

# Thoughts on the Visual Aspect of the Neoliberal Order and the Piquetero Movement in Argentina

by

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*The Argentine piquetero movement of the 1990s, in which unemployed workers blockaded the roads to protest the neoliberal order, has been described as the emergence of a “visibility” that achieved political centrality. Visibility is a technology of power. The neoliberal order depends on the visual metaphor of “exclusion” or “obscurity” for the maintenance and reproduction of relations of domination. The subjects of this exclusion become living beings when they begin to struggle for visibility, exposing the relations of exploitation that characterize neoliberal capitalism. Such a struggle was launched by the piqueteros, and their blockades put an end to the darkness imposed upon them. In response, neoliberalism was forced to invent new ways of guaranteeing the reproduction of the social order, among them extortion (through the provision of temporary assistance) and repression (through the criminalization of protest), but the piqueteros’ efforts weakened the efficacy of these instruments of power. The subsequent reconfiguration of areas of social inclusion (first in the neighborhoods and then, especially since 2005, in the workplace) is largely the result of the emerging politicization that began with their struggles.*

**Keywords:** *Argentine piqueteros, Unemployment, Labor exploitation, Visibility, Criminalization of social protest*

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A number of researchers in the social sciences have insisted on portraying the Argentine *piquetero* movement (an organization of the unemployed that protested the economic reforms of the Menem administration in the 1990s) as the emergence of a “visibility” that achieved political centrality (Svampa and Pereyra, 2003; MTD Solano y Colectivo Situaciones, 2002). In fact, several anti-neoliberal social movements in Latin America have transformed their visibility into a political banner and the very heart of their social struggle (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, and Kuecker, 2007). This theoretical coincidence has led me to reflect on the visual aspect of the neoliberal order, understanding visibility as a technology of power and focusing on its disciplinary and regulatory function. I propose that neoliberalism constructs a particular scopic regime, and my first task here is to address the character of that regime. I go on to analyze the moment of resistance and the subsequent development of visual struggles that accompanied the emergence of the piqueteros. This much-discussed and contested

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visibility both gave new meaning to the neoliberal visual exercise and increased the importance of other technologies of power. The second part of this essay analyzes the semantic (discursive constructs) and tactile (intervention, manipulation) dimensions that developed as the piquetero organizations gained strength. This study is limited to and motivated by the Argentine experiences of the 1990s and the resultant events of December 19 and 20, 2001, when massive social protests led to violent repression and the eventual resignation of then-president Fernando de la Rúa.

An analysis of this period requires a brief introduction to the origins of neoliberalism in Argentina and the particular conditions under which it emerged during the last military dictatorship. The exercise of neoliberal visibility during the 1976–1982 period of state terrorism manifested itself most clearly in the form of the *desaparecidos* (the disappeared) and the clandestine detention centers. The blood-chilling imposition of darkness that they embodied was accompanied by the brutal visibility of a geography that exalted the state's deadly power. I do not intend to analyze these features, but I do want to emphasize their deeply felt impact and show that the neoliberal visual order of the 1990s was created around the figure of the "excluded"—taking advantage of the continuation of the past in the present, the memory of state terrorism, and the persistent fear that associated resistance and mobilization with danger. The discourse of the 1990s exalted the benefits of consumption as a measure of social integration and, in particular, a form of access to the First World.

## THOUGHTS ON THE NEOLIBERAL VISUAL ORDER

*It is an image that is imperceptibly visible, perceived but not decipherable, revealed in a flash and without a possible reading, present in a radiance that blinds the reader.*

—Michel Foucault

Martin Jay argues that vision has played a central role in the development of Western thought.<sup>1</sup> The visual metaphor is present in Plato's notion of ideas in the "mind's eye," Descartes' "clear and distinct" ideas available to a "steadfast mental gaze," and Marx's comparison of ideology to a camera obscura (Jay, 1993: 134). Vision-centeredness has "enjoyed a privileged role as the most discriminating and trustworthy of the sensual mediators between man and the world" (Jay, 1994: 202). In itself, this concern about the predominance of the visual experience maintains the latter's privileged position. As Jay points out, we can talk about a discursive change in twentieth-century French thought in which the denigration of vision replaced its former celebration. This paper will examine the centrality attributed to vision in the work of the French thinker Michel Foucault in order to create a frame within which to explore the visual struggles engaged in by social movements in the neoliberal era.

The Foucauldian concern with vision involves interpreting and thinking of it as a form of social domination. In "The Eye of Power" Foucault evidences his interest in the disciplinary and regulatory function of the gaze. For him, the

project of Bentham's Panopticon is the exercise of "power through transparency," a "subjection through illumination." It entails "an inspecting gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (Foucault, 1980: 155). Bentham's prison model expresses a new ocular technology of power inverse to that of monarchic authority.

