sustains these neighbourhoods in abandonment.

### Starting with bare life

Giorgio Agamben argued that the *nomos* of modern societies is the concentration camp, an assertion that has been very controversial and which I will now address. I will begin by introducing the concepts around the paradigm of 'the Camp' as a State of Exception, as a 'grey zone'. Through this set of notions I will attempt to trouble the idea of *villas* as neighbourhoods that exist outside the city.

Agamben's foundation for thinking about the Camp is the distinction between bare life and political life, in which he draws on Aristotle. In ancient Greece there were two terms to refer to what we now call 'life': *zoē* and *bios*. The first refers to "the simple fact of living, common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)" (Agamben 1999, quoted in Durantaye, 2009, p. 205), the latter to "the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group" (op. cit.). The first was considered to take place in the home, *oikos*, whereas the second took place in the *polis* (Durantaye, 2009, p. 205). *Bios* was life with political qualities.

The term 'bare life' refers to the overlap of the two: politicized *zoē*. That is, life that has been produced by sovereign power as "no.n-political life" (Ek, 2006, p. 366). In relation to this, Patton (2007) criticizes Agamben for sometimes using *zoē* and 'bare life' as synonyms, referring to the latter as 'natural' or 'biological' life – so, the distinction between these two concepts becomes blurred at times. Here I will separate them out, referring to bare life as the modern condition of the individual,

which is sustained as abandoned by sovereign power, and to *zoē* as an abstraction that is not built on any empirical ground.

A second heritage that Agamben's theory feeds from is Benjamin's conception of bare life, or *das bloße Leben*. "Benjamin's expression designates a life shorn of all qualification and conceived independent of its traditional attributes" (Durantaye, 2009, p. 203). This heritage highlights that Agamben does not conceive of life as originally bare, but rather as bared by the action of the sovereign. Working with the notion of bare life, then, does not involve the exercise of thinking life as in a hypothetical originary state prior to society. On the contrary, bare life is a condition that is produced by sovereign power; it finds its origin neither in nature nor in a prior essence. Its production acts upon individuals of the political community, whereby their lives are held in a condition that is similar to that of a hypothetical abandonment. It attempts, then, to produce the existence of life without political attributes.

Drawing on this ascendance Agamben defines bare life as follows:

"...the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man), who *may be killed and yet not sacrificed*..."  
(Agamben, 1998, p. 8)

This adds a further element, a second concept which is central in Agamben's paradigm of the Camp – *homo sacer*. Before introducing the paradigm of the Camp itself, I will consider this notion. "*Homo sacer* is a juridical term from archaic Roman law designating an individual who, in response to a grave trespass, is cast out of the city" (Durantaye, 2009, p. 206). In other words, this individual, once he or she has ceased to be part of the community, has no worth. Also for this reason, they may be killed but not murdered (Ek, 2006, p. 367). The death of *homo sacer* does not mean anything more than the end of a life; it is the death of a subject who had already ceased to exist for the political community. Agamben takes this example from Roman law since it condenses the paradox of sovereign power, that of the political production of the non-political life.

Drawing on Schmitt, Agamben considers the capacity to suspend the law a defining function of sovereign power (Ek, 2006, p. 365), and the production of bare

life is a constitutive element of the order established by the sovereign. As Edkins (2007) flags up, the distinction between *zoē* and *bios* structures the nature of sovereign power, which governs through the production of bare life, in which *zoē* and *bios* become indistinguishable. It does this through the sovereign ban, sustaining the individual in a condition of abandonment.

Laclau (2007) criticizes the notion of *homo sacer* for being too reductive. One of his points is that Agamben's theory removes the relational and political from the possibilities of the subject. For Laclau, Agamben is assuming that *homo sacer* will not establish relationships with other individuals living in the same condition, and will be absolutely vulnerable. Laclau argues that he would personally consider abandonment as a condition for politics, that is, for the construction of a collective will and for conflicts over the definition of the rule (the law of the citizens vs. the law of the abandoned). In this sense, he adds that Agamben's model is limited as to the exercise of power, since it considers a unified State as the single and totalizing entity of control. On the other hand, he also builds a critique of the usefulness of the concept by putting into question the actual existence of bare life. He asks if there are real cases of bare life. Considering that individuals do engage in antagonistic relationships or politics, cases of bare life can only be reduced to a few exceptions. Is Agamben's model useful, then? Considering that Agamben works with paradigms (I define this notion later on), Laclau's opposing view on abandonment does not exclude Agamben's, since the latter does not attempt to explain every singular case with his paradigm but only to produce a form of intelligibility that might help interpret these cases. So, both Laclau's and Agamben's views could be used to analyse the social in its particular forms. In relation to the critique on the relevance of bare life as a concept, based on the fact that it is not found empirically in its pure form, Agamben replies that the usefulness of the paradigm lies in the forms of intelligibility that it allows for and not in the number of cases it explains, since it is not aimed at explanation. I will develop this in detail later on.

It is now necessary to turn to Agamben's notions of power in order to move towards developing the production of *homo sacer*.

*Sovereign, disciplinary and bio-power*

Before power re-appears in this text, I would like to make some distinctions between Agamben's and Foucault's notions of power. Foucault has been the most influential thinker in Agamben's work, but although their notions of bio-power and sovereign power are similar, there are differences and maybe confusions (Patton, 2007). I draw on these confusions to take my own position in relation to the use of sovereign, disciplinary and bio-power as tools of analysis in this (non-)thesis. My stance is to allow for the possibility to observe or think about these powers as operating simultaneously.

Firstly, however, I will return to Foucault's notion of power, since this is at the basis of the debate. Foucault's project does not attempt to define power but rather to analyse its operations (Foucault, 1994b). He therefore did not elaborate a theory of power but rather an 'analytics of relations of power', conceptualizations that enable an understanding of the operation of power over subjects:

...if power is in reality an open, more-or-less coordinated (in the event, no doubt, ill-coordinated) cluster of relations, then the only problem is to provide oneself with a grid of analysis which makes possible an analytic of relations of power (Foucault, 1980, p. 199 cited in Dreyfus, 1983, p. 184)

The aim, therefore, is neither to establish *what* power is nor *why* it operates, but rather *how* it operates. The search for the origins or genesis of power is left out of the question, consistently with the genealogical method. The object of study, then, is not power, but power relations. This form of analytics does not intend to search for an atemporal truth, but rather undertakes a "permanent political task inherent in all social existence" (Foucault, 1983a, p. 223). Therefore, the analysis of power relations is continuously put into play and entangled in itself. I will return to this point later.

As I mentioned in my previous chapters, power exists in relationships, but specifically in the action over actions. Foucault distinguishes violence from power by saying that the first refers to the action exerted on bodies or things, and the latter to the action over actions. In this sense, the relation of power is one of government, defined as the conduct of conducts, rather than one of violence (Foucault, 1983a, p. 221). Power relations therefore take place among free individuals, individuals whose

will is in tension with the conditions that constrain them and the actions of others. The end of freedom is also the end of the power relationship as such.

Foucault provides these conceptualizations as a means for analysing the present production of subjects, so his analysis isolates a specific form of power developed in Western modernity, which he names pastoral power. This form of power was inherited from Christianity, which had institutionalized it within the Church. The function of pastoral power then “spread and multiplied outside the ecclesiastical institution” (Foucault, 1983a, p. 214). Some of the features of this function are that it is aimed at preserving individuals, is exerted by a variety of institutions and is exerted over populations and individuals – it is therefore both globalizing and individualizing.

It is in this globalizing and individualizing quality of pastoral power that different forms of technologies are put into play: the disciplinary and the regulatory. These relate to specific forms of government, what Foucault refers to as anato-mo-politics and bio-politics. In relation to these, I will also refer to the notions of bio-power and disciplinary power, which are power acting on different objects (life and bodies) through different technologies (regulatory and disciplinary). The theme of bio-power is mainly developed by Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1* and in *Society Must be Defended (lectures at the College de France 1975-76)*. In relation to disciplinary power, he establishes a genealogy of disciplinary technologies in *Discipline and Punish*. I will now draw on his lecture of 17 March 1976 to address the differences between disciplinary and regulatory technologies, or bio- and anato-mo-politics. I am particularly interested in technologies of bio-power, specifically those that act on death. The mentioned lecture focuses on that particular point, which I will then look at from Agamben’s perspective as well.

In his lecture, Foucault starts by referring to the classical theory of sovereignty, which held that “the right of life and death was one of sovereignty’s basic attributes” (Foucault, 2004, p. 240). However, this right was imbalanced towards the right to kill, the right to death, since it was through inflicting death that sovereign power could have power over life. Foucault’s claim is that this sovereign right to “take life or let live” became complemented by the right to “make live and to let die” (op. cit., p. 241).



This is his point of departure and object of study. At this point he leaves the field of political theory and law and moves towards the field of technologies of power. The right to 'make live and let die' signals the emergence of a new kind of technology of control, which operates on life. In order to conceptualize it I will draw on the distinction Foucault makes between disciplinary and regulatory technologies.

A first difference is that disciplines operate on bodies, whereas bio-power operates on life. In this sense, disciplines are individualizing, since they visibilize the individual body, separate it, train it and use it. Bio-politics, on the other hand, addresses a population, a multiplicity of human beings which are affected by biological processes, and operates on those processes (op. cit., p. 243).

These technologies are also shaped by and productive of different forms of knowledge. Dreyfus and Rabinow (Dreyfus, 1983, p. 160) talk about the objectifying and subjectifying social sciences, which they associate with disciplinary and bio-technologies of government. I will not work with these associations and will consider instead that these technologies and kinds of knowledge are put into play together. But, in another vein, the distinction between objectifying and subjectifying sciences is useful in this study. As defined by Rabinow and Dreyfus, objectifying sciences produce and deploy human beings as objects, using, controlling and disposing bodies for their development, through disciplinary devices. On the other hand, subjectifying sciences are intertwined with bio-power; they produce and deploy subjects, and through technologies of confession they reach the self, which becomes a matter for expert interpretation. I have discussed the latter point in more detail in previous sections and will deal with the issues arising from subjectifying ethnography in the following chapters.

Returning to bio-politics, the population becomes an object of knowledge and control, breaking down to its biological processes, which are measured statistically over periods of time. Foucault identifies a set of objects that emerged in research in the eighteenth century, which were birth (the control over life and its reproduction), illness (the control over death, as coexisting with life, reducing it but not killing it), mortality (which is broken down to health as well as safety variables), biological disabilities and the environment. The last is particularly relevant for this work, since it leads to the study of 'the urban problem', central to my thesis. The environment was

considered to affect the population, to affect man-as-species, and therefore became an object of bio-power. It is this point of convergence between environment and subject that Agamben's paradigm of 'the Camp' is built on, in the sense that the Camp exists in a defined territory and subjects bodies to a strategically produced environment. This is the point I am moving towards.

Foucault finishes by drawing a distinction between disciplinary and regulatory technologies, presenting them as series: the body-organism-discipline-institutions series, and the population-biological processes-regulatory mechanisms-State series.

From the eighteenth century onward (or at least the end of the eighteenth century onward) we have, then, two technologies of power which were established at different times and which were superimposed. One technique is disciplinary; it centres on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile. And we also have a second technology, which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass, a technology which tries to predict the probability of those events (by modifying it, if necessary), or at least to compensate for their effects. This is a technology which aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers (...) Both technologies are obviously technologies of the body, but one is a technology in which the body is individualized as an organism endowed with capacities, while the other is a technology in which bodies are replaced by general biological processes. (Foucault, 2004, p. 249)

The last sentence is particularly important, since it is not a contradiction to say that bio-politics operates on bodies – i.e., as sites of biological processes of a population. Therefore, when looking at the operation of regulatory technologies, bodies are not to be excluded or to be considered as the sole domain of discipline.

Foucault then makes several points on the analysis of the operation of power, which are important to highlight in the present context. The first point refers to the concomitance of the operation of disciplinary and regulatory power, that is, that these powers can work together. In this context, Foucault offers an example which is particularly meaningful for my project: the working-class estate. These estates, he

says, combine discipline, since they distribute bodies and visibilize them for their control and policing and also produce them in particular ways through the provision of health, rules for housing, pressures on sexuality, child care and education, etc. The working-class estate, then, combines devices from both technologies.

Not only do they work together, there is also an element that circulates between the two, which is the norm. In this sense, normalization in society takes place at the level of the individual as well as in the general population. The norm of discipline and the norm of regulation intersect with each other.

A final topic of great relevance for my study relates to the end of Foucault's lecture, where he talks about power over death and racism. If regulatory power works towards the normalization of life, he asks, if it makes life, then how does it exert power over death? The precondition for killing, within bio-politics, is racism, that is, the break in the construction of the biological continuum between what must live and what must die, for the sake of the life, health and purity of the normal population (Foucault, 2004, p. 255). Racism is the precondition of the right to kill since it legitimizes the killing in terms of biological processes. Foucault here flags up again what he has emphasized before, that when he talks of death he does not mean the actual death of an individual, but its presence in life, through risk, expulsion, rejection, etc. He also refers to it as "indirect murder" (Foucault, 2004, p. 256).

The juxtaposition of – or the way bio-power functions through – the old sovereign power of life and death implies the workings, the introduction and activation, of racism. (op. cit. 2004, p. 258)

I want to highlight this because it blurs the periodization between sovereign and bio-power – although the forms of their potential coexistence at particular times can thus seem confusing. Bio-power, disciplinary power, and sovereign power can operate together in specific contexts. The example Foucault advances is Nazi society, which exhibited intensified forms of all three. It is also in studying Nazi society that Agamben elaborates his paradigm of 'the Camp'.

#### *A note on racism and bare life*

One of the differences between Foucault and Agamben, and between racism and bare life, is in the precondition for exposing life to death. For Foucault there is a pre-existent caesura in the biological continuum (racism) that justifies death. This

pre-existent break has been defined or constructed beforehand and pre-exists the subject that is killed. For this reason, the subject that is killed has an attribute that justifies its death. In the case of the Camp, for Agamben, there is no pre-existent definition of race or attribute that justifies killing. Sovereign power produces individuals as *homo sacer* without any pre-existent rules for this production. It just takes place. Anyone can be abandoned; everyone is exposed to that condition. When the subject is called 'Muselmann' (Agamben, 1999) or ends up living in a *villa*, labelling takes place. However, the labelling is not necessary for the exposure to death to take place. *Homo sacer* can exist without being named as such. In Foucault the infliction of death is an effect of racism. For Agamben, the infliction of death is the logic of Western sovereign power.

### Agamben's 'grey zone'

Whereas Foucault defines his field of analysis within the study of technologies of power, only briefly mentioning legal theory at the beginning of the lecture, Agamben takes law and theology as his fields of analysis. For this reason, and because of the fact that Agamben focuses on the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, he says that his work "corrects" and "completes" Foucault's work: "I see my work as closer to no-one than to Foucault" (Durantaye, 2009, p. 209).

Agamben asserts that the biological has always been present in Western politics, whereas Foucault identifies this presence only since the eighteenth century, thus separating it from sovereign power. To Agamben, sovereign power already included *zoē* (biological life) in political life; what is distinctive of modernity is the creation of a 'grey zone' where the two become undistinguishable, and the existence of *homo sacer*. This is what he calls the 'state of exception', drawing on Carl Schmitt's theory of sovereignty. He does not separate bio-power from sovereignty, keeping the study of sovereignty within his scope. In this context, Paul Patton (2007, p. 211) argues, on the one hand, that Foucault's meaning was not that sovereign power does not have a right over life, but that the technologies of control are a novelty, developed throughout the nineteenth century:

At the level of representation, classical sovereignty was already bio-power. At the level of political technology, it only became bio-power in the course of the nineteenth century. (Patton, p. 214)

On the other hand, he argues that Agamben misinterprets Foucault by identifying the emergence of bio-politics with “the politicization of bare life” (2007, p. 211).

Agamben’s words in *Homo Sacer*, correcting Foucault, are

...what characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of *zoē* in the *polis* – which is, in itself, absolutely ancient – nor simply the fact that life as such becomes a principal object of the projections and calculations of state power... (Agamben quoted in Durantaye, 2009, p. 210)

I will run the risk of misinterpreting Patton here, but to me it seems that he is suggesting that Foucault, in his analysis of the emergence of bio-politics, is not claiming that this is the first time that life (or *zoē*) has been put under the rule of the sovereign, as Agamben argues. Instead, Patton argues, Foucault is pointing at the emergence of particular and novel technologies of power by which biological processes become objects of regulation – these biological processes already being part of the *polis*. Acknowledging that this is not necessarily a fair reflection of Patton’s position, I will nevertheless take this interpretation as the basis for the rest of my discussion. At this stage I am trying to distinguish the different meanings given to the term ‘bio-politics’, since at points it seems that it means everything and nothing at the same time. There are at least three notions: Foucault’s, Agamben’s interpretation of Foucault, and Agamben’s. I will now turn to Agamben.

The Foucauldian thesis will then have to be corrected or, at least, completed, in the sense that what characterizes modern politics is not so much the inclusion of *zoē* in the *polis* – which is, in itself, absolutely ancient – nor simply the fact that life as such becomes a principal object of the projections and calculations of State power. Instead the decisive fact is that, together with the process by which the exception everywhere becomes the rule, the realm of bare life – which is originally situated at the margins of the political order – gradually begins to coincide with the political realm, and exclusion and inclusion, outside and inside, *bios* and *zoē*, right and fact, enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction. (Agamben, 1998, p. 12)

## The Camp

We have seen that it is the state of exception, the 'grey zone' of indistinction between fact and rule, inside and outside, *bios* and *zoē*, which characterizes modern politics. This condition is the nature of the political relation, the act of banning individuals from the *polis* and sustaining them in a condition of exclusion or abandonment (Laclau, 2007, p. 13). The paradox of this relation rests on the figure of the sovereign, which has the power to exempt itself from the rule, and in the idea of the production of the excluded, which is also a form of inclusion. That is where the greyness of the zone lies. This assertion is used by Agamben as the basis for his construction of the Camp as the paradigm of the *nomos* of modernity, a thesis that has been greatly controversial and which he develops in the same book, *Homo Sacer*.

...in our age, the state of exception comes more and more to the foreground as the fundamental political structure and ultimately begins to become the rule. When our age tried to grant the unlocalizable a permanent and visible localization, the result was the concentration camp (Agamben, 1998, p. 24)

The concentration camp is thus an example of the extreme intensification of exercise of bio-power, exercise of power over life, since it produces bare life at its extreme. That is, it produces life in its most deprived form. Agamben asserts that in the Camp there is no mediation between power and biological life, that is, bare life is produced exactly as biological life. The human being that is produced by this extreme form of bio-power is what Agamben calls the 'Muselmann', a subject "defined by a loss of all will and consciousness" (Agamben, 1999, p. 45)<sup>20</sup>.

As mentioned above, Laclau argues that the paradigm of the Muselmann is too reductive, since it disregards the human potential for political and collective action. In order to think the condition of the residents of *villas*, then, I will move between Agamben and Laclau, considering subjects to be produced but also producing the setting and relationships in which they are set. In reading D's *testimonio* I was looking at the ways in which her group of friends who gathered in the CMV were in subject positions of abandonment, produced in forms resembling a bare life living

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<sup>20</sup> This was a term coined by the inmates in Nazi concentration camps, who used it to refer to other inmates whose bodies and behaviour had been significantly transformed by the conditions under which they lived in the camp.

in the abandoned margins of the city, in a squatted abandoned building, outside the labour market and the education system, exposed to being killed-but-not-murdered. But her story tells how, for example, in the scene of Raquel's death, her wounded body was taken to a hospital by the neighbours in the absence of an ambulance, and how justice was pursued by the neighbours through a riot that caught the attention of the media. So, Laclau's critique is useful to acknowledge collective action through the claims and struggles of subjects whose citizenship is being denied. The 'grey zone' operates in the production of subjects' lives and identities, but also in relationships of struggle and resistance with State agents. In the same line of thought, in Chapter 9 I will address the emergence of *villas* as 'dirty' places, both as the result of a specific set of technologies and services deployed by the State bureaucracy and of the appropriation and practices of the inhabitants around them. Also, in Chapter 8 I will consider another situation, the presence of TV cameras in the neighbourhood and how they can become technologies that intervene in relationships of control and stigmatization. In considering TV cameras as a form of control, it is important not only to look at the TV camera itself but also at the practices of residents in dealing with them. This also applies to stigma and practices of impression management that students develop in order to deal with it in the context of the university where they study (Goffman, 1968, 1971). The paradigm of the Camp is useful to interpret the condition of *villas* in the city of Buenos Aires since it sets a framework to understand the production of abandonment of certain populations through specific spatially arranged technologies by sovereign power. On this basis we need to ask how State power is involved in the effective production of the precariousness of the living conditions in *villas*, rather than understanding those living conditions as the product of the absence of the State. But, as Laclau flags up, sovereign power is to be addressed in terms of the complexity of the diverse forces that intervene, which also involve individuals' political and collective actions. These reflections will be further developed below and put into play when reading *testimonios* and analysing 'dirt' in *villas*.

