

Notes about art and police in Córdoba, (Argentina) [\[1\]](#)

Text derived by Ana Sol Alderete, after “04/12/13 Alberdi- Córdoba- Argentina- América del Sur”, by Belkys Scolamieri

1.

One afternoon in late 2011 a group of people came out walking from *Paseo de las Artes*, the city's artistic neighborhood, with a large flag supported by three long poles. Among the people who walked within the march, some took pictures, others stamped stencils on the pavement and others stopped the traffic and handed out pamphlets. The flag read out *Casa 13* [House 13] and was carried until the Farina Hall in the *Ciudad de las Artes* (“City of arts”, several public schools of arts gathered in a piece of land), where an exhibition was taking place dedicated to the work of diverse artistic groups of Córdoba. Along the way some policemen found the march and spontaneously decided to accompany them and organize the traffic as they circulated. Meanwhile, a bus driver, who was waiting for them to signal in order for him to continue his route, asked one of the officers “what is this all about?”. The policeman answered “It’s nothing to worry about, just a group of artists”. That day I walked in that march and Belkys Scolamieri travelled in that bus.

The relations between art and police are not that noticeable until it is almost too noticeable. The same could be said about the way other social practices (for example sports, gastronomy or mechanics) are linked to the police; and something very similar about the

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relationship between art and some social institutions (for example
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~~private property, academic canon or publicity) questioned and~~
questionable. Nothing stops us, in any case, to consider that those
links are critical in every single case. These notes came from a
situation, considered traumatic, that questioned that particular
relationship in a specific place. It was a situation that many people
in Córdoba experienced in a separate manner but with a certain
affinity. The one between Belkys and I, for example, is based on that
anecdote above we shared in 2011, a seminar in November 2013, and the
interest for certain overlaps oriented towards the transformation:
overlapping the lecture with writing, of the production with
criticism, of the present with history.

The article that we are now writing, confusingly involves two
grammatical persons. One of them is a first person singular quoted
literally from a text published in *The world is small and large
at the same time*, Belkys Scolamieri's *blog*. The other is of a first
person plural in which I intend to integrate myself in that text
where I am a reader and, now, responsible for its derived version.
The article refers to "what is happening" (in the present) on
December 4th of 2013[2]. And, although it is no longer that
day, we will do the test (and we will make the mistake) to
continue writing that text, because we suspect that a lot of
this is still *happening to us*.

2

"What is happening" refers to the provincial police's establishment
of self-police barracks of on Tuesday December 3rd, due to a wage
claim[3]. The strike produced a "liberated zone"[4] of enormous
dimensions and was soon followed by a series of collective actions
entering apparent contradiction: On one hand, in the neighborhoods of
the city of Córdoba the people organized themselves and compulsively
entered supermarkets to seize goods that has appeared to them as

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inaccessible until that moment. On the other hand, while looting took
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~~place, a similar number of people came into sedentary contact through~~
a social networking site.

Thanks to the possibilities that the technology *gave me*, that neither *my eyes or my courage* could have allowed, *I came close* to the faces of the looters and *I could see* in their expression a mixture of violence with a kind of almost childlike satisfaction, without it returning their innocence. A collective energy that transformed them into a dangerous machine that could destroy everything in its path. *I asked myself*: is that not a desiring machine? A mass of energy in its peak of action, put to work by a web of relations among its members and led by a kind of circuit of nervous looks, quick glances, which would advance for a second to what their bodies thought they knew: what to take, what to leave, what to destroy, how to defend themselves and how to escape.

A third initiative was added to a series of unchained collective actions and reactions by the self-police barracks of the provincial police. The same way that people organized themselves to loot that which usually bombards them like an image of another possible life, other groups did the same as guardians of some stores and fought against that machine of destruction, causing a kind of urban hunt that perhaps would be able to defend the until then known everyday life. Were there artists and artistic practices? In that case, in what way did they make contact?

3

After a long night interrupted by the sounds of gunfire and looting, we no longer wish to be the same people today as we were yesterday. The problem, however, is that this kind of violent transformation, which compromises our expectations of significant and humane changes, is both desired and feared at the same time. Precisely in situations like these we so much like to expect that all that has been read and thought will provide meaning to our context of experience.

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The action of trying to write, confirming without certainties

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~~or ask questions, and that which was written and published it~~

is, for us, the *product* of the relationship between art and police. Scolamieri's writing stood in a sort of mental and emotional state that combined the feeling of having lost the ability to know with the apparent impossibility of settling a rigorous thought that would be suitable to the present. Therefore, it expressed distrust to any argument that, expectedly, was developed with posterity to the facts. Scolamieri's product works as a postcard of a state of affairs in which "what is happening yesterday and today in Córdoba" becomes a contemporaneous *starting point* from which to explore the possibility of a change of state.

The extended present of December 2013 still inquires us: Have we all experimented what we were reading from Walter Benjamin back in just those days; fascism? What are the mechanisms that we must highlight in order to notice the paradoxical feelings that went through Scolamieri's text? Alternatively, what are the mechanisms that we would prefer to highlight in order to evade these contradictions, of wanting and fearing, all the while distrusting posterior knowledge of such state of affairs? How do we rewrite this state many months later? Where are we now, compared to the time we saw ourselves then?

It is thinkable (to those who write and also to those who read) that among the organized citizens that looted or protected stores there were people that considered themselves artists and what they did art. Among those people, were some considered intellectual by others?; Were any of these activities a conceptualized intellectual action?; Were any of these actions *exceptionally* violent?