What interests us here is to locate a fissure, a change in the exercise of the gaze, that can be linked to the network of domination that characterizes neoliberalism as a particular historical strand of capitalism. This is a selective visual exercise, one that can be described as "making visibility invisible." To avoid word play, I will attempt to explain exactly what I mean by describing the forms taken by neoliberalism in Argentina during the 1990s and the particular character of the "ocular struggles" that took place in Argentine society.

My theoretical concern with the power of the gaze is justified by the fact that the notion of "exclusion" must be understood as a visual metaphor the *raison d'être* of which is the maintenance and reproduction of relations of domination. This calls for a new definition of "visibility" in which the "social" is that which is "included." The current selective gaze dominates not by imposing visibility everywhere but by establishing areas of social darkness and light.

The power to refrain from looking at and showing what is excluded while gazing at and acknowledging what is included allows neoliberalism, as a capitalist political project, to operate as follows: (1) Capital establishes the category of the excluded as a disciplinary threat to the included. (2) When its power is confronted by something that it considers intolerable, it constructs "revelations" that briefly illuminate the social darkness of the excluded; non-existence becomes inhuman existence. (3) It is the darkness of the excluded that sustains the fiction of effective visibility. In this sense, neoliberal capitalism creates new forms of ocular domination, and the categorization of the excluded is necessary for the reproduction of capital, the dominant social subject. This assertion allows us to identify the historicity of exclusion and leads us to ponder its material determinants.

Exclusion is, then, a historically situated and materially determined ideological construct. The exercise of the gaze, understood in the Foucauldian sense as a technology of power, is no longer determined by transparency and no longer subjects by illumination; rather, it guarantees vast areas of darkness as a sort of permanent reserve, an unconditionally available resource employed by an authority whose domination is based on its ability to create darkness as a paralyzing and totalizing shadow over the reality that it makes visible. To emphasize the contrast between this practice and those that preceded it, we could say that it is a power that dominates through darkness and subjects with shadow play.

But my argument is not yet finished. So far I have addressed two essential elements of neoliberal domination: exclusion/inclusion as a tool for dominating the included and the rooting of power in exclusion. These serve as the base upon which numerous visual practices that attribute multiple and fluid meanings to the exclusion/inclusion pairing can and will be constructed: "the excluded ignorant" vs. the included; "the excluded criminal" vs. the included; the "excluded violent" vs. the included; "the excluded unproductive" vs. the included, and others. The different meanings attributed to this fundamental

dichotomy are a product of ocular struggles and the results of resistance to these stigmatizing acts of illumination. In short, it is the dialectical moment of the gaze that is at the center of this analysis. I have yet to reflect, however, on the ways in which the imposition of darkness affects those condemned to live in such a state. I admit that my argument follows a predetermined track—in other words, that I am anticipating my conclusions. Because of this, I will start with those conclusions. If we cannot yet say anything about the ways in which darkness operates on the excluded, it is because it is here that the exercise becomes most fallible, resistible, and controversial. The new forms of domination that sustain this reprogrammable exclusion/inclusion dichotomy are far more efficacious in determining inclusion.

Here I propose to summarize the critical theoretical arguments in the social sciences that have maintained that the process of expulsion-exclusion prevented the expelled from emerging as subjects with transformative potential: The dialectical nature of the notion of the “subject” (i.e., as subjected subject and as subject to history) was no longer valid. Because of their “unsubjected” nature, the excluded could not possibly be political subjects. The main justification for this approach was their presumed “uselessness” to the functioning of the social machinery (Castel, 1997: 445). Faced with the purest formulations of neoliberalism, which asserted that vast sectors of the population were useless because they were unnecessary and unproductive, some social scientists, taking this idea as a point of departure, maintained that the excluded could not be transformative of the social order. The discourse that dominated local academia, characterized by the ever-present figure of “the expert,” validated the brutal asymmetries that authorized exclusionary classifications.<sup>2</sup>

These approaches confuse neoliberal ideological discourse with social reality. At the very least we should wonder if, regardless of what it predicates, neoliberalism could indeed do without the vast social sectors summarily rendered useless to the world or whether instead it requires their dark presence—an excluded/included distinction that presents an indeterminate contradiction of social reality the invariable determination of which will prevent a reference to the capital/labor pairing as the structural contradiction at the heart of capitalism. Is not exclusion/inclusion the tool that allows the reproduction of capital as a dominant social subject during the phase of neoliberal capitalism?