I will now draw on the critique generated by Agamben's assertion that the Camp is the paradigm of the *nomos* of modern Western society. I will follow De la Durantaye

in an exploration of the notion of 'paradigm', which will be helpful for thinking about the use of Agamben's tools in the context of my research.

### Agamben's use of paradigms

I have previously drawn on Agamben's paradigm of the Camp to think about the production of *villas*. I will now move to defining Agamben's notion of 'paradigm' in order to reflect on the epistemological status of this tool.

One of the most important elements that I take from Agamben's idea of paradigm is its characterization as a construct which is disconnected from the singular, which it names, but which also emerges from it and connects with it through analogy. By talking about something in a paradigmatic way we are developing a form of intelligibility that neither explains nor exhausts the case or the singular from which it emerges; indeed, it does not attempt to do so, but rather to elaborate a form of comprehension of its singularity which can allow us to think about other singularities. Furthermore, although it is considered in its uniqueness, its comprehension also enables an understanding of other, similar phenomena.

So, in talking about students who live in *villas* I will attempt not to deny the uniqueness of every student and every *villa*, and not to fix any of them into a particular type or category. The purpose of reading and thinking these particular *testimonios* is, rather, to produce thought which could help think these 'cases' and other similar ones – without basing it on or feeding any laws of the social, essential ideal types or understanding of originary forces.

After publishing an article on concentration camps in a French newspaper, Agamben was accused of attempting "to ruin the unique and unsayable character of Auschwitz" (quoted in Agamben, 1999, p. 31). I identify with this critique. I have sought to talk about a *villa* without talking about '*villas*', fearing creating categories that might end up feeding stereotypes which operate in everyday life, policy, and social research. I want to write about the experiences of students who live in a *villa* without reducing them to general categories or feeding generalizations of *villas*. I therefore adopt Agamben's tool of the 'paradigm', which works across the singular/general dichotomy, acknowledging the uniqueness of the particular case addressed, elaborating constructs that could be useful to look at other cases. These constructs will be fragments of *testimonio* that I will call 'testimonial paradigms',



which are co-produced written translations of the experiences of students. So, I am drawing on Agamben's way of dealing with the uniqueness of Auschwitz to deal with the uniqueness of the stories that I have elicited and the conditions from which these are produced.

But what of the 'unsayable'? I also feel affected by that – at times I would rather not talk about the *villa* or its residents. I asked the participants of this study whether they thought teachers should talk about *villas* in courses at university, looking for answers to my discomfort:

*...how do you think it should be... For example: there is the case that the villa appears as an idea or concept in the classroom. A question would be: is it good that it appears or is it not? And the other would be: if the answer is 'yes', why? But let's go back to the first question.*

That it appears? Yes. I think that it has to appear. Even more when studying a degree like mine. If you study journalism you have to have a certain understanding of reality. And the *villa* is an Argentine reality. It's impossible to pretend that it doesn't exist. It's good that it appears. It's good that people talk about it. The issue is the position from which people talk about it. You can approach it from different places. If you want to do research on drugs, the *villa* will obviously appear. We, living in the *villa*, know that. The thing is that if you talk about topics like drugs or crime, you shouldn't generalize. If you talk about it, talk about drugs in the particular, not 'everyone in *villas* consumes drugs or is related to drugs'. Yes, there are drugs in the *villa*; the people who sell are there, also people who consume. But talk about it in the particular. The same thing as crime and all the other things that they say about it. They do exist. We, living there, know that they exist and won't say 'nothing is going on'. No: things are going on. But the problem is when they generalize. That's the problem. And I think that the good thing about university is exactly that it helps you open your mind. That's what I think it's good for those of us who can keep studying. Open your mind (...) I think that nowadays they don't know how to approach the topic of the *villa*. You end up seeing documentaries on Channel 2 where they claim that they are showing a documentary but actually it's not, they've just put a few cameras in a sector in the *villa*, in the most problematic one. And the only thing that they show is how the boys of the *villa* fight with each other. Obviously, if you go there you'll find that. So, it's not exactly what they show. I think that the basic problem is that at university they do not know how to insert the topic of the *villa*. (Interview with B)

B's comment also points at the issue of the singular/general dichotomy. That problem is not dealt with at university, or in documentaries or the media. But the university at least should be a place where those issues are reflected on, where students' minds are 'opened up' to those difficulties. And regarding the question of whether or not to talk about the 'problems' that affect *villas*, B's answer to my fear raised similar points to the ones that I addressed in my methodology: that research is a dangerous activity and those dangers have to be dealt with. It is important to talk and it is important to struggle reflexively with the difficulties of talking. Not talking would mean denying the issues that affect *villas*, further invisibilizing them, withdrawing them from the field of 'Argentine realities'. Not talking about drugs and crime to avoid portraying *villas* as zones of delinquency would deny the voices of the residents, who, as B says, are not afraid to say that 'things are going on'. To this, I will add Agamben's answer to criticism of his newspaper article on concentration camps, which is set within a different debate. Agamben is asked not to talk about Auschwitz for the sake of respect of those who suffered there, to respect that suffering as incomprehensible. In a sense, this also applies to the *villa*: I cannot understand the suffering of those who struggle with the conditions of the *villa*, of hunger, stigma, etc. I cannot completely understand the experiences that the students express in the *testimonios* we have produced. However, in his response Agamben warns of the dangers of falling into euphemistic talk about Auschwitz, of resigning ourselves to efforts of understanding:

To say that Auschwitz is 'unsayable' or 'incomprehensible' is equivalent to *euphemein*, to adoring in silence, as one does with a god. Regardless of one's intentions, this contributes to its glory. We, however, "are not ashamed of staring into the unsayable" – even at the risk of discovering that what evil knows of itself, we can also easily find in ourselves. (Agamben, 1999, p. 32)

Similarly, ceasing to look at and talk about *villas* raises them to the sphere of the sacred, that which cannot be spoken, which cannot be understood. Thus, any act or critique is disabled, along with any questioning of our own participation in the action of evil.

### *Paradigms*

There is, then, a paradigmatic ontology. And I know of no better definition of it than the one contained in a poem by Wallace Stevens, entitled 'Description Without Place':

It is possible that to seem it is to be,  
As the sun is something seeming and it is.  
The sun is an example. What it seems  
It is and in such seeming all things are.

(Agamben, 2009, p. 3)

Critiques of the assertion that the Camp is the paradigm of the Western modern order should be read considering the extent of this assertion. That is, what does Agamben mean when he defines his concentration camp as a paradigm? In this context, I will follow De la Durantaye's reading and pose two questions. On the one hand, how does Agamben define his notion of paradigm? On the other, how does he use it? Agamben was particularly influenced by Foucault in this area. In the first chapter of *The Signature of All Things* he interprets Foucault and develops his own notion of paradigm; so, by reading Agamben I will also be addressing Foucault. In the Introduction to the book he says, "The astute reader will be able to determine what in the three essays can be attributed to Foucault, to the author, or to both" (op. cit. 2009, p. 7). He concludes his reflection by outlining the six defining characteristics of his notion of paradigm, according to what he considers to be Foucault's use of the concept. This tool fits with the genealogical principles I have outlined so far in this research. I will now put them to work together.

Agamben begins by introducing Foucault's work and its (lack of) definition of the paradigm. He highlights the distinction between Foucault's and Kuhn's notions. He makes reference to Foucault's avoidance of mentioning Kuhn or even the term 'paradigm' when talking about his studies on knowledge. However, he quotes the interview entitled 'Truth and Power', where Foucault says, "What was lacking here was this problem of 'discursive regime', of the effects of power peculiar to the play of

statements. I confused this too much with systematicity, theoretical form, or something like a paradigm” (Agamben, 2009, p. 14). On this basis Agamben summarizes Foucault’s difference with Kuhn as a disciplinary one, since Foucault carries out his analysis at the level of politics, the struggle over the conditions of the validation of statements, the government of science, rather than the analysis of the rules that constitute its form. Agamben then moves on to analyse Foucault’s use of paradigms, such as the panopticon, which are of a different kind from the Kuhnian. He formulates this basic notion:

...[Foucault’s panopticon is] the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form. In short, the panopticon functions as a paradigm in the strict sense: it is a singular object that, standing equally for all others of the same class, defines the intelligibility of the group of which it is a part and which, at the same time, it constitutes. (Agamben, 2009, p. 16)

Thus, paradigms are separate from that to which they refer, allowing for that object to be thought but also constituting it. But what status has the ‘ideal form’ that Foucault speaks about? It differs from Weber’s ‘ideal type’ in that Foucault does not seek essences or general types, but works with singular, explicit and local techniques or programmes, which are connected in a particular “isolated programme” (e.g., the panopticon) (Dreyfus, 1983, p. 132). This distinction adds to one of the elements of genealogy mentioned in previous chapters, which deals with the minutiae, with singular objects, rather than with generalizations. Even generalizations, as we will see later, are considered to be singularities that refer to other singularities, rather than operating in a deductive movement.

To explain the paradigm from the perspective of the whole-part relationship, Agamben draws on Aristotle’s *Prior Analytics*: “...the paradigm does not function as a part with respect to the whole (...), nor as a whole with respect to the part (...), but as a part with respect to the part (...), if both are under the same but one is better known than the other” (Agamben, 2009, p. 19). In order to address the status of this form of knowledge, Agamben draws on Melandri’s theory of analogy. The paradigm functions through analogy rather than logic. Analogy

intervenes in the dichotomies of logic (particular/universal; form/content; lawfulness/exemplarity; and so on) not to take them up into a higher synthesis but to transform them into a force field traversed by polar tensions, where (as in an electromagnetic field) their substantial identities evaporate (...) The analogical third is attested here above all through the disidentification and neutralization of the first two, which now become indiscernible. The third is this indiscernibility, and if one tries to grasp it by means of bivalent caesurae, one runs up against an undecidable. It is thus impossible to clearly separate an example's paradigmatic character – its standing for all cases – from the fact that it is one case among others. (op. cit. 2009, p. 20)

So, the analogy exists in a singularity which cannot be distinguished from any other singularity, although the two are disidentified. The analogy, therefore, neutralizes singularities as cases; it turns them into paradigms, although the difference between singularity-as-case and singularity-as-paradigm cannot be drawn. The singularity is case and paradigm, and singularities allow for other singularities to be known through becoming indiscernible. The indiscernibility between case and paradigm and between singularities is the analogy. Adding to this, Agamben draws on Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement (*The Critique of Judgement*) to address the issue of the status of the claim of the paradigm. The question is, what rule does the paradigm follow in order to sustain the status of its claim? The answer is that, since the paradigm exists in the relationship between the parts, between the particular, without reference to the whole or general, there is no *a priori* rule that legitimizes the paradigm: "it is the exhibition alone of the paradigmatic case that constitutes a rule, which as such cannot be applied or stated" (Agamben, 2009, p. 21). Therefore, the validity of the paradigm does not lie in an external and pre-existing singular, but in itself and in the relations of analogy that it implies. This point will be of particular relevance when addressing the use of paradigms, since these are not set within a prior set of rules, but are undefined and ambiguous. Therefore, considering that this work is presented as a doctoral thesis, I should provide a reflexive account of the use that I want to give to that paradigm, although, it is clear, its potential meanings exceed any reflection. Returning to the idea of the exhibition of the paradigm as its rule, Agamben draws on Goldschmidt to state that the paradigmatic relation does not only involve cases or sensible objects, but also an intelligibility that is activated in the exposition of the paradigm. The paradigm operates by producing a similarity between objects

that takes place in its exhibition. This action is where the third, the analogy, appears, turning the case into a case-paradigm (analogy is the hyphen), thus ceasing to have the status of a case while being one at the same time.

Agamben then turns to analyse the paradigm in relation to the hypothesis, as understood by Plato, and the hermeneutic circle; that is, he seeks to understand the hypothesis and the hermeneutic circle from the perspective of the paradigm. I will lay out the relationships between these different concepts, which will be used later on in my research.

Agamben follows Goldschmidt and interprets Plato's dialectical method, developed in book 6 of *Republic*, "as an exposition of the paradigmatic method" (p. 25). Plato considers science to emerge from two moments: the first considers hypotheses as presuppositions that are known first principles, *sensibles*; the second considers hypotheses as presuppositions that are stepping stones to reach the first principles of things, in a movement from ideas to ideas. Agamben argues that the latter group defines paradigms – they are neither sensible nor ideas; they are the sensible considered as paradigm. They work as a form of intelligibility of other 'sensibles' by their exhibition. The paradigm, for the dialectical method, is what allows us to reach for the non-hypothetical, the first principle of things (op. cit., [12]). However, paradigms differ from hypotheses in that they do not seek the knowledge of a first principle of things, since they do not contain any truth, but intelligibility instead.

Agamben then moves on to read hermeneutic interpretation as a "paradigmatic circle". He focuses on two premises of hermeneutics: that "knowledge of the whole presupposes that of single phenomena" (op. cit., p. 27) and vice versa, and that interpretation is developed through inquiring pre-understandings in relation to things. Agamben's reading proposes, on the one hand, understanding that there is no duality between the singular and the whole, but relationships between singulars which expose a whole which they also constitute (in their condition of paradigms). On the other hand, he dismisses the distinction between pre-understanding and interpretation as two moments in knowledge, adopting the statement that "intelligibility does not precede the phenomenon; it stands, so to speak, 'beside' it" (op. cit.). The knowability of the phenomenon takes place in the moment of exposition, where paradigm and case are one and the same:

The phenomenon, exposed in the medium of its knowability, shows the whole of which it is the paradigm. With regard to phenomena, this is not a presupposition (a 'hypothesis'): as a 'non-presupposed principle', it stands neither in the past nor in the present but in their exemplary constellation. (2009, p. 28)

The last point he makes relates to the relationship between the original phenomenon and its reproduction. At the level of the paradigm, the difference between original and reproduction becomes undecidable. The reproduction is undistinguishable from the original since there is a knowability that connects both without unifying them: "Every photograph is the original; every image constitutes the *archē* and is, in this sense, 'archaic'" (Agamben, 2009, p. 29). But the paradigm cannot rest in the condition of the original or in that of the reproduction; it is the medium that unifies and separates both. He draws on Goethe's concept of *Urphänomen* to elaborate this reflection:

As a paradigm, the *Urphänomen* is thus the place where analogy lives in perfect equilibrium beyond the opposition between generality and particularity (...) Even though it never crosses into the generality of a hypothesis or law, the *Urphänomen* is nevertheless knowable; it is indeed in the single phenomenon the last knowable element, its capacity to constitute itself as a paradigm. For this reason, a famous Goethean dictum states that one should never look beyond the phenomena: insofar as they are paradigms, 'they are theory'." (Agamben, 2009, p. 30)

The *Urphänomen*, then, is another approximation to the notion of paradigm, which Agamben draws on to consider reproduction as both different from and the same as the original. Different, since a photograph is a singular different from the phenomenon it represents, but the same at the level of paradigm, since there is a knowable element that connects both through analogy. In this sense, Agamben says, at the level of paradigms there is no origin, there is no *archē*, reproduction and origin are conflated in the paradigm that makes their knowledge possible, and therefore singular phenomena and theory are also conflated as paradigm.

Agamben concludes by setting out some defining characteristics of the paradigm, as understood by him and, in his view, by Foucault:

1. A paradigm is a form of knowledge that is neither inductive nor deductive but analogical. It moves from singularity to singularity.

2. By neutralizing the dichotomy between the general and the particular, it replaces a dichotomous logic with a bipolar analogical model.
3. The paradigmatic case becomes such by suspending and, at the same time, exposing its belonging to the group, so that it is never possible to separate its exemplarity from its singularity.
4. The paradigmatic group is never presupposed by the paradigms; rather, it is immanent in them.
5. In the paradigm, there is no origin or archē; every phenomenon is the origin, every image archaic.
6. The historicity of the paradigm lies neither in the diachrony nor in synchrony but in a crossing of the two. (Agamben, 2009, p. 31)

He then adds:

At this point, I think it is clear what it means to work by way of paradigms for both me and Foucault. *Homo sacer* and the concentration camp, the *Muselmann* and the state of exception, and, more recently, the Trinitarian *oikonomia* and acclamation are not hypotheses through which I intended to explain modernity by tracing it back to something like a cause or historical origin. On the contrary, as their very multiplicity might have signalled, each time it was a matter of paradigms whose aim was to make intelligible series of phenomena whose kinship had eluded or could elude the historian's gaze. (op. cit., pp. 31-32).

In this last paragraph, then, Agamben responds to most of the critiques considered above in relation to the Camp, bare life and *homo sacer*. It seems to me a satisfactory response – but the rest of the paragraph leaves me uneasy. Agamben defines the aim with which he used his paradigms as “to make intelligible series of phenomena”. However, it seems his paradigms were seemingly also aimed at being provocative (LaCapra, 2007). So, I would not want to take his as the final word on the use of the paradigm in this work, since this topic seems to be far more complex. The principles he sets out throughout the article raise the question of the use of the paradigm as going beyond intelligibility. This is as much about the exposition of the paradigm and its effects as it is about its content. Therefore, the paradigm has many uses, one of which is the quest for understanding our present condition, but its exposition has also other effects, such as provocation, irony, etc. My use of



paradigms in this text does not intend to be clear and simple, and it will unavoidably run the risk of having unintentional effects. As I have mentioned, I will treat pieces of *testimonios* as paradigms. I will carry out double readings of them using and troubling conceptual tools in an attempt to produce different meanings. However, these may be used in different ways and my text may be written over by the readers. The uses are many. In the discussions I have so far developed and the reflection that is yet to come as I work with paradigms I attempt to acknowledge the ethical, political and rhetorical aspects of producing *testimonios*, 'truth effects' (Lather, 2000) that are disidentified from the speech act that has produced them but that at the same time are indistinguishable from them. These 'truth effects' do not represent the whole of the stories told by post-compulsory-education students living in *villas* or refer to them as a whole, but carry with them the potential to relate to each one of these stories through analogy in their exposition.

Next, I will relate Agamben's paradigm to the Foucauldian idea of interpretive analytics as presented by Dreyfus and Rabinow, putting the use of paradigms in relation to other principles of analysis taken from Foucault.

### Genealogy and interpretation

I have already introduced genealogy in a previous chapter, and will not develop it further here. However, I would like to connect the paradigm with genealogy in the sense that the paradigm is a connection between singulars, and genealogy the study of superficial practices. Both remain at the level of the surface without a search for depth, and find their strength in taking seriously and dealing with the complexity of the multiplicity of elements of the present. In this context, Foucault proposes the development of a 'history of the present'. This means a history that does not intend to explain the past by referring to any contemporary rules of verification (and maybe making conclusions for the present on the basis of those discoveries or truths), but rather an inquiry that sets its ground on the problematic of the present context and subject of knowledge, and forms questions based on the construction of that problematic present. It will thus dig into history, but without attempting to explain the past by deploying analytic tools from the present. It will not explore what was relevant for individuals of the past, but instead look for what is relevant for understanding the present. So, the genealogist will face the challenge of taking the present seriously without referring to deep causes or origins.

Foucault makes use of concepts such as 'apparatus', *dispositive*, 'grids of intelligibility'. I will take Agamben's notion of 'paradigm' as an interpretation and development of these, and will not go into this topic further.