Let us now try to state an irritating assumption: *No artistic practice known neither initiated nor participated in any of these actions.* Is it that artistic practices can only take place in determined circumstances of the institutionalization of violence^[51]? Perhaps there can only be practices of art in areas that are fully

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inhabited by the police? It would be hasty to respond to these
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~~questions affirmatively. One might wonder, however, if any other~~
artistic activity that involved self-organization of people took
place, spontaneously, within what happened and what was lived in those
days. We can also ask ourselves if the intellectual activities have
some kind of genuine expectation of snatching away things from the
present.

4

What exactly does it mean to be - or not to be - a part of that
machine; why we cannot recognize the desires that moved it as
our own? There are no morals to help us. Again, the question seems to
deceive us a little: We cannot assume that we know the boundaries
between being a part of and not, even if they are strongly intuited;
we cannot remain aloof of ideas of happiness that we understand, even
if they do not make us happy; we could not determine when violence
became an exception, that is if that ever did happen.

The expectation to undertake a critic's review of an art of *what is
happening* is reversed by the fact that what is *going on* becomes a
critique of art's own critical potential and existential
justification.[6] Art's critical potential lies precisely in
questioning the "narrative of exception" stating that: "'What is
happening' began Tuesday December 3rd and ended Wednesday 4th with a
speech that the governor of the province made publically at noon".

A non-disciplinary art would criticize, from its role as a
privileged promoter of collective imagination[7], that which
"was happening" still is happening today in all
relationships between people, in all artworks and in all
trajectories, as well as the public difficulty to point out a victim
to this state of affairs itself: Each previous event and each present
story is inscribed with the violence of a social boundary that makes
some people live with guarantees and others without them.

And this is precisely what December of 2013 brings as a critique to

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art. In the deployment of uncertainties that we were exposed to, in
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~~the dislocation of the guarantees, there was neither an~~

intellectual stance in a broad sense, nor an artistic one in a more specific sense, able to reposition the before known in respect of the now lived. What we experienced as an exception in those days has not (yet) been reinvented to take away the pain, not even to apply with energy a sense of change to the present, which is perhaps the most important, sustained promise trusted by the artistic communities that are active today[8]. The possibility of doing so is perpetually there. Scolamieri's text suggests us that thinking the social boundaries inscribed in the intimacy could be the first step to understand the construction of a collective subjectivity.

5

There is nothing philosophical in the amazement that the things we are living are “still” possible in the XXI century. Our relationship with the past is not immutable; it is unique today, tomorrow, the day when these words are read. What is now happening is saturated with tensions. We see as on a postcard a constellation of relationships between yesterday and today. How do we name it? The strength of a frightened middle class embraced its artistic practices. In December and later, in debates and conversations, there was also talk about the fascist character of the masses. But what exactly does fascism mean nowadays[9]?

How many things, or what, should one sector of society take away from another in order to unbalance the system of forces which makes us experience class boundaries? What would happen if the artistic energy of the privileged sectors were looted? In the context of these reflections, only one question remains. The question is what if the art is only thinkable in a state where the police activity exists. Where the officer guarantees peace to the bus driver and the artistic agent has nothing to do with the policeman's march over the pavement. In any case, the question is, could art be ripped from that state?

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~~Translations by Yessika Atencio~~

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[1] An earlier Spanish version of the article has been published both on paper and online in *Un Pequeño Deseo* N°24, in Córdoba, Argentina in November 2014: <http://casa13.org.ar/unpd/24-noviembre-2014/>

[2] This text is found published with a license *copyleft*

<http://scolamieri.blogspot.com.ar/2013/12/041213-alberdi-cordoba-argentina.html> (date accessed March 27th 2015). Henceforth the change of typography in verbs or phrases indicates that the first person singular has been taken literally from this text.

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<http://www.argentinaindependent.com/currentaffairs/police-end-strike-after-day-of-widespread-looting-in-cordoba/> (date accessed March 27th 2015).

[\[4\]](#)

The term liberated zone refers to a territory that enjoys impunity for certain activities, guaranteed by the inactivity of the police. The expression was consolidated,

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le <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-90336-2007-08-26.html>:

“The perpetrators shouted ‘liberated zone!’ and the hunting began”
(date accessed March 27th 2015).

[5] The reference to the police as a central aspect of the institutionalization of violence has been expressed, among others, by Walter Benjamin in his essay “Critique of violence”, originally published in 1921: “For from the point of view of violence, which can alone guarantee law, there is no equality, but at the most equally great violence” (*Reflections: Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, Schocken, New York, p. 296). The author relates and distinguishes types of violence, especially the lawmaking and law-preserving violence (state violence, fearful to other lawmaking violence that institute new limits) and the pure immediate violence, defined by the absence of all law foundation, is destructive to the limits and never absolute respect of the soul of the living. The latter is also called revolutionary violence towards the end of the essay.

[6] The present article stands on this paradox, from where is given as an object to be read.

[7] As Reinaldo Laddaga would say.

[8] Read the cover of a book widespread in artistic circles, published in 2006: “The decisive process of the last years in the universe of the arts is the formation of a different culture to the modern and their postmodern foothills. A particularly eloquent sign of this process is the proliferation of artists’ initiatives to facilitate the participation of large groups of very diverse people in projects where the realization of fiction or images associate

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with the occupation of local spaces and the exploration of
experimental forms of socialization. We face new cultural
ecologies.” (Reinaldo LADDAGA, *Estética de la emergencia*, Adriana
Hidalgo, Buenos Aires).

[9]

http://www.elmilitantevenezuela.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7431:ique-es-el-fascismo-y-como-combatirlo&catid=3&Itemid=100037 (date accessed March 27th 2015).

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