### EXCLUSION AS A TOOL IN THE COMMODIFICATION OF LABOR

Exclusion as a guarantee of the reproduction of capital in the neoliberal phase has as its objective the intensification of the commodification of labor. Consequently, it attempts to reduce labor costs by ensuring the elimination of the political component that could threaten to transform salaries into an “independent variable” (see Negri, 2002).<sup>3</sup>

This can even be seen as a sort of historical compensation in favor of capital, given that neoliberalism guarantees that salaries will be regulated by the law of supply and demand. An interview with F. A. von Hayek corroborates this intent when this advocate of economic liberalism<sup>4</sup> speaks of Keynesian economics (von Hayek, 1992, my italics):

Keynes despaired in the 1920s of the possibility of again making wages flexible. He came to the conclusion that *we must accept wages as they are and adjust monetary policy to the existing wage structure*. That, of course, forced him to say, "I don't want any restriction on monetary policy because I have to adjust monetary policy to a given situation."

But he overlooked that, at that very moment, the trade unions knew that the government was under an obligation to correct the effect of the trade-union policy, and so we get a hopeless spiral. The unions push up wages, and government has to provide enough money to keep employment at these wages, and this leads into the inflationary spiral. *This came out of the practical considerations of Keynes in the short run—that we can't do anything about the rigidity of wages.*

In fact, the British in the 1920s were very near success. The very painful, and silly, process of deflation was very nearly successful at the end of the 20s. Then they got frightened by the long period of unemployment. I think if they had lasted a year or two longer they probably would have succeeded.

In Argentina, the state-run genocide carried out by the military dictatorship, the dismantling of industry, and massive unemployment had a common thread: the subordination of labor. Paraphrasing Sartre, the three calamities that perpetually hound labor—unemployment, poverty, and repression—combined in an unprecedented way.

To show how the dark presence of exclusion worked as a threat and a disciplinary element for the included, an example of the workings of the excluded/included dichotomy should be sufficient. During the 1990s, labor reforms that profoundly altered the protective nature of individual and collective labor rights were passed, and their goal was to reduce so-called labor costs. Labor rights that had been attained through intense social struggle began to erode and gave way to an endless series of norms that reduced labor costs, damaged labor stability, and allowed the fragmentation of the working collective by individualizing labor relations.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, these reforms constructed an ideological discourse that claimed, depending on the speaker, to be defending "the excluded," "the hungry," or "the external elements." Reforms that proposed the most severe lack of labor protection in a variety of areas (work contracts, indemnification in the case of dismissal, vacation time, collective negotiations, etc.) were justified as a way of including the excluded. In fact, most of these reforms were the result of very strong pressure on the part of international bodies and were implemented without resistance by the local authorities. A 1993 International Monetary Fund (IMF) report attributed high and increasing unemployment to inflexibility and lack of competition in the labor market and recommended reforms that would increase flexibility and eliminate features of the social security system that discouraged job creation. What was to be avoided, according to the report, was the situation in which the wages of the employed were so high that the unemployed ("the external elements") were unable to find work. Defending the rigidity of the labor market would benefit the employed, who were protected by competition with the unemployed, rather than the society as a whole.

These statements are interesting because they clarify the rationale and interests espoused by several Argentine civil servants in their legislative approach to the flexibilizing labor reforms enacted during this decade. Specifically, during the 1991 parliamentary debate on labor reform,<sup>6</sup> the chairman of the Senate's Labor Legislation Commission, Senator Oraldo Britos (*Debates Parlamentarios*, 1991), said,

In a way, the project tries to take into account the situation not of those colleagues who have work but of those who do not. . . . I do not think the term [flexibilization] is very precise, because the mere fact that we intend to produce more jobs does not entail flexibilization—rather, it is full knowledge of the fact that we cannot merely pass laws for those who can feed themselves. We must also legislate for those who are hungry.

First of all, we can see that the argument was based on the construction of a distinction between two social sectors: employed and unemployed. The particular way in which social reality is described implies that the problems suffered by the unemployed, “the external elements,” are the result of laws that excessively favor the employed. Thus two groups that structurally occupy the same subordinate position with regard to capital are pitted against each other. I have already mentioned the exercise of visibility that operates through the excluded/included dichotomy. The nature of the labor reforms, which jeopardized both individual and collective labor rights, was discursively justified by the existence of the excluded, and the employed were directly revealed as the included. Therefore, what the one-dimensional veneer of neoliberal thought is veiling is the dividing line between “us” and “others”—capital and labor—that constitutes labor relations. The concept of the included encompasses everything that is not excluded. And yet, as we can see, the only thing that is apparent in the included category is the presence of the employed.

Earlier I talked about the ways in which neoliberalism operates as a political project of capital. I also pointed out that “excluded” is a category established by capital itself—a tool for disciplining the included. We can therefore say that the disciplinary threat is directed at workers in the included category, who are considered responsible for the unemployment of the excluded. Thus illumination can be instituted at both poles of the excluded/included distinction.