Instead, I would like to revisit a distinction drawn by Dreyfus and Rabinow between commentary and interpretive analysis. The first relates to a form of knowledge characteristic of the Renaissance (Castro, 2004; Foucault, 2005), which consists of the endless interpretation of meanings of texts, though remaining at the level of the text. The second refers to a form of knowledge that asks for the effects of the practices of the speaking subjects, that is, it goes beyond the text to study speech acts and practices, which are produced by and produce speaking subjects. Therefore, it goes beyond meaning to study effects through a study of discourse, understood not only as text, but also as practices and devices (Ball, 2013, p. 19). So, Foucault does not deny the existence of phenomena beyond language. The empirical world exists and he uses the available knowledge about it to develop his analysis. He also acknowledges that the available knowledge is a production that emerges from contextual discursive formations that give it the status of 'truth'. It is not his concern whether brute reality beyond language actually exists or not, although he does not deny its existence. His is instead concerned with studying and problematizing the production of truth claims and associations (Prado, 2008, p. 154):

My question was not: Does madness exist? My reasoning, my method, was not to examine whether history gives me or refers me to something like madness, and then to conclude, no, it does not, therefore madness does not exist. This was not the argument, the method in fact. The method consisted in saying: Let's suppose that madness does not exist. If we suppose that it does not exist, then what can history make of these different events and practices which are apparently organized around something that is supposed to be madness? So, what I would like to deploy here is exactly the opposite of historicism: not, then, questioning universals by using history as a critical method, but starting from the decision that universals do not exist, asking what kind of history we can do. (Foucault, 2010, p. 3 cited in Ball, 2013, p. 9)

The separation between brute reality and truth is methodological, not ontological. Foucault did not do ontology; he was not interested in it. He was interested in problematizing the notions of truth that are constitutive of discursive rules of thought. In this sense, there is neither one truth nor one notion of truth for Foucault – this is

only an element within a discourse. Prado identifies five uses of 'truth' in Foucault's work. I will not go further into this topic since it is not relevant to my study. However, as to the question of whether Foucault is an 'irrealist', for me the answer is no. But it was not his concern to make ontological statements, rather to bring complexity to the notion of truth as device, and to methodologically do without it to analyse practices and technologies.

The discussion of 'interpretive analytics', as Dreyfus and Rabinow refer to Foucault's method, introduces an important element to my study, which is the relationship between the speaking actor and the commentator or analyser. The commentary relativizes every testimony and every statement through the proliferation of interpretation. Interpretation is endless and therefore every text is subject to further interpretation, which is also subject to further interpretation. However, interpretive analysis addresses the effects of particular technologies, attempting to understand the conditions of the production of subjects. In this sense, it is not involved in the endless interpretation of context, but deals with the problems of the present. It enquires into logics that are not spoken about in everyday life, into orders that operate on the surface without being advertised. At the same time, they are present in the actions and words of subjects, who might not recognize them. Therefore, the ethnographer is involved with his/her subjects but at the same time is detached from them as s/he analyses their words, actions, practices. This does not mean that the ethnographer's voice claims to explain the subjects' interpretations of the world or practices. The researcher is not appealing to any knowledge of underlying causal or originary forces that inform these interpretations. However, the researcher does search for the unadvertised which is operating on her or him and the subjectivities of the subjects. Using Agamben's notion of paradigm, the researcher, then, will construct intelligibilities (that emanate from and are identical to elements of the empirical world) that could help in observing the operation of technologies of control on subjects in specific contexts by means of analogy. Therefore, the ethnographer does not place him/herself above the respective subjects, but next to them, subject to the same forces as those being observed. As I have presented in the first section of this work, I will be reading *testimonios* and interpreting them 'using and troubling' analytical tools in doing so. I will be producing a particular object, 'testimonial paradigms', using fragments of *testimonios* as paradigms. I will be producing a

reflexive reading of those constructs. These readings are intended to be provocative to the reader, but there also is an ethnographic approximation to *villas* in my reading of these stories. I have already mentioned that I visited and volunteered in a traditional and popular community centre and parish church in a *villa* during the fieldwork in which I elicited these *testimonios*. So, there is an ethnographic intent here from the outset. Furthermore, my reading and interpretation of these stories intends to make sense of the social relations that are represented in them. I will take fragments of *testimonios* as paradigms, as singularities analogous to unique speech acts, which have the potential of relating to other speech acts or representations. It is my aim to produce readings of these which are not only provocative but also useful for anyone who faces an analogous context and attempts to make sense of it (or to problematize the process of making sense of it). My reading of *testimonios* will have an ethnographic aspect to it in the sense that it will intend to engage with a specific (textualized) context and explore that which is taking place there that is not yet considered. This exercise will not produce discoveries, but the questions it will pose will be in some ways directed towards that aim.

## 7. Testimonial paradigm

In the previous chapters I have explored methodological possibilities on the basis of the genealogical principles I have highlighted. Foucault's genealogical method has provided me with a set of premises by which to think my role as a researcher and my relationship with the text I produce, the object of study and the audience. My initial research design relied on the abilities of scientific methods to produce true accounts of reality, which would therefore have an authority that made them not only reliable but also fair. So, I was working on two assumptions: that social science would provide me with the authority to speak truthfully, and that there was an inherent fairness in truth telling. Applied to my own research, this meant that through first-hand knowledge of young people in *villas* I would produce narratives that would counter the stigmatizing stereotypes of this population. Foucault's principles destabilized these ground rules of truth production that I was setting out, and led me to rethink my project alongside the critique of science and representation developed within the project of post-structuralism.

Foucault's project, drawing on Nietzsche, proposes the production of accounts of reality that critique the pursuit of essences, teleological history or substantial truth, by acknowledging the complexity of reality at its surface and positioning the researcher as a part of that complexity and knowledge as a product that emerges from it. My initial project, from this stance, did not rest on the effectiveness of the scientific method to capture truth, but on the authority conferred to it by power, operating through institutions such as my university, a community of researchers, awarding structures, etc. Renouncing the claim to grasp the truth, then, involved redefining the nature of the text that I would produce and therefore myself as researcher. Considering this text as a thesis, this also meant redefining the epistemology, ontology and ethics of the research.

On these new grounds I reconsidered one of the pillars of my project, the voices of the participants that would serve as data in the process of production of an account of their experiences as students. One of my assumptions was that interviews with young people from *villas* would provide me with access to their everyday practices and identities. Furthermore, drawing on Beverly's interpretation of the Latin American

*testimonio* I conceived of the transcription of the interviews with participants as a potential reflection of the voices of the participants in my research. The discussion around Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio* was useful for me to reflect on my relationship with my participants and the nature of the product of my interviews with them. I began to conceive of the latter as 'mediated *testimonios*' (Sklodowska, 1993), that is, as narratives told in the first person by speakers who tell experiences that they have witnessed or lived, and which are recorded and transcribed by an ethnographer, researcher or journalist, who is politically motivated by a desire for social change. My understanding of the *testimonio* is as a co-construction which involves technologies of transcription as well as processes of translation into text. This means that the product is separated and different from the original voice of the speaker, but also that it is constructed by an attempt to bring the speakers' stories to the attention of readers. It is a deliberately realist and untruthful product whose value lies in inviting the reader through a 'truth effect' to 'write over' with further interpretation and questions.

In this sense, I am a writer but also a reader, and a second production within my 'thesis' is that I am reflexive in interpreting these *testimonios*, therefore engaging as a reader who is addressed by these texts and who attempts to elaborate reflections that could incite further interpretation or be deployed in similar exercises. My aim, then is to produce 'writerly' (Barthes, 1975) texts, which are writings produced based on the interpretation of other 'writerly' texts. The value of the whole exercise is intended to be in the expansion of the 'force field' of the text, in the 'constellations' (Adorno, 1984) that are drawn and potentially drawn by myself and the readers. The overall aim is to expand meaning, to expand the effects of the voices both of the speakers and of myself, and to provoke the reader. The nature of my analysis, then, is that of commentaries, as defined previously, drawing on Foucault. That is, there are potentially endless interpretations of the text establishing relationships of analogy between different elements.

In order to pursue this exercise I will work on the *testimonios* produced, cutting them down and producing objects which attempt to be of the same use of Agamben's 'paradigms'. Agamben talked about Auschwitz as a 'paradigm', that is, as a symbolic construct resembling the real Auschwitz but different from it. It is helpful to think of Auschwitz through its analogy: researchers should not seek to exhaust the real

Auschwitz as an object of study, but rather to make it possible to look at it in such a way as to allow thought to emerge from it. Auschwitz as paradigm has the potential to relate to other singular phenomena and enable interpretation through analogy. The Auschwitz paradigm does not attempt to be generalizable or to exhaust the interpretation of the singular which it names. In my own work I will cut out pieces of the *testimonios* and separate them into text boxes to consider and use them as paradigms. These will then form a kind of 'testimonial paradigm', that is, pieces of told and transcribed experience of a subject which are produced by a researcher to contribute to thinking about this and other similar singularities (be they textual or performative). These 'paradigmatic *testimonios*' are not intended to be turned into or to produce generalizations, but rather to be used to think about other singularities. They do not attempt to exhaust the singular which they name, since, as mentioned above, *testimonio* is a mediated and partial co-construction. But they are intended to be 'realistic' enough to persuade and relate to the reader, potentially connecting to other analogous experiences but also bringing a sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity that provokes questions or a sense of ambiguity.

## Appendix 4 – continuation of Appendix 2

*Ok, so, let's go back. So, you remembered the thing with the shoes when you first went to university. Your friend came along with you to visit your university and it was a matter of, 'Mmmm... This is going to be my place for a while'.*

If I had done my course in a timely manner I should be graduating now. That hit me hard last year, thinking 'I'm not doing it as I should' and I was very decided to quit. 'I can't deal with this. It's obvious that I can't'. Also, it really got me down thinking, 'If I had done it as I should have I would be finishing now and wouldn't need to be here anymore'.

### *Suffering*

So, last year I thought, 'OK, I'll do it as fast as I can so I don't have to come to university anymore'. But things don't always work out as one expects them to. I planned to sit for six exams, I finally got ready for four; one was oral and I didn't show up – I reached the door and left; I couldn't do it. So everything was telling me that I couldn't do it; I disappointed myself even more. Every time I decided 'I'll finish, I'll sit', I ended up not doing it and feeling worse.

At the times of final examinations I had the crisis of not wanting to do anything and ended up crying for a whole day, feeling that I was useless for that. And the worse thing was that, much as I would tell my friends about it, they wouldn't understand.

### *Your high-school friends?*

I knew that my friends were studying and everything, but I felt that they wouldn't be able to understand me. They all said 'You've always done well'. I came across my friends, they'd ask 'How did it go?' – 'I'm not confident'; 'Don't worry, I'm sure it was OK'. And you thought, 'No, I'm not doing well, it's the opposite; I don't know where



that girl that used to get nines and tens has gone'. So I was very frustrated with myself; I felt that I couldn't achieve what I wanted. That used to happen to me at university, and it still does, and the worst thing is that I feel I have no-one to talk to in there. It's like they won't understand. Neither the people that are there nor my lifelong friends. That's when you think, 'I don't know who to talk to; they don't understand'. You end up keeping everything to yourself. There were moments when I didn't want to go there anymore; I didn't want to have anything to do with the university. I felt that it was harming me, in the subjects, in finding people that could... not necessarily understand, but at least understand that my situation is different, that I wanted to tell other stories, that it's not what I had expected from journalism. So it's pretty sad the thing of... I don't know, even enrolling in the modules is hard because you say 'I'll enrol and I have to see if I do well this time', and try to say 'I'll do it, I'll enrol in this and that module'. I enrol in four modules and end up passing three; I fail one and say 'Goddamn it'. I always end up realizing that I can't achieve what I propose to do. And that's a problem. That really affected me. And regarding the rest... I was very scared of what that people would think. You say, 'Everyone must think that B doesn't do anything at home and that's why she doesn't do well'. That hurt a lot. I thought that the rest thought that about me. It hurt, because it was the opposite; I know that I study at home, that I try, that... Thinking that the rest regard me as lazy, 'This one says she'll do all the modules and then fails, and has many exams to sit and doesn't do it'. It was very silly of me to think about what the rest thought of me. I was very scared of that. I said 'No'. But because I think that... I don't know if I was caring about myself? I said 'OK...' I didn't want them to think that about me because I didn't want them to generalize about myself and the rest of the people. When I got accepted at the university I was introduced to the director of the Department of Student Support; he told me, 'You're the first person of a *villa* that comes to study to this university'.

*You're the first person of a villa that studied at your university?*

Yes. I didn't know how to feel about that. It was like, 'OK, but I'd rather you hadn't told me'. I don't know if it's good that he told me. It was very weird; I wanted to be

with people that had similar circumstances to mine at the university. Someone I could talk to or...share something. And the fact that they tell you, 'You're the first person'; it's like, 'On the basis of my performance they'll decide whether they keep giving opportunities to people from the *villa*'. I was very scared of that; I thought, 'If I don't do well I don't know if they'll keep supporting students from the *villa*'. That generates some pressure. I didn't want it to be, 'As B couldn't do it, the rest of the *villa* won't be able to make it'. It wasn't good. It was extra pressure. They didn't realize at that moment the effects that had on me, what they were telling me.

*No, probably not. You didn't tell them, right?*

No... How would I say it? 'Don't tell me this because it makes me feel worse'? [We laugh.]

Besides, I felt that if they thought that I didn't study and was lazy, they'd generalize it to my family as well. I didn't want my family to... I mean, I didn't want them to have a bad idea of my family. I don't know why. Every time I studied, in high school and always, I did it with the idea of being the pride of my mother. I study for my mother to think 'I'm proud of having the daughter I have'. But I think that because she gave me everything that I am now. She taught me all the values, the thing of waking up at five in the morning to go to work every day, come back, not complain of being tired and, on the contrary, say 'Let's have dinner'. To come back and not be tired, not show tiredness, come back home and start cooking, and everyone sit down together to have dinner...

*How many were you?*

We were six... It's about showing me that you have to wake up every day, work... So, I think that it was about being the pride of my mother. And at university I felt that I was failing that. I felt that I wasn't achieving what I had proposed to achieve. How

can I be the pride of my mother if I'm not passing most of the modules every year? If I can't have a grade that's higher than six? It was hard. It hurt me seeing my mother, so I said 'I can't fail my mother'. Last year, when I had the crisis of quitting, leaving, continuing, not continuing, I had the image of my mother. Of my mother and my brothers, who were there next to me, supporting me – 'You can do it, B'; 'I can't fail so many people who have so much faith in me'. I think I'm still studying because of them. I don't know if I'll ever be a journalist. I don't know, but I know that the day I get my degree I'll be the happiest person in the world. It's not just about a degree. This degree implied many things to me. Among them, many tears. There were days when it was really hard, when I had lumps in my throat because I couldn't understand how my classmates spent their lives, spent their days, asking about what labels of purse to buy, when you went out into the street and found a lot of people looking in the garbage because they didn't have anything to eat. And you knew that they didn't understand. And you had to shut up and say, 'Well, each one thinks and lives in a different way and has the luck or not to have a good economic situation'. But it was very shocking to see that. To have that reality. My neighbours, who live across from my house, they're *cartoneros*<sup>21</sup>, so you know what it is and you know what they suffer and you know how difficult it is every day. So sometimes listening to comments such as, 'If you drive along the motorway close the windows because they'll mug you'... Those things really hurt. Or, 'Watch out when you go near the *villa*'. It always hurts; it's a wound that is always open. It's true that at university there are many people that are valuable, but there are also many people that live in that Tupperware. And even though you want to, you then think, 'No, it's not worth it'. [We laugh.]

But it hurts. It's always damaging; that wound will always be open.

*At university or in general?*

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<sup>21</sup> Scavengers.

In general. I talk about university because I spend the whole day there. I have classes in the morning and then spend the rest of the day working there. So, I'm there day and night. My reality is this university. I'm here from eight in the morning until 10 at night, so that's where I listen to all the commentaries.

*When do you study?*

I have classes from eight to one, so I study from one to four.

Oh, and at four you start to work

At four I start working. Yes. Sometimes I go for a walk to the park. That's the good thing about the neighbourhood of my university: it's full of parks. I go there and stay there.

*Do you study there?*

Yes, it's much more quiet.

Continues in Appendix 5

## 8. Space/time, dirt, abject and C's story

This chapter will engage in a discussion of several different but inter-related theoretical possibilities as resources for thinking about *villas* in Argentina as spaces of production of otherness and abjection. Above I have presented Agamben's paradigm of the Camp as a tool for interpreting the *villas*, along with Laclau's critique of this. Agamben developed the idea of the Camp as a site where sovereign bio-power sustains individuals in a condition of abandonment, producing a specific subject, who is the desubjectivated 'Muselmann'. Laclau argues that Agamben does not acknowledge the social and political relations that are developed within such sites as Agamben's Camp, and which contest their very laws. Their exchange leads me to think about the technologies that are put into play in the constitution of subjects, as well as the social processes that take place around and in relation to these at the micro level. Based on this, I will now move on to look at the minutiae of space, time and relationships and to conceptualize these notions. I will then present a 'testimonial paradigm' and pursue the discussion with a commentary using and troubling the idea of 'boundary' as a tool of analysis.

In working with the discussion between Agamben and Laclau I attempt to bring together two poles of a dichotomy that, following Doreen Massey's critique (1992), seem to be present in their different perspectives. This is the space vs. time dichotomy. As I understand it, Agamben emphasizes the effects of the conditions of existence arranged in a particular territory in the production of subjects, giving special relevance to the permanence of spatially arranged dispositifs (Ek, 2006). On the other hand, following Massey (op. cit.), Laclau responds by emphasizing deterritorialized movement, considering the study of politics as enabled by the variable of time (as opposed to space). I will now draw on Doreen Massey's critique of Laclau's *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*, where she conceptualizes space and time as interrelated concepts. I do not mean to develop a critique of Laclau for its own sake, but to use this discussion to provide some theoretical resources to look at *villas* taking into account time and mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2006). I will consider Foucault's notion of power as existing in the actions of

individuals, in coercions and resistances, and attempt to use this concept in relation to space and time.

### Politics, time, space

In brief terms, Massey mounts a critique of Laclau's separation between space and politics, as for example when she states that "spatiality means coexistence within a structure that establishes the positive nature of all its terms" (Laclau, 1990, p. 62, quoted in Massey, 1992, p. 69). Change driven by politics, on the other hand, would exist in the openness of the dislocation of structures, which cannot be represented in spatial terms but only in temporal, since dislocation takes place in time. Massey quotes Laclau again "any representation – *and thus any space* – is an attempt to constitute society, not to state what it is" (op. cit. p. 82, my emphasis). This constitution is therefore fixed and unable to acknowledge the dynamism of politics. Laclau's critique of Agamben seems to be based in this same understanding of space and time, since he claims that Agamben does not acknowledge in his notion of the Camp, a paradigm developed on the description of a dispositif inscribed in space, the dynamism of politics and its potential for the existence of subjectivities other than the Muselmann and laws other than the Camp's. Although my understanding is that Foucault's notion of power, which Agamben draws on, allows one to think in terms of struggle and resistances at the micro level, and therefore to see the dynamism of social life and politics, I find Laclau's critique very useful for the deployment of Agamben's paradigm since he points out the possible limitations that it could expose the researcher to. Doreen Massey's critique of Laclau is very useful for the same reasons, since it points to the underlying limitations of Laclau's paper. I will now briefly outline Massey's critique, her conceptualization of time and its implications for thinking mobilities and immobilities.

Massey begins by drawing on three approaches to the conceptualization of space as static. The first is called 'radical geography', which in the 1980s moved from conceiving space as an effect of the social – that is, only as a social construction – to understanding it as produced and producing of the social. Therefore, space was framed as a relevant category to understand social change. The second is a feminist approach, which argues that dichotomies, such as space vs. time and male vs. female, which are constructed as a positive and a negative pole (A/Not-A dichotomies) are constitutive parts of ideologies, which contribute to sustaining

power asymmetries between groups by not allowing to think about alternative forms of social order. They only allow thinking about order vs. disorder. The need, then, is to overcome the time/space dichotomy in order to produce different forms of understanding. Massey's final approach comes from physics, emphasizing the need to understand space as interrelated with time rather than as separate, and both as existing in their actuality in the interrelations of objects: "it is not that the interrelations between objects occur *in* space and time; it is these relationships themselves which *create/define* space and time" (Massey, 1992, p. 75). On this point she is not disagreeing with Laclau, but rather pointing to some of Laclau's expressions, considered to be metaphorical or rhetorical, as slippages into a space vs. time dichotomy. Massey then proposes an understanding of space as space/time, that is, as interrelated with time and also as constructed by the interrelations of objects and interactions that exist at all scales. A further proposal that she then raises is of particular relevance to this work: she proposes a conception of space/time as ordered and chaotic. She mentions two views on space: Darby and Jameson's, who associate space with chaos as opposed to time, which is for them subject to be ordered through the coherence of narrative, and Laclau's, who associates it with an immutable order as opposed to time, which involves change. Her focus here is the use of dichotomies, and she proposes thinking of space/time as both chaotic and ordered.

This point is of special importance in this work, so I will pause to look at it in more depth. Massey presents the issue of order and chaos on two levels, one related to the ontology of space and the other to its representation. In relation to the first, she conceives of space as ordered, since she defines it as a set of phenomena arranged in a system, but also chaotic, since "for although the location of each (or a set) of a number of phenomena may be directly caused (we know why X is here and Y is there), the spatial positioning of one in relation to the other (X's location in relation to Y) may not be directly caused" (Massey, 1992, p. 81). It is the complexity of the interrelations that constitute space that make the position of each phenomenon relative to the independent operation of others.

Furthermore, these systems have mobile and stable elements. It is at this point where the term 'space/time' becomes more appropriate than 'space', since

movement involves both space and time. Sheller and Urry, by looking at the emergence of a 'mobilities paradigm' in the social sciences, provide a set of theoretical tools to study movement, which help expand the idea of space as a system or network. Firstly, they highlight the idea in the current literature that the material existence of the social is heterogeneous – they speak of 'sociotechnical systems' or 'hybrid geographies' composed of mobile human and non-human material (Sheller & Urry, 2006). This statement is similar to that of Massey presented above, by which space is considered both as constructed and producing of the social. Going a step further, they point to the fact that the social and the spatial are tightly connected and that both the human and the inhuman need to be looked at in the study of mobility and in the constitution of (mobile) spaces:

Networks are on occasions tightly coupled with complex, enduring, and predictable connections between peoples, objects, and technologies across multiple and distant spaces and times (Law, 1994, p. 24; Murdoch 1995, p. 745). Things are made close through these networked relations. Such assemblages extend not only to physical movement but to new forms of surveillances, what has been termed the 'surveillant assemblage'. (op. cit., p. 216)

An illustrative example of this is presented by one of the participants, B, who tells of how the practices employed by the *villa* inhabitants to hide their stigmatized identities have been made even more complex by the presence of journalists filming the neighbourhood with TV cameras<sup>22</sup>:

I don't feel that they [TV cameras] provide anything new; I don't think they provide anything good. On the contrary, I know people that had to walk around to avoid the cameras and not be filmed because their bosses would fire them if they knew they lived in a *villa*. I think that nobody considers that. There are many people that had to give a different address when applying for jobs in order to get one. So, if there is a camera of any TV channel and you are filmed walking in the *villa*, and your boss sees you [on TV], then you'll have to invent eight thousand stories. 'I went to visit such and such...'

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<sup>22</sup> B is referring to journalists who go to *villas* to film the everyday life of these neighbourhoods in order to produce news for TV channels or to film documentaries. These are not surveillance cameras, but they broadcast the images of individuals who live in *villas*, individuals who in many cases hide their place of residence. So, they expose an aspect of their identity which they want to hide.



They don't realize that they harm you. I understand when they come to cover something that has actually happened, so they come to cover the news. But the great majority come, they don't have a story to cover, and end up filling space with something about the *villa*. And you see your neighbours, your relatives, having to change their route to avoid certain places because the cameras are there... It's not good. But it's not good because it's wrong having to lie about your address in the first place. It's like a chain: you said that you had your address in another place, you try not to be seen there, and when the cameras are there you try to go as fast as you can so they don't catch you. There always end up being cameras in the neighbourhood. (B's *testimonio*)

"It is like a chain..." of unintended consequences in an assemblage of objects and people where cameras capture the images of people passing by and these are transmitted to the TVs of their bosses who see them unexpectedly, opening the possibility for the emergence of fear, surveillance and suspicion, which then lead to an interrogation of the neighbour-worker. The *villa* as stereotype then is put into play in a set of existing relationships between the boss, the employee, the institution, etc., and disrupts them, allowing for the expulsion of the employee from the job.

The intensification of the complexity of surveillance finds its reflection also in the practices of the residents to elude them and an even more careful 'impression management' (Goffman, 1971). It also shows the fragility of social boundaries, such as the division between workplace and home (or work relations and personal relations), as well as the fragility of the connections that constitute these assemblages, since although the TV transmission is fairly stable, the capturing of a resident's body by the TV camera and the reception of the image by their boss are very fragile connections that take place in space/time. However, they give rise to embodied practices and skills in the residents.

Moving on to Massey's comments on space/time and representation, she seeks to establish the same complexity in terms of the nature of the knowledge produced on the basis of the categories of space and time, mounting a critique of the dualist view of them at another level. She quotes H.C. Darby as follows:

A series of geographical facts is much more difficult to present than a sequence of historical facts. Events follow one another in time in an inherently dramatic fashion that makes juxtaposition in time easier to convey through the written word than juxtaposition in space. Geographical description is inevitably more difficult to achieve successfully than is historical narrative. (Darby 1962, quoted in Massey, 1992, p. 82)

Having addressed the complexity of space she then describes how Darby's views on time and narrative have been challenged (see Hyvärinen Hyden et al., 2010). I acknowledge that the stories that I draw on are speech acts within which coherence is disrupted. I have mentioned in the Introduction that I have decided to traduce the text of the interviews into a written form that keeps marks of the orality of the speech act; I have thus decided to present those disruptions in the *testimonios*. In that sense I consider *testimonios* to be partially coherent, having both coherences and incoherences. I conceive of neither space nor time as necessarily coherent, instead considering both as juxtapositions without logical connections.

At this point I would like to link the complexity of space, time and space/time to the principles of Foucault's genealogy outlined in the first chapter of this (non-)thesis. I presented an analysis of 'descent' and of 'emergence' as methodologies and ontological grounds. The first of these notions understands identities as networks of marks, the second refers to the study of the present as the struggle of incommensurable forces that takes place on a 'stage' which sets the conditions for the struggle. Before using Massey to apply Foucault's concepts to conceptualize space, some comments need to be made. In particular, Massey (op. cit., p. 79) mounts a critique of the following statement of Foucault:

We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skin. (Foucault, 1986, p. 22)

This quote coheres with the perspective that Foucault presents in *Genealogy, History, Nietzsche* when talking about the study of descent, and also in his

Introduction to the diary of Herculine Barbin (see above). In relation to the sphere of the study of descent, he proposes to dissect the associations between the different elements that construct identities. This method is also analogous to the idea of writing 'histories of the present', which question the production of the present conditions of existence in history rather than question history using present forms of thinking. The issue that Massey points to is how the present is understood, arguing against a reading that conceives of it as a static order. From her perspective, Foucault's view of space is too static. However, when reading Foucault I return to his idea of power as existing in the actions of individuals in relation to the actions of others, that is, a notion of power which is inherently dynamic. In the same vein, his notion of 'emergence' is relational, since it focuses on the entrance of struggling forces onto a stage. Therefore, the object of study, the emergence, is constituted by the stage as the condition of possible existences in relation to the forces that intervene and the distance that separates them. So, when reading Foucault through the lens of the Agamben-Laclau discussion and the literature on mobilities I will look at the dynamism present in the actual constitution of the objects of study addressed. Rather than understanding them as already constituted, I will understand them as being in the process of becoming. As Sheller and Urry (2006) mention, this involves looking at the immobile as well as the mobile flows of objects, images, information, etc.

At this point I should also note that Foucault's notion of emergence is more complex than Massey's notion of space, adding another element to the networks that constitute space/time. This is the distance that separates forces, objects and individuals. The notion of network recognizes associations but not disassociations. Foucault's notion of emergence acknowledges the distance produced by a set of conditions in which forces operate. In a note on power he says:

...power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and that constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or, on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions that isolate them from each other; and, lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional

crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in various social hegemonies. (Foucault 1979, pp. 92-93 quoted in Jessop, 2012, p. 19)

This passage would require extended reflections to be deployed fully, but I would only like to mention that this introduces a new element for consideration in space/time. Foucault mentions force relations, processes that these relations go through, strategies in which they take effect. These elements are covered by what I have presented above in Massey's work in 'mobilities' theories. But he also talks about something that exists beyond the notion of 'system', which is the separation and isolation of elements occurring on the basis of the disjunctions and contradictions of elements that support one another. His definition of the idea of distance and separation is not incompatible with that of the system, since the system involves distances, separations, and isolations, provided that there also are relationships of support between the elements that constitute each other. So, in this case, it is not a question of working against the idea of space/time, but of making it more complex.

### Dirt

Having presented some basic tools to understand space/time I will now move to another concept which links the notions of *villas* as Camp and *villas* as abject. By making these connections in theory I am trying to bridge the distance between social (dis)order and the subject. By the end of this journey I will have attempted to understand *villas* as places where inhabitants are produced as abject. I have so far looked at the notion of space in order to observe the material effects of power, and I will now move to apply this complex notion to understand the production of classifications which organize the social and produce subjects as abject. In order to do this I will first look at Mary Douglas' (1966) work on 'dirt' as a tool to understand the production of social order through the distribution of matter in space. I will then look at the notion of 'abject' drawing on Julia Kristeva (1982) and Judith Butler (2011) to examine the production of subjects that takes place in this distribution of matter in space. Mary Douglas' notion of 'dirt' as 'matter out of place' was reaffirmed and deployed by Julia Kristeva in her conceptualization of the abject, so these pieces of literature feed and have fed each other. The conceptualization of space that I have highlighted above poses many questions as to how to understand Mary Douglas' work, and it is to these questions that I shall now turn.

Mary Douglas's fundamental insight can be summed up as follows: "Dirt is essentially disorder (...) There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder" (Douglas, 2002, p. 2). She later adds that "reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death" (p. 5). She defines dirt as 'matter out of place', that is, as being constituted by its subversion of a social order rather than by a polluting nature. Her work has been a landmark in the theory of anomaly, by which society is ordered by systems of classifications that separate the normal from the anomalous. The question then is how normality is produced – I have touched on this when presenting Foucault's and Agamben's notions of power. In Douglas' theory these systems find their origin in an innate drive of the human mind for an ordered cognitive system (Duschinsky & Lampitt, 2012, p. 1994). However, several objections have been raised to Douglas' theory of purity and impurity, which she acknowledged. A first issue is that the theory works on the assumption that "society is a unitary whole, and the assumption that there exists a unitary 'ordering' mechanism within the human mind" (op. cit. 2012, p. 1995). Taking into account the complexity and fragility of the networks that constitute space and the social, locating the boundary that separates what is in place and what is out of place becomes a problem. But also, as Duschinsky and Lampitt (2012) note, these assumptions rest on another assumption, which is that representations of the social order reflect the social order. Both of these assumptions have been criticized, the first for not acknowledging the diversity of systems of classification operating in societies and the latter for assuming a linear and unmediated relationship between categorical systems and social phenomena. Duschinsky and Lampitt look to Bourdieu for responses to these assumptions, considering the discourses that represent social order as diverse, produced, deployed and operating in the construction of the social order. In this sense, the idea of a unity both in society and in its representation is put into question, and the production of the pure and the impure is considered in its complexity. This perspective coheres with Foucault's genealogical project, presented in Chapter 3, in which he proposes a form of knowledge understood as a social action that troubles understandings that refer to underlying teleological or essential forces for the explanation of social emergences. On this basis, I refer to Massey and Sheller and Urry to understand these 'discourses' or representations in their materiality, as objects that are part of the network of objects that constitute space/time.

The problem of locating the classifications that constitute social orders in society remains unanswered. I will seek these boundaries, specifically the one that separates the *villa* and the city, in the concreteness of the empirical, looking at the stories gathered. In this section I attempt to look at how *villas* are produced as abject and, in their material, embodied and symbolic forms (e.g., as an address in a CV), constitute “deeply discrediting marks” (Goffman, 1968) which are put into play in the networks of space/time. I am working on the assumption that *villas* are produced through bio-power (Agamben, 1998) as separated from the city and in particular conditions that have effects on subjects. Below I present a testimonial paradigm which describes the intervention of the ‘*villa*’ in space/time; I will then move to conceptualizing the production of the abject.

*When [the restaurant] was busy the cook that lived in my neighbourhood brought kids from the neighbourhood like me to work with him. That's how I started working with him. One day a pair of trainers disappeared. So, all of the workers from the 'villa' were pointed at and they started saying, 'They are 'negros, they are thieves', bla bla bla. You feel bad because they put everyone in the same bag; they make you feel pointed at. That's when mistrust begins. With small things, like the mobile phone or... I feel that I am honest enough for you to give me your wallet, ask me to keep it and I'll keep it safe until you ask for it. That's how I feel. And you feel bad when someone points at you, when they put you in the same bag because of an idiot that...whatever. So that's when it started...*

*Yes, so they put everyone in the same bag even though I had been working with them for a long time. Before the incident they used to take me to the office to bring papers to sign: 'Go to the third floor', 'Go to the sixth floor and have this signed'. Until one day they asked me to bring a paper to the office and they told me, 'No, don't come in, stay at the door'. That was obviously not nice. I felt really bad. I was used to going to the office, sitting down for a while until the papers got signed – the girls had their mobile phones there in the office, their things, their purses – until one day, 'No, stay there at the door'. I felt terrible and that's when I decided that I would quit even if I would be unemployed.*

“That's when mistrust begins. With small things, like the mobile phone...” The speaker, whom I will call C, provides us with an analysis in his testimony which could

be that of an ethnographer. Unfortunately the pace of his speech and my own lack of awareness during the interview meant no expansion of his analysis was elicited. He was talking about discrimination for being a *villero* in his workplace, talking about the emergence of a new status quo whereby *villa* inhabitants were restricted in their access to certain spaces and colleagues would stop trusting them. He begins his story with the event of the disappearance of a pair of trainers, which significantly changed the set of relationships between individuals, objects, building. Previous to the event, workers that lived in the *villa* were known to live there and were identifiable, but in his story this mark did not have effects until the disruptive event. The disappearance of the trainers activated this mark and resulted in the establishment of a boundary that separated those who were marked by the *villa* from a set of objects and places. This boundary existed in 'small things, like the mobile phone...', in objects considered valuable which he was not supposed to be near to.

But C's narrative also tells of the production of distance and isolation after a significant change in the workplace. As I have mentioned above, it is my aim to look at the connections between objects but also at the production of distance and isolation. In this sense, parts of the system remained the same, such as the employer-employee contract, binding both parties to an exchange of labour and salary. But on the basis of these and other relationships which brought together and supported the system of the restaurant, other connections disappeared. Places were redefined with a new set of norms which threatened the presence of *villeros*, resulting in their physical segregation. Objects considered to be valuable were also separated from them. The relationships between individuals that were supported by these objects and places, by their co-presence or 'meetingness' (Urry, 2004, p. 116) in particular places like the boss' office, disappeared when *villeros* were denied entrance to these places. This distance is what in Mary Douglas' framework would be the boundary that produces dirt, that divides 'matter in place' from 'matter out of place'. This boundary is shifting, contingent and also subject to the interpreter of the boundary, since its identification is produced by an act of interpretation. Those acts of interpretation are also effects of and have effects on space/time. I only refer here to C's interpretation, which finds expression in both the transcription of this text and his decision to quit his job. I am assuming that there is a correlation between what he says and what he

did; I am analysing his story as if it tells the truth of what happened in order to think about the set of relations which I am trying to conceptualize and interpret.

C's story ends with his resignation from the restaurant job. There is a process and condition taking place here which I aim to address next, which is abjection. But there is also C's disconnection from the system and the separations produced in the system of the restaurant. He left a position of abjection (Popkewitz, 2013, p. 452), living within the boundaries of the system, not entirely 'in place' in his workplace but still within the system, to one of absolute exclusion. This meant his complete separation from the network of relations that constituted the restaurant as a workplace and himself as an employee. The continuation of his story of his complete exclusion from the restaurant can then be told in the context of other systems of relations (such as the one revolving around my PhD). Although in this case my research project is enabling of telling this story, it is also the case that some stories escape my reach or are silenced within my project. I presented these limits when looking at D's story in a previous chapter.

I will now move on to address the condition to which C was subjected after the disappearance of the pair of trainers. I will attempt to conceptualize it as 'abjection', the condition of being neither included nor excluded, but in between.

### Abjection

The notion of abjection was developed by Julia Kristeva in her work *The Powers of Horror* (1982). The notion elaborates the deployment of the boundary as a tool to understand the social, also drawing on Mary Douglas' work. However, at the same time it can be used to problematize the boundary by reflecting on that which is in between, which exists on the border. Above I have mentioned some of the literature that looks into the complexity of the constitution of what is named as the 'social', 'space', and 'time', and the interrelated nature of these notions, addressing the difficulties in drawing clear boundaries that separate social relationships. In this way I have attempted to 'use and trouble' (Lather, 2012; Ball, 2014) the 'boundary', deploying it in the interpretation of a story but also raising the issues inherent in its use. I will now attempt to do the same but in a different way, drawing on Kristeva.

In *The Powers of Horror* Kristeva says



It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4)

The abject, according to Kristeva, is neither subject nor object. The 'I' confronts the abject in the same way that it confronts any object. It is different and separated from itself. But in the abject the I finds no meaning with which it can relate. The abject is abandoned by the I in an act of loss which sustains the life of the I. In this way the abject is that which is eliminated from within. Kristeva illustrates the abject as defecation, vomit, sweat, involving an act of extrication that takes place in "...territories, languages, works..." (1982, p. 8). The I constantly draws and redraws boundaries in the diverse dimensions in which it exists, since the space that the I occupies is "catastrophic". It is a space/time in constant movement, and in which there are "ashes of oblivion" of the abject which was eliminated in the past but also the time of thunder, the 'burst of abject'. The I which produces the abject – the 'deject' – is therefore astray, involved in a continuous act of separation which sustains and saves it, in a constant production of Otherness in individuals, objects, territories.<sup>23</sup>

Kristeva's concept is about the boundaries of the life and physical existence of the I. Butler reads Kristeva in the framework of Douglas' understanding of the body as a construct in which boundaries are produced and instituted by taboos. Thus, Kristeva's notion of the abject becomes a deployment of the idea of the boundary to reflect on the production of a particular subject through exclusion. Butler reads in Kristeva's work a connection between the body and social control, a conceptualization of the materiality of the liminality between the interiority and exteriority of the body, and a function of the production of Otherness:

What constitutes through division the 'inner' and 'outer' worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control. The boundary between the inner and outer is confounded by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are

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<sup>23</sup> The subject who experiences the abject.

accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit. (Butler, 2011, p. 10)

So, the boundary of the body is a fragile element and condition of the exercise of social control over subjects, and its limit is designated by the matter or fluids that permeate this constructed boundary. These therefore constitute the limit between the 'inner' and the 'outer' and it is the extrication of the I from this limit that sustains it. However, the abject, the limit, is not an object that the I can relate to but a 'jettisoned object' (Kristeva, 1982), meaningless, excluded and repulsed matter.

But the point that Butler makes, moving beyond the sphere of the I, is that the separation of the I from the abject in itself is a function of the production of Otherness. So, this function of identity-differentiation intervenes in the subjection of individuals to abject positions. Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008, p. 234) understand the abject similarly as

an 'uninhabitable' subject position, eliciting shame and disgust that must be cast outside the sense of self and identity.

From this perspective, the abject can be seen as a subject position that does not provide a subjectivity. Echoing Kristeva, it is a site of meaninglessness. The I is the limit of the subject.

Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008, p. 234) argue that the abject does not only constitute the separation of the body, the limits of the acceptable, but that it also incites desires to produce an 'own' self. In this way, they look at the technologies that are available to individuals for managing the repulsion of the abject in the production of their own selves.

## C

We could interpret C's story as one of abjection and his refusal of that position. In his story C says that at a certain point the relationships that constituted his workplace suffered a sudden change when a pair of trainers were reported to have gone missing. All of the employees who lived in *villas* were separated from certain spaces of the building and a distance with other individuals and their belongings was established and sustained. At the level of space/time, there was a rearrangement of people and objects in a new network of relationships, forces and distances. However, that rearrangement did not only take place in the material dimension, but

also in the psychological. There was a production of repulsion, fear and processes of identity-differentiation. In those processes, some workers extricated themselves from the abject, which were those tainted by *villas*. It is worth raising the question of whether that taint would also have been tainting. That is, if a worker who did not live in a *villa* had remained close to those who did live there, would the taint have been passed on in the form of 'courtesy stigma'? (Goffman, 1968) Would the tainted have become abject as well? The notion of the abject position is helpful in this sense since it does not only apply to the mark of stigma, but also to the position within a set of relationships. This position is both social and geographical, as I have explored above. As C mentions, he was separated geographically in relation to objects and made to occupy a position that was 'uninhabitable'. He was expelled to the limits of the organization he worked for as an individual that contaminated that organization and therefore threatened its functioning. Again, the definition of the terms of contamination was the product of a specific arrangement of elements in the constitutive network of relationships at the restaurant where he worked. Under the narrative of the abject, his resignation makes sense, since he was subjected to an uninhabitable position, separated from the relationships that constituted his worker identity and abandoned. However, this framework leaves room for further interpretation. Was the success of the new order sustained at the workplace? Were there acts of resistance?

## Conclusion

This chapter has been an attempt to make sense of the story told by C using two concepts – 'dirt' and 'abjection'. The notion of dirt opens up possibilities for reflection on the social arrangement of individuals, objects and relationships, and the notion of abjection opens up possibilities for reflecting on subjectivity. I have attempted to think of the second in relation to the first, drawing on the idea of the 'position' of abjection, which refers to the subjective condition of occupying the place of the abject in social relations. In using both of these concepts I have tried to use and problematize the idea of the 'boundary' as a tool of analysis. The exercise has not resulted in a dismissal of the value of using boundaries, but rather an acknowledgement of the importance of contemplation of the complexity inherent in social divisions, in this case social exclusion. I have used Mary Douglas' notion of dirt in the light of Doreen Massey's concept of 'space/time', which provides a

perspective that considers the interconnectedness and dynamism of the social world, troubling the idea of clear-cut divisions or exclusions. 'Abjection' focuses on the space of liminality, conceiving of it as a condition in itself rather than only a sign of a separation. Both notions, therefore, problematize the notion of 'boundary', opening up further possibilities for interpretation.

The aim of this exercise is to use and discuss theoretical tools to interpret a testimony that I conceive of as a 'paradigm', drawing on Agamben (2009). The fragment that I have edited and presented can be considered as a singular symbolic construct that has the potential to be related to other similar singularities (be they a story, a speech act or an action) in terms of its content through analogy. The analysis produced through the exercises of interpretation and the theoretical discussions developed potentially contribute to the analysis of other, similar phenomena. These analyses are produced on the basis of the testimony as paradigm, not on any real subject. However, I have made efforts to produce the testimony such that it is realistic, since it is through that realism that it may be expected to have potential for analogy, and that the analysis may thus be considered useful. The testimony is not considered to be a production of truth, but a production of a 'truth effect' (Lather, 2000).

The underlying issue on which this chapter is based is the question of the conceptualization of exclusion. In looking at *villas* I have explored the idea of the Camp (Agamben, 1999) as one way of thinking about exclusion not as abandonment but as a produced and sustained condition of abandonment by sovereign power. I find this concept useful because the idea of complete separation from the State and society does not stand up to either an ethnographic or any empirical gaze. There are, for example, effective forms of health provision, policing, schooling, etc., operating in *villas*, even though on first observation the conditions of life appear different to those in any other formal neighbourhood.

A key point in the notion of the Camp is that it is located in space. I have then attempted to work with a basic notion of space as space/time, which allows us to think of space and the social as interconnected categories. One criticism that Laclau made of Agamben's idea of the Camp is that it does not allow thinking about the possibilities of political struggle in contesting the rules and norms of the Camp. The

idea of space/time provides a framework that includes both the physical distribution of matter but also how it is affected and how it affects the social relations that take place within it. In this way, space is both social and political. 'Space/time', then, is a concept that is helpful for linking Agamben's and Laclau's ideas.

Having established this theoretical basis I have considered Mary Douglas' notion of 'dirt' as a tool to locate and trace social exclusion. The presence and relation of subjects to dirt can be used to reflect on the relation of the speakers of the *testimonios* to institutions, groups, individuals, etc. Mary Douglas conceptualized 'dirt' as 'matter out of place', a notion which finds its basis in Durkheim's theory of anomaly, which distinguishes between the normal and the anomalous. Following Foucault, I consider anomalies to be a production of power. Furthermore, drawing on Agamben, I consider some anomalies to exist in a state of exception where sovereign power sustains a condition of abandonment, and that the *villa*, in many ways exists in this state of exception. I consider 'dirt' as matter that transgresses the social order but which is also produced and sustained in that specific condition by power. Using Foucault's notion of 'emergence' alongside the notion of space/time, my conclusion understands the production of the 'dirty' as sustained but contingent isolations and separations within the 'sociotechnical systems' that constitute space/time. When looking at C's story, I conceive of his body as becoming 'out of place' in certain areas of his workplace because of his being a *villero*. The restaurant where he worked became divided into places he was allowed to access and places he was not, the same happening with people and objects, from which he became separated. In that sense, he became an abandoned, jettisoned object. In other words, he became abject.

I have then examined the notion of the 'position of abjection' in order to consider the subjective processes that take place in the condition of being separated, of being positioned at the margins of a system of relations, the workplace in C's case. I find the notion of abjection of special interest, since it problematizes the idea of a clear boundary between the I and the Other. The paradigm of the Camp conceives of the human condition of abandonment as the product of the function of sovereign power to assert itself; similarly, the notion of abjection conceives of the jettisoned abject (of matter or subjects) as the product of the function of self-identification of the I to assert itself. I use this notion to introduce the dimension of subjectivity in relation to

social order. I use the term 'position of subjection' (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008) to relate a subjective condition to a position within a set of relations in space/time. The aim is to establish a point of entry to thinking about the experience of being placed at the borders of institutions or networks of relations, neither excluded nor included, neither subject nor object – abject.

To sum up, in this chapter I have attempted to conceptualize the condition of exclusion of *villeros* in the city by using the story of C's segregation in his workplace. This story is put forward as an example, which could have similarities with other stories in other contexts. I have attempted to discuss a model of exclusion which draws a line between inclusion/exclusion, order/disorder, normal/anomaly, by introducing the ideas of mobile networks and abjection, in the framework of understanding exclusion as a produced and sustained condition. These ideas allow us to think the social as constituted by networks of human and inhuman elements connected through relations that constitute 'sociotechnical systems'. The idea of a boundary between the included and the excluded thus becomes problematic, since the boundary becomes mobile and relative to the interdependent positions of the elements that constitute these networks of relations. The idea of abjection, on the other hand, considers the site of liminality as a condition in itself, blurring but not eliminating the border between inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. The aim of this chapter has been to provide commentaries on exclusion that do not slip into disabling any distinction between the included and the excluded, but which address the interconnectedness of the social world. I have considered this interconnectedness in relation to material physical proximity as well as in relation to the functions of production of the excluded, such as self-identification (in the case of abjection) and the reassertion of sovereign power (in the case of the Camp). In this way, *villas* and *villeros* are not excluded but produced and sustained as an abandoned Other. It is through that act of the abandonment of the Other that the identities of 'normal' citizens, and the norm in institutions and, on a larger scale, the State, are preserved.

## Appendix 5 – continuation of Appendix 4

*In our previous meeting we talked a little bit about what people said about your neighbourhood at the university. We talked about your classmates, which is what you were telling me now. You also mentioned your teachers. That had... I thought it was very interesting what you said. Let's talk about the teachers. [We laugh.]*

The thing about the teachers is very strange. I had teachers that were the best thing that happened to me... In first year we had an introductory module in which we had to hand in a newspaper article every week. They taught us how to write an editorial, then the next week you had to hand in the texts. And I, unlike my classmates, hadn't gone to a high school with a language orientation, so it was very hard for me to do it, or to do what the teachers wanted. However, I remember that I told the teachers that I was finding it hard. Two of the teachers sent me extra assignments by email, so I had the class homework, plus what they were giving me to practise. That really helped me. I still talk to them nowadays and they're always there for me. Sometimes they send me an email asking how I'm doing, if I need anything, those kinds of things. I told one of them that I lived in a *villa* and they were always very aware, 'Do you need anything?', asking me how I was doing with the assignments, what I was finding difficulties with, how to present the assignments... In that sense it was great for me to have them as teachers – the fact that they were there, the fact that they were sending me work via email and everything, to me it was... It was very good and even better to have them in my first year. I knew that I was having difficulties with the course; their module was the basis of the whole course of studies, so it was very good to have them, to have their interest in me, their questions. That was very good. I then had other modules, classes where I didn't want to go, like Methodology.

*Let's talk about Methodology. [We laugh.]*

In Methodology we had three parts; it was a module that was divided into three: Surveys, SPSS, which I didn't find very hard, and Theory. That's probably what I found most difficult. But the problem was that I didn't like the way of explaining, the

way of teaching. There was no way I could like that class. I felt that the teacher had to be broader, to explain it somehow, it was... She had a very narrow mind; she didn't realize that she was talking to nineteen or twenty-year-olds. She was saying things that weren't like that. The thing with hypotheses... The hypotheses she gave were always about the *villa* or the conurbation of Buenos Aires. Things like, 'A kid who lives in a *villa* has more chance of being a criminal than one who lives in an area...' in a private area. Or, 'The kid from the conurbation is much more...' 'In the conurbation there's much more drug and crime than in the City of Buenos Aires'. Things like that. And you know that it's not like that. Actually, I think that that's not based on surveys; I don't think that things are as her hypotheses said. I think that in a way she led students to believe that. Because when you're a kid you have your teacher as a referent, so if you listen to your teacher saying those things, I don't know... Even when she talked about the steps to carry out a survey, 'When carrying out surveys you have to have in mind the place where you'll go, look at...'; the fact that she gives the example, 'I once carried out a survey in a poor neighbourhood, in a *villa*, but I did it several years ago; now it's different, if you go to a villa watch out, because you might not get out'. Those are comments that are out of place. She might not have realized, but she's managing a group of students that still don't know some things. When you're eighteen, nineteen, you don't know many things. If they tell you those things, you'll think in that way. Even more if you live in a gated neighbourhood or community. I had many classmates who lived in gated neighbourhoods, and the closest that they'd been to a *villa* was driving along the motorway<sup>24</sup>. So, it's not good for her to say that.

*Yes, better for them to have another approach to the neighbourhood...*

Yes.

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<sup>24</sup> Some *villas* are next to motorways.



*How should the approach be...? So, you had the situation in which the villa as an idea was brought up in the classroom. One question would be: is it good for it to be brought up? And the other, if the answer is yes, how? But let's talk about the first...*

Should it be brought up? Yes, I think it should be mentioned. Even more in a course like the one I'm doing. If you study journalism you need to have an idea of what reality is like. And the *villa* is an Argentinian reality. It's impossible to ignore it. It's good that it's mentioned. It's good to talk about it. The issue is the place from where you talk about it. You can approach it from different places. If you want to do a research on drugs, the *villa* will of course come up. We, living in a *villa*, know about it. But, if you talk about drugs or crime, don't generalize. If you talk about it, talk about drugs in particular, not about the *villa* or, 'People from the *villa* consume drugs or are related to drugs'. Yes, there are drugs in the *villa*, people sell there and people consume there, but talk about it in particular. The same with crime and so many other things that they say. They obviously exist. We, living there, know about it and won't say 'No, nothing happens'. It happens. But the problem is when they generalize. And I think that the good thing about studying is that you can open your mind. That's the value of having the possibility of studying. Opening your mind. When I left high school, I told you, I thought that all the posh kids lived in Tupperware. And thanks to the fact that I continued studying and having the possibility to know new people who thought differently from me, I could realize that things weren't as I thought. So, I think it's good to talk about it, to talk about the *villa*, talk about disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In any area, but even more in journalism. Because I think that nowadays they don't know how to treat the topic of the *villa*. You end up watching documentaries on Channel 2 where they say that it's a documentary on the *villa* and, oh coincidence, they put the cameras in the sector where there is most mess. And the only thing they showed was how the youth of the *villa* beat each other up. Obviously, if you put the camera in that sector, that's what you'll show. I think that, basically, the problem is that they don't know how to deal with the topic of the *villa* at the university.

*Not expecting you to have an answer, but do you have any suggestions, ideas, intuitions on how you think they should talk about the villa at the university? Given the fact that teachers do? Not that you have to have a definitive idea; I don't want to put you in that situation of having to speak, just asking if you have any intuition. If you don't it's fine. It's a complex question.*

I don't know if they should address the topic in a particular module, but there are subjects like the social sciences, theories, where I think they could talk about it. You have subjects such as Social Theory where they talk about the different authors and what each one believes; in some of those theories you could talk about it. I would like to know what some of the teachers think. But always separating the theoretical thinking from critical thinking. I mean, I can stand up and give my opinion on the *villa* but without... I don't know how to explain it. Without intending to influence people. I think it's good to talk, to promote a debate; I'd like to listen to people who think differently. But it's very hard. I think that the teacher shouldn't do it if they're not prepared or don't know. It has to be someone who knows or that has at least set foot in the neighbourhood, been there, spoken to people. Not a lecturer that has read about it. Books say many things, the news reports say many things, and it's not useful for me to have a lecturer that speaks from the point of view of the books or the news. If you speak, it has to be about something that you know. And if you pretend to listen to opinions, you have to be able to manage a classroom with different points of view.

I remember the event of the hypothesis because...you can hypothesize on thousands of things; I didn't think it was necessary to make a hypothesis on the *villa*, on the conurbation, on the behaviour of people. Because I think that everything that has to do with human beings is difficult to hypothesize, because human behaviour is difficult to understand. So, I didn't think it was necessary to make a hypothesis about the people of the *villa* or the kids that smoke and that because of smoking are more likely to commit crimes. I didn't think it was necessary; you have many other examples and you have many other things about which you can make a hypothesis. But the comment on the survey bothered me much more; don't say 'If you go to the *villa* you might not get out'.

*If you were in her place, conducting a survey and inviting your classmates to the neighbourhood, how would you...?*

I don't know how I would do it, but I think that I never thought about it either. Telling them...that anywhere in Argentina, Buenos Aires, there is crime and there are robberies, so if you go, watch out and do not behave like a tourist, don't go with a huge camera where you have a bunch of guys who will want to steal from you. But beyond that... You know that it's the same even when you walk along 9 de Julio Avenue. Watch your belongings, but that's all. It's for precaution, it's not that if you go to the *villa* you won't get out. Even more in a *villa* like mine, where you have exits everywhere. I don't even know how to say it! But I would tell them that it's not the way they picture it in the news, that it's not all crime. Anyway, I'm against TV cameras in the neighbourhood. I don't like them.

Continues in Appendix 6

## 9. Using waste

In the previous chapters I have presented B's paradigmatic *testimonio* and introduced Mary Douglas' notion of 'dirt' in order to think about the connections between space and socially constructed classifications in the production of the dirty. In B's story there is a 'dirty' character who enters the stage, and, following Mary Douglas, "where there is dirt there is a system" (Hawkins, 2006, p. 2), I intend to produce interpretations of the social based on the presence of that character.

This character is a *cartonero*<sup>25</sup>, a scavenger. Actually, it is any *cartonero* or *cartonera*, since B does not specify the exact moment when she sees the person delving into the garbage of the restaurants near her university. It does not matter who s/he is; the details of the moment when she sees the scavenger are unimportant too, since for her, s/he is a defining element of an institution – her university. However, she is not attempting to reflect on the place in itself, but rather defining the place in relation to her own experience of it. So, the scavenger is not the defining element of the setting per se, but the defining element of the setting as it is related to B. B is a part of the setting she is describing. So, her description speaks as much about her as it does about the setting. What I intend in this section is to produce a reading of this paradigmatic *testimonio* interpreting B and the set of relationships that she is part of, and to discuss the theoretical tools used.

The previous section described the difficulties of using Mary Douglas' (1966) notion of 'dirt' alongside the Foucauldian principles presented in Chapter 1. I have drawn on Douglas' definition of dirt as 'matter out of place', and then looked at the dynamism and complexity of Massey's notion of 'space/time', which make the limits between 'matter in place' and 'matter out of place' difficult to define. Massey and the current literature on mobilities use the idea of the network to conceptualize space/time, using notions such as 'socio-technical systems'. Their method focuses on the

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<sup>25</sup> This is a colloquial term used in Argentina to refer to informal collectors of waste material. This type of informal work often involves the collection as well as the cleaning, classification, and separation of the material to be sold to recycling agents. 'Cartoneros' also collect things for personal use, such as clothes or food. So, they produce both exchange value (material sold for recycle) and use value (material for personal use) out of disposed-of material – waste. Their work and living conditions are extremely precarious and risky. (Perelman, 2008, pp. 119–120)

interconnectedness and dependency of the diverse elements that constitute space/time. Space is thus contingent and positions are mobile and subject to the movement of the various material elements (be they human beings, objects, or technologies) that constitute socio-technical systems.

## Waste

When considering the notion of 'waste' within this framework, it is difficult to reach a definition. I am going to make reference to two challenges. The first is the attempt to define waste without reference to the abstract concept of 'value', and the second is the challenge of understanding waste as a positive rather than as a negative concept. The second challenge is also related to the broader concern of this study in dealing with the risks of using/producing research categories that construct individuals as abject (Ball, 2013; Popkewitz, 2013).

In relation to the first challenge, I draw on the current literature on waste, which engages with making sense of its materiality. I resort to materiality due to my discomfort with the abstract and generalizing categories which impose themselves on the complexity of what they name. I have developed this in my Methodology, drawing on Foucault and his proposal for 'effective history':

Effective history...shortens its vision to those things nearest to it – the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies; it unearths the periods of decadence, and if it chances upon lofty epochs, it is with the suspicion – not vindictive but joyous – of finding a barbarous and shameful confusion (Foucault & Rabinow, 1991, p. 89)

I would describe this as a 'dirty history', one that does not restrict itself to the clear boundaries of distant abstract concepts but that dares to see the surrounding matter out of place, the in-betweenness of the abject, the contingency of the interdependent relationships that constitute individuals and space/time. In this sense, looking at materiality is a way of accessing concrete 'messiness'. However, as I will consider later, this does not mean a disavowal of abstraction, but rather uses it to acknowledge the emergence of that which is out of place or hidden.

I will draw on the principles presented in the previous section based on Doreen Massey as well as on Mary Douglas' views on the cultural meanings of dirt. Dirt is different from waste, although authors such as Hawkins (2006) at points conflate both

notions. I will now deal with the issue of definition and present a framework by which distinguishing the two concepts is not necessarily meaningful.

I will look at 'dirt' and 'waste' as concrete productions in space/time, beginning the discussion with a fragment from Gregson and Crang's editorial to an issue of *Environment and Planning* dedicated to waste:

...the different incarnations of waste can be used to suggest the situational and relational character of the category 'waste'. Far from being fixed in advance, waste is seen as historically mutable, geographically contingent, and both expressive of social values and sustaining to them. (Gregson & Crang, 2010, p. 1027)

Note that these authors talk of 'incarnations of waste', making explicit the distinction between 'waste' as category and that which is considered waste. When I talk of waste, then, I will be talking of its incarnations – unless I state otherwise. Waste is defined in its relationships to other matter or individuals, which set its position within a network of socio-natural relationships (Castree, 2002, p. 134). These socio-natural systems are to be considered as existing in space/time (Massey, 1992), and therefore as contingent and mobile rather than fixed. Finally, the study of materiality is not divorced from the study of culture. Following Doreen Massey (1992, p. 75), I will understand material objects as produced through socio-cultural practices as well as conditioning them. In this sense, matter is not only considered as a social construction but also as a constitutive element of the social (thus, the notion of 'socio-nature' is more appropriate, since it acknowledges this mutual conditioning). Waste will therefore not only be understood through categories with passive and negative connotations (such as 'remainder', 'excess', etc.), but also as matter that positively intervenes in the constitution of socio-nature (Hawkins, 2003).

The search for materiality leads to a rethinking of the notion of waste defined as matter without exchange value. But I would like to emphasize the second challenge that I presented, since this constitutes a step further in my rethinking of the conceptualization of exclusion. I have begun by attempting to look at the boundary of the *villa*, both geographical and relational, making itself present in the taint of stigma. However, in the previous chapter I described some problems with the idea of boundary, highlighting the interconnectedness of socio-natural systems as well as

the in-betweenness of the position of the abject. So, the boundary becomes blurred in the complexity of space/time. Although I wanted to stress this complexity, I was still interested in acknowledging the distances that separate *villas* and their inhabitants from individuals, objects, and places. In this framework I thought about *villas* and *villeros* as produced and sustained by sovereign power and individuals as abandoned. My next move in terms of conceptualizing the distance that separates *villas* from other spaces will be away from thinking of *villas* in negative terms, drawing on the literature on waste. Thinking of the *villa* as the negative pole of a dichotomy contributes to its construction in a position of abjection (Popkewitz, 2013, p. 449), and, furthermore contributes to asserting the ‘positivity’ of the opposite pole of the dichotomy, ‘the normal city’. This same logic structures Agamben’s (1998) notion of the Camp and Kristeva’s (1982) idea of ‘abjection’. Both Agamben’s ‘Muselmann’ and Kristeva’s abjection are products that serve to reinforce that which produces them. Like dirt, waste is also constructed as the negative of ‘clean’. My intention now is to acknowledge this and attempt to think of waste, and of *villas*, as produced and constitutive of society rather than just the excess of those societies:

The task then, is to describe the specific ways in which shit has been deployed *practically* and politically to produce the positive... (Hawkins, 2003, p. 44)

I will present the notion of ‘regimes of waste’ to help understand waste not as excess but as a specific product. I will highlight the issues related to the use of the notion of ‘value’ to define waste. On the other hand, I will consider waste as matter that constitutes and produces society in particular ways. I will then look at *cartoneros*, scavengers, as disturbing, through the performance of their work, the construction of waste as excess, since they use waste and engage with it not as a negative (i.e., excess or abjection) but as a positive element.

## Conceptualizing waste

Value, as the labour time socially necessary to produce particular commodities, is the specific measure of wealth in capitalist societies. Capitalist wealth is not, therefore, measured in *material* terms – that is, as an accumulation of the qualitatively distinct properties of commodities as use values. Rather, it is measured in *social* terms – that

is, as an accumulation of the qualitatively similar ‘substance’ of commodities as exchange values. (Castree, 2002, p. 137)

Castree in his paper draws on Actor Network Theory and Marxism to think about the notion of value from a materialist perspective. He is referring to an abstract notion of capitalism, which he refers to as a “first-order approximation” of complex commodity networks. It is within this abstract notion that the category of waste as the excess of value is constructed. Value, then, is a “phantom-like” creation, a real abstraction. A materialist perspective thus needs to re-think the notion of value.

Gille draws on Castree’s critique to turn to conceptualizing waste. She argues that economic theory, since it has focused on the study of the production of value, has been blind to waste. She argues that the social sciences lack the tools to conceive of matter which is “routinely left unrealized – either as use or as exchange value” (Gille, 2010, p. 1024). In the current situation the category of waste therefore remains a “theoretical by-product”, a residue that is not used for the understanding of socio-natural relations. Following on from this, Gille uses the concept of “waste regimes” to describe a set of institutions which regulate its value, production and distribution (op.cit., p. 1056). This view is similar to Mary Douglas’ notion of dirt in the sense that both conceive of waste as a social construct. However, they are different in the sense that Douglas’ conceptualization relies on the premise of a “unitary ordering mechanism” (Duschinsky, 2013, p. 119) in relation to which matter can be ordered or transgressive, whilst Gille looks at the particular ways in which matter is produced as waste. Gille, therefore, does not understand waste as transgressive, but as a product. Following the same move towards a positive understanding of waste, I will draw on Hawkins, who thinks along the lines of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*.

As for the second challenge, to avoid representing and conceptualizing waste as the negative pole of a dichotomy, thus reinforcing the value of the opposite pole, I address this challenge within my concern with the politics of research and its social effects. As I have mentioned above, I do not consider this a thesis, a closed statement of truth, but rather an exercise and tool for the proliferation of thought. The aim at this stage is to seek a way to produce an understanding of waste – and therefore *villas* – dealing with the danger of fixing it in a position of abjection which reinforces its opposites, or the hierarchies in which it is set (Popkewitz, 2013, p. 449). The attempt I now highlight uses Foucault’s *History of Sexuality V.1* as a main



source, where he develops a notion of power as productive of life and sexuality rather than repressive, which he then calls bio-power. “For Foucault relations of bio-power depend not on the mere removal and evasion of the negative, but on its *active exploitation*” (Hawkins, 2003, p. 43). Hawkins then looks at the technologies of production and distribution, as does Gille, but also at the technologies for its removal. Drawing on Laporte (2002), it is in these technologies that he observes the “labour of the negative” of waste and how it is deployed “in the constitution of a modern ‘I’ that depends on new circuits of repression, shame and embarrassment”.

Laporte is interested in how shit became the negative reference for the individualized body and state reason. What the bourgeois subject and the state share is an inextricable connection to the fate of waste; their prestige and value depend on the basest of human products. (Hawkins, 2003, p. 46)

To sum up, I am moving from an understanding of waste which defines it in negative terms to one which looks at the processes of both its material production and the production of its negativity in relation to the State and individuals. I began by drawing on Castree’s critique of the notion of value, by which waste is a residue. I have drawn on Gilles idea of ‘waste regimes’ to acknowledge the intervention of technologies of production and distribution of waste, allowing us to think of waste as matter which is not only out of place, but also managed. Following this line, I moved further, I drew on Hawkins’ ideas, who considers waste not only as materially produced, but also as a negative production. Drawing on Laporte’s *History of Shit*, he considers the production of waste as a secret and private ‘matter’, as constitutive of the modern subject and State reason. What is at stake in the problem of conceptualizing waste is the relationship that is established with it by the writer and readers. It is an ethical problem. The danger, then, is continuing to reduce waste to secrecy and negativity in the activity of thinking about it, by turning it into what Castree calls a ‘theoretical by-product’. By thinking within this frame we are reinforcing the clean and pure matter and subjects. We are contributing to producing and sustaining matter and subjects in abject positions.

B

People were different downtown. I don't know how to say it. I didn't see sacrifice there. On the contrary, I saw the people going to work and maybe it was the very people from my neighbourhood, the ones who ended up being the *cartoneros* that collected the food that was being thrown away in the super restaurants nearby. So, it was very weird for me to be from my neighbourhood and to go to a university that I felt I had nothing to do with. I don't know... It is true that I have teachers that are very good and are working in the best newspapers of the country, but I felt that that wasn't my place. That's what struck me the most, because even though I am reserved and find it hard to start a conversation, at university it was twice as hard. So many times I ended up resigning to speak... I would go from eight in the morning to one in the afternoon and had not spoken a single word.

This is an extract from the *testimonio* of B, a student who lives in the *villa* and got a scholarship to study in a private university. Of the whole of her *testimonio* I have chosen this fragment to treat as a paradigm. I have made this choice based on the fact that she repeated the image of the *cartonero*, collecting garbage from the nearby restaurants. The repetition caught my attention and I have decided to pause and reflect on the meanings of this image.

The first time I read this fragment I searched for an identification of the boundary between waste and good with the boundary between the *villa* and the city. The only evident presence of the *villa* in the landscape of the university that I found was the *cartonero*, associated with waste and with B through her empathy and her sense of a common 'belonging' with him. I thought of these associations as a thread to understand B's feeling 'out of place' in her university. She felt this way as dirt is out of place in public spaces. Waste and dirt are made secret in public spaces (Hawkins, 2003) and she was also making her belonging to the *villa* secret, avoiding to speak. The *cartonero* thus became an interesting character in the setting. A transgressive character. Someone who was troubling the perception of waste and, in so doing, troubling the social order.

## Villas and waste

I will now move to think about an association of the *villa* with waste, following Mary Douglas' insight: "reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death" (Douglas, 1966, p. 5). Following the discussion presented above, the same notions about dirt can be used for thinking about waste. Understanding waste as emerging from and constitutive of social arrangements can lead us to reflect on the separations that are sustained in society and the positions created. I have already mentioned that I will move away from the idea of a social order, but will understand society as contingent networks of relations between human and inhuman elements. I will thus attempt to see in the relationship of *villas* to waste how both are in positions of abjection, and think about how the effects of this negativity could reinforce the State and the normalization of subjects in particular ways.

I will begin by presenting some definitions of *villas* that show how these neighbourhoods are often defined through negativity, that is, as the negative opposite of a positive quality or object. This condition is similar to that of waste, presented in the previous sub-heading. From this point of departure I want to flag up the constraints of the notions which the *villa* researcher deals with and the possibilities for producing new categories that conceive of *villas* in themselves rather than as 'theoretical residuals'.

## Villas defined

Varela and Cravino (2009) have explored different definitions of *villas* and their pejorative connotations. I will look at them in light of the notion of the 'labour of the negative' (Hawkins, 2003) and consider whether they are set within a dichotomy in which they occupy the negative pole. The definitions Varela and Cravino draw on are the following:

- Aguas Argentinas S.A. (national water supplier): "... 'villas de emergencia' in which the urban design is irregular or non-existent"
- Malvinas Argentinas Council, Buenos Aires Province: "Marginal weave is defined by the precariousness, signals the substantial incompletion of the basic requirements. *Villas* and settlements are the classic examples".

- Defensoría del Pueblo de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (ombudsman, City of Buenos Aires): “New Urban Settlements (...) constitute informal processes of the occupation of estates – private and/or public – by families with low resources. One of the characteristics that they present is the spontaneity of the occupation... The level of consolidation of the buildings is minimal or non-existent and the index of overcrowding is high. They lack infrastructure and basic services (potable water, electricity, sewerage). Since these enclaves are located in any free or vacant interstices of the city, they are frequently located on open-air dumping grounds, near railways or the Riachuelo [River], in floodable lands, contaminated or with danger of collapse, producing a high level of exposure of the population to risks that affect their health and/or physical integrity.”
- UN-Habitat characterize slums as “lacking adequate access to potable water, basic sanitation services and other infrastructure. Low-quality housing, inadequate and informal. Overcrowding, unhealthy living conditions and high risk areas”
- INDEC (National Institute for Demography, Statistics and Census), Argentina: the *villa* house is that located “in a habitation nucleus, generally located on State or third-party lands. Usually built with precarious materials, low quality (metal sheets, wood, etc.) and on the margin of building orders; that is, without a design of streets for circulation, ordered division of lands, lacking adequate sanitary services.”
- Subsecretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda de la Nación: “We say *villa* to those human settlements on lands without regularization of possession and without the planification of an urban design. Considered as irregular settlements, *villas* grow in lands of private or public ownership.” (Varela, 2009, pp. 49-54, all translations are mine)

These definitions are taken from different levels of State bureaucracy as well as UN-Habitat, an agency that informs policy. These definitions not only set the limits for the understanding of *villas* in State policy, but also have specific effects and mobilize resources in the material production of these neighbourhoods as well as the subjectivities of the *villeros*. A salient feature in these definitions is that they are constructed in opposition to the norm. The terms used to define them are ‘irregular’, ‘inadequate’, ‘informal’, ‘lack’, etc. That is, *villas* are defined as that which lacks the conditions of normality. Following Hawkins, these definitions reinforce the value of

normality in the suspension of *villas* as the negative. These are used in relation to private property, health and urban design. Regarding the first, the transgression of private property associates these neighbourhoods with delinquency. But in this work I have focused on the second in my search for the associations of *villas* with waste. The definition of *villas* and *villeros* as existing outside the norm of health is a device that intervenes in the flow of bio-power, as defined above. It is, then, related to the production of life and subjects through specific technologies.

### Emergence of villas

I will now examine the historical process of the emergence of *villas*, highlighting Ratier's account from 1972, whereby waste is a constituent element. Houses were built out of a combination of occupation of land, use of waste material and deployment of building skills that people learnt in their rural homelands – since many *villa* residents were migrants.

[Since the 1930s the] creoles' inventiveness has led them to seek their own solutions, using the elements that their traditional culture offers. There is an ancient peasant architecture that, gathering indigenous and Spanish techniques, trains any individual to build their house.

#### Box 1



Source: <http://movimientoevita-capital.blogspot.com.ar/2014/05/rechazo-detenciones-por-la-toma-de.html>, accessed 29/11/2014

However, the elements that are available in some regions of the country are not at hand here: neither the stone, the cane, nor the possibility of making adobe. So, they resort to anything – zinc sheets, wood from boxes, bags. Even old automobile batteries, such as those that constitute the walls in an old *villa* named Villa Acumuladores [Accumulators].

It is made the most of the building elements that the city offers (...)

Looking at some shacks we can still perceive the beams of the creole shack, though now covered with sheets or wood. The trampled soil floor is also common (...) (Ratier, 1972, p. 14, my translation)

These kinds of waste materials have been an important element in the building of the houses of the *villas* of the City of Buenos Aires, although in the particular case I am looking at, they have lately been mainly replaced by their owners by bricks. I include the picture in Box 1 to illustrate<sup>26</sup>. Still, the point is that waste is present in the emergence of these neighbourhoods, since it is common to see newcomers starting to build their houses out of waste. The improvement of houses is related to the development of an informal real-estate market (Cravino, 2006) where houses are commoditized and given exchange value. In this process there are 'value regimes' and 'waste regimes' (Gille, 2010) intervening, but I will leave that reflection for another time. Regardless of any explanation that can be attempted for the construction of houses out of either waste or 'proper' building material, in principle I adopt Ratier's narrative of the process: the inhabitants use the materials that the city offers, the ones that are available to them. In this sense, houses made of garbage are also a manifestation of the condition of their inhabitants in the city, of what they had access to and the relations that positioned them. In the emergence of *villas*, then, the debate between Agamben and Laclau becomes useful, since there is a rationality in the social arrangement, held by the action of technologies of waste production, distribution and removal, which are troubled by the collective action of individuals who trespass the taint of dirt to make a living (a 'dirty' living). These individuals, in settling in 'uninhabitable' lands, building their houses with 'useless' material, therefore transgress the normal conditions of production of life and in so doing live in an "uninhabitable subject position" (Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008, p. 234), in a position of abjection. The tension between Agamben and Laclau persists in my reading, since neither the norm nor the collective action of individuals in

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<sup>26</sup> I took this picture from the blog post "Rechazo a detenciones por la toma de Villa Lugano" (2014) [Rejection to detentions for the squatting of Villa Lugano], belonging to Movimiento Evita, a grassroots organization based in Buenos Aires City (with territorial presence in *villas*). It is not mentioned when or where the picture was taken, but the landscape that is presented is not dissimilar to the one I have observed in my visits to *villas*. I chose this photograph to illustrate two forms of construction that can be seen in *villas*. At the top of the picture there are developing brick houses with several floors. At the centre of the picture there are houses made out of nylon sheets, pieces of wood, cardboard. These seem to be early settlements. This inference is supported by the message of the sign, which says, "We will leave peacefully if we are given housing solutions". The early settlement is facing the threat of eviction.

creating their own rules are enough to explain the tensions of the position of abjection of the inhabitants of *villas*.

On another level, waste is very present in the landscape of *villas*' public spaces, such as streets and open spaces. I am not claiming that *villas* are the deposit of the waste produced in the city in this sense, since the garbage that is observed in their streets, aisles and open spaces is also produced in the *villa*. However, the city's cleaning services do not provide the infrastructure to keep the *villas* clean. The point I am trying to make is that, although *villas* are not the city's rubbish dumps, their 'dirt' is produced by the city administration; therefore, it is a production of a specific 'waste regime'. In this sense, *villas* could be thought of as existing in a State of Exception (Agamben, 2005), produced and sustained by sovereign power to reinforce the State norm. The following observation by the Secretary of Human Rights of the Ombudsman of the City of Buenos Aires in Villa 31 illustrates this:

I arrive at squares 100, 103 and 99; I am told that in this sector there is domiciliary recollection of garbage and that it works well. The truck passes through the street and collects the garbage in front of each house. The street is approximately 4 to 6 m in width. I can see that the area is clean; there is no rubbish on the floor. The truck passes along all 9<sup>th</sup> street.

I arrive at the 'playón' [open space] in front of the Caacupé chapel, in front of square 2. I see wide streets with two containers full of waste, flies, waste on the floor. The inhabitants say that there are very big rats in the area.

A boy of approximately eight years old comes to me and tells me that he lives in front of the container and that when it rains there are many white worms.

The neighbours say that the truck does not collect the garbage every day. (Hernández, 2011, my translation.)

Hernández suggests here that the dirty landscape of some parts of the *villa* is due to the lack of provision of garbage collection services. He also provides a fairly detailed first-hand approach to waste. In the main text of his report the agency provides a broader explanation of the situation of all *villas* of the City of Buenos Aires in relation to garbage:

The demographic density and its particular urban weave differentiate *villas de emergencia* from the rest of the neighbourhoods of the City. The narrowness of the

internal streets of these make access difficult for the vehicles that carry out the collection of the domiciliary garbage, and then they accumulate in the public spaces in the containers that the companies set or scattered around them.

This gives rise to the so called micro-rubbish dumps or minor accumulations of garbage thrown in the streets, composed in their majority of remnants of domiciliary garbage, but also from elements such as insecticides, rubble, out-dated medicine, residues of chemical or dangerous substances. These residues, when decomposing, produce nauseating odours; on the other hand, their burning produces great quantities of toxic smoke, due to the accumulation of paint, tires, plastics and other non-degradable elements. (op. cit., p. 4, my translation)

A first comment I should make is that, although I am rhetorically separating public spaces from houses, in reality there is no such physical separation. If it rains and the streets flood (a common situation in *villas*), the waste and the living beings surrounding it enter the houses, since the houses get flooded. Regarding air pollution, there is clearly no separation between the inside and the outside of the house. The public space significantly affects the private space. This may seem obvious, but I think it is helpful to explicitly mention it – particularly when investigating the agency of the residents in relation to pollution. Hernández collects residents' testimonies who blame their neighbours for throwing garbage on the streets either because they do not know how to use the containers or because they do not have the money to buy bags. My reading is that Hernández places the blame on inhabitants by resorting to the explanation that they do not have the means to use the containers properly. I feel dissatisfied with this reading, for it raises the question of whether inhabitants have any agency in the shaping of their habitat, and whether any actions are taken by them. So far I have presented the production of pollution or dirt as the only result of the action of the State, either by action or by omission. This view erases subjects from the scene, assuming their absolute passivity. I consider that the actions of individuals have to be questioned not only in relation to public spaces, but also in the privacy of their homes. Below I present F's account, who illustrates the domestic efforts of cleaning involved in living in a dirty environment:

She [her mother] had me when she was 23. She was my age; she had two children, and she didn't have a proper house: it flooded when it rained. She would put us on the bed; the water reached her knees, and there she would be, taking the water out with a sweep, unplugging the things...alone.



*Was it the same house that you have now?*

We have fixed it now; it doesn't flood anymore. Besides, they did some improvements in the neighbourhood, the sewerage and those things (...)

*You tell me that since you were born until now they've done the sewerage; what other things?*

Basically, the sewerage. I can't remember well, but we've always had electricity. But the thing with the sewerage... Everyone tries to improve their own house, but the street is another issue. That's when the neighbours organize and...

My house was too low in relation to the rest. That's why it used to flood. And now we have filled it: we added soil, rubble, those things, and it's higher. We widened the drain and it doesn't flood anymore, thank God. It's all those things that helped my mother not to be so bad now, when this happened [when her partner left and robbed her]. We already had our house; my little sister has everything that we can give her. My mother struggled for us, now we struggle for my little sister. The three of us for my little sister.

The efforts of inhabitants to produce their lives within and amongst waste, then, are not only related to the working of the cleaning devices arranged by the City Council, such as rubbish containers. These efforts are present in the organization of neighbours to work on the streets or to raise claims against the State (electricity, water, cleaning have been gained through collective action, protest and negotiation). They are also seen at the domestic level: dealing with a flooded house in a neighbourhood with no sewerage, spending hours cleaning the house. But, this work, although it takes place in the domestic environment, is actually a form of acting in public, since it is aimed at sustaining lives in a habitat produced by the State.

He [a college teacher] used to tell us 'the State does what it can'. But we also do what we can. The State does what it can with subsidies: it controls them, it doesn't control them, it does what it can. And we also do what we can. (F)

F, in a testimonial fashion, responded thus in the interview to one of the things that discomforted her in class, which was when her teacher would talk about benefits and the action of the State in *villas*. The production of their living conditions and their lives is not to be understood as a product of the State, since they also act on it with the resources that are available to them. I would add a further comment on the teacher's perspective, drawing on Edkins (2002), who criticizes readings that explain

famine on the basis of the incapacity of the State to reduce it, either for lack of resources or of technology. Instead, she looks at it as a production of the State. Within this frame she raises the question of who profits from famine, allowing a distribution of responsibility in its production and the lives that it takes, through the lack of action or resources. The same can be applied to pollution in this sense. The reading that 'the State does what it can' obscures the actual decision of cleaning companies and the City Council to distribute insufficient rubbish containers in *villas* (and sufficient in other neighbourhoods) and not to collect them regularly (as it does in other neighbourhoods).

I have here presented some elements of data to think of *villas* as produced as dirty. On the one hand, they are often defined by State agencies and international organizations as outside the norm, or as lacking normal qualities. They are not defined positively but negatively. In this sense, they are 'theoretical by-products'. This is a reinforcement of the positive, since it binds it, renders meaningless that which is outside of it, and does not allow for the construction of any other positive object. I therefore attempt to examine the emergence of *villas* not only by looking at their production as lack (of sanitary infrastructure, in this specific case) but also by looking at the actions of the inhabitants who produce their conditions of living by redeploying the materials rendered to the condition of waste. I attempt to do this by drawing on the Agamben-Laclau discussion, aiming to look at the effects of technologies of control as well as the actions of individuals who redeploy them. This also relates to the use of Doreen Massey's notion of 'space/time', presented in the previous chapter, which leads me think of the social and material as a whole, as 'socio-technical systems'. This also involves, drawing on Actor Network Theory, looking at nature and the social as interconnected, as 'socio-nature'. From this perspective, *villas* are neighbourhoods which, although secreted under meaninglessness by many of their definitions, trouble the category and condition of 'waste'. Their emergence from the 'lack of value' (as a real abstraction) exposes the constructed and abstract nature of 'value', since it reveals the potential existence of 'use value' at the material level. But they also enact the possibility of life in material conditions that have been deemed 'uninhabitable' by 'waste regimes' and broader 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1990). There are 'opportunities of survival' (Margulis, 1968); the *villas* not only enact the possibility but also generate the conditions for

that possibility. So, it is the actions of individuals together with the technologies of bio-power and their (by-)products which constitute and produce *villas*.

The performance of the *cartonero* in the city is of the same transgressive nature. But this adds a further point, which is visibility. *Villas* are, as waste, often hidden and secreted; they are built in neglected or repulsive lands and, if they are not, they are 'no-go areas' which remain unknown. As I have shown, they are also invisible from the point of view of theory and policy, since they are 'theoretical residues'. The *cartonero*, on the contrary, accepts visibility, since s/he collects the waste from middle-class neighbourhoods, dressed in 'uniforms of poverty' (Perelman, 2010, p. 114), dressed in 'dirt', exhibiting its transgression and abjection. Shame and embarrassment possess the new *cartonero* in the performance of her or his job (Dimarco, 2007; Perelman & Boy, 2010). However, in this very performance, they bring transgression to the streets of the middle-class neighbourhoods by confronting 'regular' inhabitants of the city with the troubling of the limits of their identities. This produces the *cartonero* as abjection. That is how the *villa* reaches B in her university, positions her university, positions her and makes her feel out of place as 'dirt' and shame. It is this shame that deems her secret, as *villas* are. As she reveals in her *testimonio*, her feeling of being 'out of place' results also in a physical removal from the university. So, instead of going to the library to read she would rather go to a nearby park. Or study at home.

### B and the *cartonero*

Dimarco (2007) reflects on *cartoneros* as positioned within the residual of the labour market, following Bauman's notion of 'human waste' as the excessive, redundant. However, she moves beyond this to consider them as silent critics of the boundaries of the valuable and waste. Rather than 'being' residual, they trouble this condition by creating value from waste. They problematize their position/category of 'human waste', of exclusion, since they enact and, in so doing, sustain the work of the informal garbage collector (legal only since 2003 in Argentina). Furthermore, they trouble the very production of waste by using those materials that are produced as such by exhibiting their use value. Some of the materials that they collect are sold for recycling but others they keep for their own use. They therefore expose the constructed nature of waste, the abstract reality of value – and in doing so they become dirty. They are neither excess nor redundant, but nor are they fully

recognized as workers. Their work has no social security but it is legal; it is sustained in insecurity, in abandonment by the State. The waste that they collect for themselves does not hold as 'waste', but neither does it have any value. They are in between, living in a dirty and 'uninhabitable position', troubling the productions of waste and life.

One thing that is to be mentioned is the value of the visibility of the *cartonero*. When I say 'value' I refer to the efforts put into that visibility, which is not spontaneous. The effects of their visibility are observed in this text, since they motivated B's speech and B's speech motivated this analysis. The performance of the job, to the new *cartonero*, entails shame and embarrassment. There is a process by which they overcome these feelings and accept the performance of their work. This is not an entirely individual process since the co-workers and associations intervene in the revindication of the job and in the construction of their identity as 'workers'. However, as mentioned, they are not fully identified with this identity (Dimarco, 2007). These struggles are manifested in the formation of organizations of *cartoneros*, but also in the very performance of the work, establishing relationships of trust with their clients, that is, the city inhabitants who provide them with the recyclable material from their shops or homes (Perelman, 2010). This impacts on their visibility, a condition which means the overcoming of the stigma that they bear.

Dimarco's analysis does not talk of wasted lives, but of lives that make of waste a place where life can be possible. This critique is reflected in B's experience and testimony, as she witnesses the performance of the *cartonero* with deep discomfort, which disrupts the setting and story. Both the *cartonero* and the Buenos Aires' *villa* perform a critique of the frontier of dirt and waste, to the extent that they become visible. From this perspective, there is a strong connection and solidarity between B and *cartoneros*, because even though they are in extremely different positions, they both share their belonging to the *villa*. B, in her story, recognizes a relationship of solidarity but also one of difference with the *cartonero*. She witnesses the dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) of the *cartonero*, but she is a university student. However, she recognizes in the *cartonero* a neighbour with whom she shares something in common which makes her feel 'out of place'.

I would like to examine what I just described as B's discomfort in more detail. She does not mention it directly during the interview, but her *testimonio* expresses it. I would like to first consider the way the presence of the *cartonero* produces in her a kind of anger, which is manifested in the interview. That expression of anger and discomfort is in itself a form of resistance, since it is the pronouncement of the disavowal of an identified social arrangement which she is part of. Her speech has been translated and written down, and produces a truth effect that has troubled me and potentially will trouble some of the readers as well. On the other hand, I will also consider how B transits the position that she is in at her university, being an inhabitant of the *villa*. I will first look at her silencing and her reluctance to remain within the premises of the building, understanding her position as one of abjection. I will then look at B in the position of the deject, considering the excess of the surplus in her classmates' clothing and the production of the abject.

#### B in a position of abjection

In the testimonial paradigm presented above, B tells of how she feels out of place in her university, in association with the fact that her neighbours are the people who collect the garbage of the restaurants of the neighbourhood of the university. But she also talks about how she is silenced in her university. I have suggested in previous sections how *villas*, as waste, are removed from the public sphere, and produced as secret and obscure. Hawkins (2003) describes how waste is produced as a negative, removed from public spaces, a signifier of meaninglessness which can only produce repulsion. I have related that repulsion to abjection, and in that sense the production of the negative takes place in the encounter with others, when the deject separates itself from abjection, demarcating the boundaries of the I. The *villa*, as developed above, can also be thought of as abjection, produced as a jettisoned, meaningless negative. I have presented how the public service agencies conceive of *villas* as a 'theoretical by-product', defined only in opposition to the norm and therefore meaningless in itself, emerging from the hidden, the uninhabitable land, the waste material produced as being without value. Furthermore, *villas* only became visible with the rise of the social sciences in the 1960s, when they became an object of policy. The policies that were designed since have both attempted to 'solve' the 'problem' of *villas*, first through eradication and then through urbanization. These policies began to be constructed as such after 1955, the end of Perón's second

administration. But this construction was also a political strategy to undermine Perón, and was based on the measuring of the increase of the number of people living in *villas* through statistical social enquiry (Ratier 1972, p. 29). The 'problem' was therefore that the population of *villas* was growing. Eradication was foregrounded as the solution. From 1956 onwards, different administrations would move from assistance to eradication, like a pendulum. In both approaches, *villas* were produced as a problem which needed normalization. As Walkerdine and Ringrose develop, abjection is the condition for the development of technologies to manage it. In the case of the production of the city, sewers are a technology of waste management, but they are also technologies for making that waste secret (Hawkins, 2003). In this sense, the position of abjection is characterized by both meaninglessness and secrecy, by being undefined but also managed to be removed from public sight. *Cartoneros*, in that sense, open up that which is removed from sight by opening up the containers or plastic bags that produce, hold and hide waste, looking at it and using it. But they also expose their own redundancy; they get dirty and expose their own dirt, and in so doing experience and struggle with feelings of shame and embarrassment. These feelings are overcome through collective action, a form of labour that is passed from generations to generations of *cartoneros*.

B, in the university, is silenced. She says she would go and not pronounce a word in a whole day. This is associated with the fact that she feels out of place; her speech brings these two things together. A significant fact not shown in the fragment selected for analysis, but which is present in her *testimonio*, is that her classmates do not know that she lives in a *villa*. Like many of the speakers presented in this work, B did not tell her classmates where she lives. I will now make two readings of this.

I would first like to consider B's position as similar to that of C, analysed in the previous section, whereby she is produced as abject due to her relationship with the *villa*. In B's case, there is no fact that triggers or sets off the social arrangement which positions her in abjection. She identifies with the *cartonero*, the supposed shame of the *cartonero* who looks into waste because s/he has nothing to eat, and hides the fact that she could be the neighbour of that *cartonero* as she is the neighbour of others. Her relationship to the *cartonero*, who becomes abject and transgressive, positions her in a position of abjection and transgression. Unlike the

*cartonero*, she hides the marks that reveal her position through careful impression management (Goffman, 1990). She also hides the transgression of her position: she is one of the very few students in this private, middle-class university who lives in a *villa*. The transgressive nature of her position is one of the drivers of her speech in the interview, which she expresses in a context of confidentiality and anonymity.

### B as deject

Another way to look at B's position would be as that of the deject. I will now draw on another fragment, which I again will treat as a paradigm.

This degree implied many things to me. Among them, many tears. There were days when it was really hard, when I had lumps in my throat because I couldn't understand how my classmates spent their lives, spent their days, asking about what brand of purse to buy, when you went out to the street and found a lot of people looking in the garbage because they didn't have anything to eat. And you knew that they didn't understand. And you had to shut up and say, 'Well, everyone thinks and lives in a different way and has the luck or not to have a good economic situation'. But it was very shocking to see that.

Would it be fair to say that B was feeling abject when listening to her classmates' worries? I do not aim to speak about the real B, and I think it is probably not entirely fair to the text to interpret it as B feeling abject. However, the exercise could be of value.

B says that she felt shocked, that she could not understand her classmates, that she cried and felt knots in her throat in the presence of her classmates. These features are somehow related to the symptoms of abjection: abjection is meaningless, incomprehensible; it produces a shock in the self-inducing processes of elimination within the self, which can be expressed as tears. Kristeva (1982) considers the deject to be bound with abjection by the mandate of the superego. B is bound with her classmates also by a mandate, the mandate to study and progress, which could also be thought of as the mandate of the superego. Getting the scholarship to study

at the private university was an opportunity that she could not refuse, although she often feels like rejecting it. This analogy is still a poor one; however, I will continue to seek similarities in the search for another perspective that could help to deal with the issue of reading the Other as negative.

B, in her speech, resists the relationships in which she finds herself whilst being a student, specifically, the relationships with her classmates. She does not actively participate in these relationships in that she does not speak, but she cannot avoid being a part of them. To some extent these relationships are imposed on her, but on the other hand she actively rejects them. Even this rejection could be thought of as being part of that network of relationships, even listening to what her classmates say, seeing them, being a witness.

My first reading of this fragment suggests that B's listening to her classmates entails a challenge to her values, which she does not dare to express. But we can also think about the possibility of reading disgust in B's words. This would not be dealing with abstract morality, but with the embodiment of morality in the construction of an I which produces bodily processes of disgust and rejection when threatened. In order to propose this reading I will develop a brief theoretical discussion which aims at looking at surplus as disgusting.

Ringrose and Walkerdine, in their paper on the management of abjection, look at the production of the other through class and race. They look at how working-class black and white women are produced as abjection:

'Blackness' and black and brown female bodies have long been regulated through the racializing and sexualizing imperialist gaze (Bannerji, 1993). The symbolic hold of the 'hottentot venus' (the South African woman put on exhibition in England and France to display her 'unusually' large buttocks) offers a constitutive historical example of the representation of the black female body and sexuality as excessive and grotesque (Gilman, 1985). Whiteness is a more permeable boundary and the working class is read onto the body through signs like excessive/fat white flesh and overly tight clothing (got her tits and ass out), brassy blonde (or red) dye-jobs, flashy acrylic nails, hooker heels (to list only a few visual cues). We would suggest these symbols become 'condensed' (Hey, 2006) into those subjects, white-chavs, trash, tarts, slappers, hen-partying women, laddettes, pram faces, who can then be easily read or positioned as



other (Skeggs 2005; Wray & Newitz 1997; Youdell 2004). (Walkerdine and Ringrose, 2008, p. 235)

The idea of the excessive, that which cannot be governed (op. cit.) is deployed in the construction of the other and of abjection. I would like to use this idea to make some suppositions about B feeling abject when facing her classmates, who are middle-class students. B cannot understand, is shocked and feels lumps in her throat in her exposure to the surplus that her classmates embody. She cannot understand why they are worried about purses when her neighbours (broadly speaking) are outside, in their streets, looking in the garbage because they are hungry. The image of her classmates is defined by surplus.

I will understand surplus as exchange value, as a real abstraction. It is an abstraction that has real effects in the organization of the social and, in this case, it is a defining element of the scene. Surplus, by definition, is excess. In the context of a free-market economy, it is also ungovernable; there is no governing of surplus. A purse can be as expensive as a buyer is willing to pay. There is also no limit to the amount of surplus that a person can accumulate. In this sense, surplus could constitute B's classmates as excessive, ungovernable, threatening. This excess is especially evident in the co-presence of the *cartonero*, who by exposing the use value of waste also exposes the excess of the price of goods such as the purses that her classmates worry about. Understanding the classmates not only as human bodies, but as a unity that combines human and in-human matter, they then become that surplus, which is material as well as embodied and constitutive of their sense of self (their worries are affected by this excess of value). So, attempting to stand in B's position I will try to think of her classmates as an ungovernable excess, which is repulsive. In this sense, her silence is not only a form of oppression, but also a positive reaction in her attempt to preserve her own identity.

## Final Words

In the Introduction to this work I mentioned that I would not write a conclusion since this would act against the expanding movement that I would try to give to the text. I set out to produce a set of reflections and *testimonios* that would be interconnected, as in a constellation, in which the power to produce meanings would lie not in the propositions that I elaborated but in the possibilities of relating the different elements offered in the text. In this way, the text would not move as a vector towards its aim and conclusions, but in a movement of expansion in which the different chapters would be independent but at the same time interconnected and feeding each other. As I presented the shape and movement of the text I outlined two drivers that condition the whole of the piece: the decision to tell stories of high school graduates from a *villa* in their post-compulsory education pathways and the decision “not to write a thesis”. The tension between these two decisions contributed to the non-linear direction of the whole of the piece. This, then, is not a conclusion that gives closure to my (non-)thesis, but an open ending. I explained my decision not to write a conclusion in Chapter 4, where I reflect on my ethical discomforts with producing closed readings of texts. On the basis of my attempt not to reduce the *testimonios* of the participants through my readings and my intention to produce myself differently, to be different through reading differently, I set out to exercise double readings of *testimonios*. Through double readings I would intend to explore openings within texts, that is, the potential for the proliferation of meaning. And, in reading differently, I would attempt to become someone different through writing. A conclusion strictly speaking would involve the closure of the intentions proposed at the beginning of the project of a thesis. In this case, I will not intend any closure, but will reflect on one of the intentions that I have pursued throughout my PhD project: the intention to sacrifice the subject of knowledge (Foucault & Rabinow, 1991, p. 97). This section, then, is intended as another element in the constellation of chapters that constitute this work, which connects to the rest in multiple ways and that, at the same time, constitutes an end of the book.

Foucault proposes in “Nietzsche, History, Genealogy” a redeployment of the tools of the discipline of history (which he calls “traditional history”) and proposes an “effective history”.

History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. (Foucault & Rabinow, 1991, p. 88)

He calls for the will to knowledge to be directed, deploying the means of traditional history, towards dissociating the constructs of knowledge rather than reinforcing their authority. He acknowledges the violence exerted by historians and, without attempting to elude violence, proposes its deployment to expose it and thus expose the hidden history of the discipline of history. In that way, he offers three uses of knowledge for an “effective history”: parody, to expose the constructed nature of the characters of history that represent truths with which individuals identify; dissociation, to expose the weakness of the construction of the unity of identities and the complexity that lies beneath it; the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge, exerting the violence of the will to truth over oneself (as knowing subject) rather than on the human objects (or subjects) of knowledge.

the veneration of monuments becomes parody; the respect for ancient continuities becomes systematic dissociation; the critique of the injustices of the past by a truth held by men in the present becomes the destruction of the man who maintains knowledge by the injustice proper to the will to knowledge (op. cit., p. 97)

In this project I have intended to carry out the third use, which resonated with the shame I felt when studying fellow students’ lives and rendering them to positions of abjection in my understanding of them (Popkewitz, 2013). The sacrifice of the subject of knowledge operates as a principle of action in my project rather than as a plan. On this basis, in the face of different problems and contexts, I have carried out diverse forms of sacrifice. I will now relate these efforts to two forms of ethnography that I have presented and exercised to certain extents: realist and reflexive. I will reflect on how I have redeployed these in my search for sacrifice.

In Chapter 3 I have mentioned that both positivist and naturalist approaches to ethnography have attempted to produce accounts of cultures or lives that captured

their “natural” state, intending to represent them as they really were. I have also referred to these as realist forms of ethnography. One of the strategies that I have drawn from these traditions has been the attempt to reduce my intervention in the field. In the tradition of realist ethnographies the erasure of the subjectivity of the researcher operates as a condition of the production of ‘objective’ accounts. In my production of *testimonios* I have deployed some of these strategies. I travelled to Argentina and did a six month field work volunteering in a *villa*, I established relationships of trust with gatekeepers and participants through which I accessed their stories. I carried out interviews in which I tried to reduce my interventions, avoid leading the speakers’ responses, I have also used a recorder to produce a document that captured the speech of the speakers. These methods have to some extent been designed to produce data which captures culture and lives in their “natural” state. Furthermore, as Sklodowska argues, in the tradition of latin american *testimonios* accounts are often produced on the basis of a realist ethnographic contract by which the subject of the study is described in order to inform an audience (Sklodowska, 1993). This has been the case to some extent in my relationship with the speakers. Also, in the translation of the recording into written text I have tried to maintain the breaks characteristic of oral speech, the unfinished sentences and other oral qualities of the event of the interview. In this sense, I have intended to produce an account that resembles the real voice and speech of the speakers. I have, however, included my presence in the account, exposing my interventions in the interview as well as a brief introductory note on the context of the interview and on the decisions that I took in the transcription. These can be considered to be resources of reflexive forms of ethnography, which I will refer to later.

In spite of my use of “naturalist” methods and technologies, I have intended to deploy them in a way that operates differently from positivist and naturalist ethnographies. In this way, I have proposed to offer the space of my thesis to the voice of the speakers, relating to participants not as native informants or objects of study, but as speakers who take control of the interview and my research and use it for their own ends. This move is in itself sacrificial, since it attempts a withdrawal of the author, not for the purposes of producing an epistemologically valid and authoritative piece of research, but to politically deploy the space and format of the research for the empowerment of a subaltern group. There is another layer in which

a sacrificial drive operates, since the status that I confer to *testimonios* is not of an account that has gained authority in the representation of the real lives of students of *villas* but one which produces a specific “truth effect”. This is partially motivated by a sacrificial drive since I understand my efforts to produce a text that looks and feels objective but that it is not so. Through the before mentioned methods and technologies I consider to be producing a “truth effect” rather than an account that reaches the true selves and lives of the participants. In this way, the subject of knowledge is sacrificed as the beholder of truth and I renounce to that authority.

I will now consider the tools that I drew from reflexive ethnography and how I have redeployed them. The attempt to erase myself from the process of research and from the text was meant to fail (see Chapter 3) since my intervention in the interviews would be unavoidable and the conditions of production and circulation of the PhD thesis (the author-function) would inevitably shape the form of the text. These *testimonios* are co-constructions which are produced under specific conditions and following particular rules – in this case, its condition of PhD thesis. I have, then, intended for the “truth effect” in *testimonios* to expose their co-constructed nature both by acknowledging some of the decisions that I have made in the translation of the account as well as by including my interventions. Some ethnographic accounts hide the voice of the researcher, such as Elizabeth Burgos’ (1984) or Oscar Lewis’ (2011) but I decided to include my voice drawing on the influence of more reflexive works such as Rodolfo Walsh’s *Operación Masacre* (Walsh, 2008; see also Sklodowska, 1992) which include the subjectivity and intervention of the author. In my view this is a more reflexive as well as a more realist form of account since it acknowledges the intervention of the researcher which actually takes place in the field work. So, in terms of honesty and validity, reflexivity adds value to the *testimonios* through a partial acknowledgment of the process of production. However, in terms of the political use of the text (referred to earlier) it is an exposition of my failure. I have set out to remove myself and my agenda from the work in order to allow for the speakers to take my position (of power) but in the face of the impossibility of doing so I accepted to carry out a failed attempt which acknowledges its failure by exposing my presence. My exposition in the text is a recognition of my failure and another gesture of the sacrificial drive in this work.

Finally, I have included *testimonios* alongside my commentaries, attempting to relativize my voice putting it next to the speakers'. Or, to be more precise, to the echoes of the voices of the speakers which manifest in the realist-shaped *testimonios* that I have co-produced. Through this decision I try to further expose my "outsider" position which, in spite of my efforts to gain trust and acceptance in the *villa*, persists and is present in the whole of the piece. "Going native" is another trope of the ethnographic enterprise in the production of its authority, which I intend to problematize through this gesture, through the break between *testimonio* and commentary. This break is also conflated with another gesture, which is the fact that I included *testimonios* in appendixes. The appendix is a section that is not considered to be of necessary reading in a PhD thesis, so by including *testimonios* in scattered appendixes I am trying to present the reader with the decision of whether to read them or not. Although reading is always a decision on behalf of the reader, this gesture reinforces it. It also undermines the position of the writer as the master of the text since the text then becomes ultimately defined by the decisions of the reader on whether *testimonios* are "in" or "out". This is also an instance where I am explicitly put into question as the producer of the *testimonio* for the quality and appeal of my product.

I will not talk further about the *testimonios* since they speak for themselves. I will move on to the process of writing about *testimonios* which was also partially moved by a sacrificial drive. I will relate this to reflexive ethnography, tradition in which researchers make explicit the process of production of the account presenting both the decisions that they have introduced as well as their subjective motivations. I will consider Chapter 4, in which I reflect on the ethical concerns that have shaped the whole of the work, which also manifest (or emerge) in a sense of shame that I have experienced when facing this project. Acknowledging the effects of my affect in the PhD project is a form of reflexivity. In doing so I have looked at the intersection of *logos* and *bios*, in Foucault's terms (see Chapter 4), and also at the social relations that set the conditions for the production of knowledge, drawing on Levinas (also see Chapter 4). I, then, have addressed the field of ethics, both in Foucault's and Levinas' terms. Drawing on Levinas, I have intended to respond to an Other through this work, and drawing on Foucault I have intended to produce myself through this work. Reflexivity, then, becomes "effective" in the response I set out to produce,

which is an exercise of sacrifice of the subject of knowledge through which I respond to an Other.

The sacrifice of the subject of knowledge operates at many levels in this exercise. On the one hand, in the way I treat *testimonios* when writing about them, considering them as singular “testimonial paradigms” that have the potential of relating to analogous phenomena or representations. The intention of writing about *testimonios* would then be producing forms of intelligibility, tools to interpret the lives of the students who have spoken for this project, rather than producing explanations or truth claims. Secondly, the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge operates in the form of reading that I carry out of “testimonial paradigms”, a reading that renounces to authoritative assertions and that remains undecided between different and contradictory interpretations. The aim, then, is to enable the proliferation of meaning, identities, representations, rather than to move towards the knowledge of the ‘true’ lives of the participants. Another layer at which the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge operates is by attempting to transform the writer through his/her writing. That is, to transform myself through writing. This involves a sacrifice to the extent that I intend to cease to be who I have been through this project. Finally, there is a sacrificial drive in the invitation to the reader to ‘write over’ the text, to exercise double readings of it, making of this PhD thesis a “writerly” (Barthes, 1975) “book-experience” (Foucault & Trombadori, 1991) for both reader and writer.

In the attempt to transform myself I have made several exercises. One of them was characteristic of the ethnographic enterprise, which is carrying out a field work in which the researcher exposes his/her body and self to living in a different culture. I did not carry out this practice fully since I did not live in the *villa*. However, I committed six months to working in the local parish church community centre in order to engage with the everyday lives of the neighbours of a part of the *villa*. This in itself involved troubling my prejudice and pursuing a different way of conceiving life in *villas*. During the field work my research design was put into question, which gave place to Chapter 5, in which I try to acknowledge the exclusions that I produce, to expose the limits of my position. By including D’s *testimonio* I try not only to expose my limits but also to allow for questions that go beyond this project. I introduced the *testimonio* considering it to be thought provoking on its own. I then moved on to re-think a set of concepts that intervened in the way I had thought the

subjects of this research. I had built my questions on the assumption of a separation between *villas* and the city which I viewed as a boundary. This boundary separated the formal neighbourhoods from those where there was a lack of presence from the State (such as lack of services, health and security, education, etc.). I then looked at two fragments of *testimonios* and, based on the singular experiences they told, I exercised readings with the aim of troubling those assumptions.

First, I considered the manifestations of abandonment that I had observed in *villas* as a specific production rather than as the absence of the State. I understood these forms of abandonment as effects of the action of sovereign power rather than as its absence. Giorgio Agamben's notion of "grey zone" is helpful to conceptualize abandonment, not as lack, but as a specific production. Recourse to the ideas of "disorder" or lack of action from governmental agencies are often used as premises to think the conditions of marginal neighbourhoods (Loïc J. D. Wacquant, 1997). Through Agamben's tools I intend to look at *villas* as produced orders which resemble abandonment, being territories where fact and rule become undistinguishable, where the rule of law is suspended to extents by which fact becomes the rule. As presented before and drawing on Laclau (2007), there are issues with Agamben's tools since it can lead to denying the struggle that takes place on the enforcement of law between subjects and sovereign power, the resistance of the subjects that live within grey zones. So, as a result of this discussion I propose to look at *villas* as effects of the contested action of sovereign power, as the enactment of actions in which a rationality to produce abandonment operates. This will serve as a basis to consider the position of *villa* residents as one of abjection rather than one of exclusion.

Secondly, I reconsidered using the idea of a "boundary" to explain the separation between *villas* and the city. This idea is often used in urban studies within the notion of the "fragmented city", "fractured city" and also to some extent in the idea of the "segregated city" (Koonings & Kruijt, 2007, p. 8). In reading C's *testimonio* I drew on Actor Network Theory (Castree, 2002) to explore relationships and space as networks or "sociotechnical systems" (Sheller & Urry, 2006) that take place in space/time (Massey, 1992). I have then tried to consider the limitations of both tools in interpreting C's story, seeking for a perspective that would acknowledge the complexity that the idea of "network" provides along with the acknowledgement of



the distances and divisions that the idea of “boundary” allows to analyze. The notion of boundary is present in concepts such as “dirt” and “waste”, which I have drawn from Mary Douglas (1966). So, in the discussion I intend to use and trouble these notions as analytical tools in the reading of C’s *testimonio*. As mentioned before, there is an aim in the exercise of using and troubling itself, but the exercise also results in a product, which is a reflection on the use of the ideas of “boundary” and “network” which operate in the production of representations of the condition of certain positions within societies. The movement is not towards finding “the right” analytical tool, but to remain undecided, acknowledging the capacities and limitations of both.

Finally, in Chapter 9 I explore further the ideas of “waste” and “abjection”, which I had already introduced and deployed in the previous chapter. In this chapter I focused on tools to think subjectivity in a certain position within a set of social relations. My specific interest was to produce a perspective that would address the condition of being a *villa* resident (in the context of being a student in university) in positive terms. By ‘positive’ I do not mean optimistic or moral, but epistemologically positive. That is, a perspective that characterizes the condition of *villa* residents in its own terms rather than as the opposition, absence or lack of the condition of the “formal citizen”. In that same line I exercised a reading of B’s experience in university as that of the abject and of the deject. Again, I did not try to be coherent in my readings neither to affirm one reading over the other, but to displace myself through reading (and writing) and to acknowledge the possibilities and relativity of both interpretations.

In the three chapters, then, the exercise I have carried out has been tainted by an intention to reduce the authority of my reading as a unitary author producing a text that I assume cannot be easily deployed to act on *villas* and their residents, to the extent that it does not sustain one authoritative claim. It is a form of knowledge that instead of reaffirming itself, it sacrifices itself in the intention to enable the proliferation of meaning and to be ‘written over’. In the first chapter I drew on Agamben’s theoretical tools and Laclau’s critique, attempting to remain between the two, undecided between understanding the condition of the *villa* resident as the result of the action of sovereign power or as the struggle between the codes of the residents and the rule of State law. Rather, I have intended to consider both

positions as starting points to think the condition of *villas*. In chapter 8 I have intended to do a similar exercise using the concepts of “boundary” and “network”, considering the uses of both without attempting to propose any of them as a better tool. The intention, rather, is to expose the limitations of any account based of any of the too notions. Finally, in Chapter 9 I have intended to look at the position of one of the speakers, B, from two different perspectives. The exercise, again, was to produce two readings without intending to affirm any against the other, in spite of the contradictions that they may have. Although I have produced diverse readings in the three chapters, there has been one concern that has traversed the three, which is the risk of rendering the condition of *villa* residents to abjection through producing them as unintelligible (Butler, 2011) in writing about them. I have presented the diverse characterizations and definitions gathered by Varela and Cravino (2006) which define *villas* in negative terms, that is, as the opposition or lack of something other which is defined in positive terms. I have also presented Wacquant’s (1997) warnings on defining marginality as “disorder”, also as a negative of an other, the “ordered” or order itself. I have then recurred to the notion of abjection several times for different reasons and have intended to produce readings through the use of concepts that searched for a positive perspective.

I have also played with the figure of the Appendix, adding *testimonios* in appendices in order to expose the reader to the choice of reading them or not. I have done this as a call for the reader to intervene, to be part of the text. Although this is a rather playful gesture, it manifests my intention to make of this a “writerly” text, a text that does not close meaning but that calls for the reader to write over it. The intention to make a text which allows for the proliferation of meaning beyond its assertions and arguments underlies this gesture. At this level I also understand this work as “book-experience”, in this case, on behalf of the reader. I have already mentioned that the writing of this (non-)thesis has been intentionally transformative. I have also mentioned that my fate has been affected by my decision to pursue a PhD, involving moving from my home country, exposing myself to the experience of the *villa*, I’ve moved houses a dozen times, have met wonderful people and have now returned to Buenos Aires, finalizing a very unpredictable cycle in my life. I would be happy if the reading of this work was also a peculiar experience to the reader, although in other forms. I do not intend to explore that dimension of this text since it is totally beyond

my control. However, I have several times extended the invitation to the reader to write over the text, to consider the experiential dimension of this book. This project becomes effective in its use, in its experience. That is another expression of my intention to step aside and to let go of this work to the library where it will be awaiting for readers. But also, to hand it to my examiners and move forward in my PhD course.

I hope the reader has enjoyed these fragments, this exercise, this experience. I now finally withdraw and make the final and most effective attempt to sacrifice myself as the subject of knowledge. I put an end to my exercise. Thank you for your presence.

## Appendix 6 – continuation of Appendix 5

*Are there many cameras?*

Yes. I don't feel that they provide anything new, anything good. On the contrary, I know people that when there were TV cameras had to walk around them so that they wouldn't be captured, because their bosses would fire them if they knew that they lived in a *villa*. I think that nobody is conscious of that. There are many people that, in order to work, give another address. So, if a camera from Channel 2 or whatever channel is in the neighbourhood and catches you walking in the *villa*, and your boss sees it: you'll have to invent a thousand stories, like you were visiting someone and this and that... They don't realize that they're harming you. I understand when they go to investigate something specific that took place there. But most of the time they come, they don't have any news and end up filling space with something from the *villa*. And you see your neighbours, your relatives, having to walk around so as not to walk in certain areas because there are cameras... It's not good. It's not good having to lie about your address in the first place. It's like a chain. You say that your address was somewhere else, try not to be seen there, and when there are cameras, try to walk as fast as you can so as not to be captured. Or stupid things like that that add up. There always end up being cameras in the neighbourhood.

*[We continued talking about the local news; I asked whether she had any preferences. I am not including that section because it makes reference to very specific local media groups and diverts from the main topic, the presence of the media in the villa.]*

...you know that there's this concept in journalism, that a journalist has to look for different sources. The more sources you have, the richer the news. I think that the great mistake in the media is that every time they look for news in the *villa* they

interview the *puntero*<sup>27</sup>, the delegate<sup>28</sup>, or the *villa*'s most popular character. They pick one of those three. And I think that none of the three represent the inhabitants of the *villa*. The *puntero* will talk from a position that is beneficial to him, trying to brainwash people into voting for him and the politician that he represents. The delegate? They're supposed to be normal people, elected by the community, but once they're elected many of them forget about the people that voted for them. They only think about their interests and how to attract donations to the *villa*. Those donations never reach the people. So, I think that none of the three represent the worker from the neighbourhood. Because, ultimately, none of the three are breaking their backs working. I think they should talk to other people in the neighbourhood; you have people who work as *cartoneros*, construction workers. I think it's even more interesting if you talk to a builder who built his five-floor house in the *villa*. Because from the motorway you can see five-floor houses. I think it's good to ask them if they have an idea of the dangers if any of the houses catches fire.

There has been a lot of news about the growth of the *villa*. I don't like the fact that they're growing so much. I don't like that they've occupied all the empty lands; I don't like the fact that the houses are growing so much; I don't like the fact that what used to be a huge backyard is now a narrow alley. Because I think that people aren't aware of what would happen if there was a fire. There's no space, not enough time to organize a rescue operation and put out the fire. If one catches fire, many will catch fire. It's too crowded... I think that many people have taken advantage of the fact that the population is growing so much; they are making a big profit, have built a five-floor house, live on the first floor and rent out the rest of the floors. But they don't know what they're doing. People say, 'Well, when the government comes, they'll kick us out and give us compensation'. But what if something happens before that? I don't understand the position of the government, allowing them to expand. If anything happens everyone will say 'It's the government's fault'. This is not to defend the government; I'm not in favour of any politician, but I think that people aren't aware of that.

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<sup>27</sup> Local political leader.

<sup>28</sup> An elected community member who is in charge of deciding about the management of a section of the *villa* and for distributing goods provided by government and other organizations to the inhabitants of the section of the *villa* which they represent.

*I also put myself in the position of the one who keeps building floors and think, 'Well, why not?' What I'm trying to say is that it seems to be a public matter, the design of the neighbourhood, the conditions of security that individual people have... Anyway, the delegate does some kind of planning, doesn't he? 'You can build here, you can't build there'. Doesn't he?*

No.

*What if someone wants to build a house in the middle of the alley?*

No.

*They'll throw him out?*

Yes, that's on behalf of the neighbours.

*Right.*

There are places that people tried to occupy many times and the neighbours ended up throwing them out. And in other cases it was the neighbours who said, 'We'll mark this land and then sell it'. I think that the main role is played by the people. You can't blame anyone. I think that they didn't realize the danger that there is in there. I think that nobody considered it. You have houses that are next to the motorway and I think that they haven't measured the consequences. What happens if you have a little kid living in one of those houses? It's very dangerous. But well, in some cases you know that they need to charge a rent because they can't work, and they say 'I'll build a further room, rent it and have extra income'. They only thought about that. It's fine;

it's another way of having an extra income. But it's to the detriment of security, theirs and the rest. When I went to live there I was five...

*Five years old?*

Yes. It was completely different from what it is today. You had a lot of space. You could go out onto the street and had a lot of space to run, to play, and as kids that was great. Nowadays you don't have that space; there's no empty land. There used to be a huge area to play. Nowadays you don't have that; you have houses, and houses, and more houses. It's unbelievable that they allowed people to build next to the railways; it's so dangerous. And in the *villa* there are lots of children. It's full of children. It's contradictory. I understand that people need houses; it's horrible not to have a house. Everyone who lives in a *villa* knows that we don't own our houses. So, you have a very uncertain future in that sense. We had the luck to be in a place that was more or less alright. My house only has two floors.

*Right, but the ones on the sides have three, four...*

Yes.

*[The interview continued in a friendly conversation, without going into depth on any topic, with many breaks, until we concluded. I'll only quote a last fragment to give an end to the transcript, which I find particularly meaningful in this work since she highlights the relevance of going into the villa, of being there. I find that meaningful because my research adopted an ethnographic approach, partly pointing to the need to look at the complexity, the particular, the material, rather than looking at the villa from the position of abstract categories. She also mentions how she was transformed when she dared to meet her Others. In this (non-)thesis I have also tried to respond to the Other by transforming myself. So, I include her words, which point to the issues that have been at the centre of this (non-)thesis, which I also read as*

*an invitation, or maybe a shared feeling, or shared concerns, which I, as her, try to answer in exercises of fragmented responses, fragmented attempts.]*

It's very easy to talk about what one reads, and from a position of not seeing. It's different. I think that when you go and see how things are, that's when you can speak. You speak from a different place, don't you? You're not only saying what a newspaper said or what somebody wrote at certain time. You go there and you can see for yourself how things are. It's different. The idea of the *villa* doesn't remain on the abstract level of, 'It's located in a certain place and this and this happens', but you can even say, 'People are like this'. In the newspapers they won't tell you if people are kind, are not kind, look at you in a good or in a bad way. But if you go, it's different. I take the example of when I went to visit the rehab centre with the Father for the first time. It was different. I knew that they were guys who were fighting addictions and were having a difficult time, but it was hard for me to understand why they fell into drugs. Once you go there your mentality changes. The way you look at it changes. It's different. I could talk to you about a kid that was trying to quit drugs a month ago and say 'He's fighting', but now, after having been with them, talked to them, I can even understand why he used certain substances. It's different.



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