### THE PIQUETERO MOVEMENT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR VISIBILITY

*I think the piquetes put an end to apathy, but in an alternative way. We shook the country out of the sweet dreams of Menem and all those policies, and we were like the explosion of a new light.*

—MTD Solano y Colectivo Situaciones

I have questioned the sociological approaches that perpetuated neoliberal domination by linking the excluded to the reproduction of the state. Pierre Bourdieu even said that, given the redundancy of this theoretical maxim, the various forms of organization among the unemployed were a “sociological miracle.” And now we finally come to the heart of this paper. Neoliberalism, as a specific historical manifestation of a form of social domination, requires the segmented, dark presence of the excluded. The subjects of this darkness, reified in their condition, suddenly become living beings when they manage to launch a struggle for visibility and thus threaten to subvert the imposed dark order. Regaining visibility means exposing the relations of exploitation that characterize neoliberal capitalism.

How was exclusion resisted in the Argentina of the 1990s? This resistance did not entail the conquest of visibility once and for all, but its emergence in the market context led to a profound change in the categorization of the excluded. The excluded became the *piqueteros*. The outsiders (or “external elements,” as the IMF puts it) who had been relegated to darkness by the neoliberal order, driven by hunger and pauperization, reappeared in a painful locus of capital: the routes for the circulation of merchandise. Denied entrance into the areas of production and consumption, they invaded the inner recesses of the market to interrupt the flow of merchandise that they did not produce and would not consume. The blockades erected by these unemployed laborers’ collective organizations contested “economic freedom.”

The *piqueteros* denied the reproductive role neoliberal capitalism requires of the excluded: their obscure presence. We could say that their blockades put an end to the “dark” role assigned to them. At the same time they were a clear interruption of the reproduction of the neoliberal order: visibility was maintained during the blockade. *Piqueteros* often refer to the idea of “putting their bodies” into the struggle, and I want to underline this other, costly aspect of the movement: blocking the roads, stopping the flow of merchandise to put an end to their obscurity, entailed exposing their bodies.

Unemployment emerged as the condition of individuals; people who lost their jobs did so alone. Reciprocal alienation (Sartre, 1995) had replaced the social bond. Capital denied the only possible source of survival by rendering the workforce useless, thus showing its incommensurably deadly power. The “explosion of a new light” on the roads was preceded by an arduous process of construction of political subjectivity. Thus, another element expressed in the blockades was the cessation of atomized existence and solitude—the political practice and confrontation of labor as a collective subject. If the excluded embodied a threat to the included, their transformation into *piqueteros* turned them into a threat to capital in that, visible and organized, they resisted the “guarantees” of the broad reproduction of capital. Their acquired political visibility had to face, time and again, a power that would appeal for the preservation of the neoliberal order precisely by manipulating that visibility. A new morphology of social intervention (tactile and semantic regimes of power) was constructed once the visual wars had been declared.

Once the fiction of exclusion had been dismantled, neoliberalism was forced to invent new ways to exercise power in order to guarantee the reproduction of the social order. Visual practices continued to be employed but necessarily acquired very different characteristics. The imposition of darkness encountered limits when the “power to let die” was confronted with a struggle for survival and the fighters, having made themselves visible, exposed the deep contradictions upon which the neoliberal regime was built. Two forms of state intervention in this visible reality may be called “extortory” and “repressive.”

### **EXTORTORY INTERVENTION: TRANSITORY SOCIAL “ASSISTANCE”**

The implementation of policies targeting the unemployed began during the mid-1990s and was based on a number of unexamined assumptions. First, the

exclusion presented as a counterpart to unemployment was linked to an individual lack: lack of education and training to do the job properly—a discourse of obsolescence during the era of the “third technological revolution.” Therefore discursive constructs spoke of “improving employability.” Secondly, there was a paradoxical combination of a characterization of society as consisting of insiders and outsiders and a neoliberal concept of unemployment as a transitory phenomenon. The first assumption—unemployment due to obsolescence—provided an initial definition of unemployment that sought to reproduce this very situation in order to guarantee a rupture of the bonds between the affected parties. The unemployed were then individually blamed and expected to expend their efforts on improving their condition of employability.

The neoliberal state’s material intervention, implemented through the transitory employment programs, resulted from the development of bonds among the unemployed—their unexpected coming together, their capacity for resistance, and the power they acquired by establishing a space for protest (the blocked road) that obstructed the holiest and most sacred economic freedoms. As Dahrendorf (1974) asserts, capitalism tends to institutionalize the ways in which class antagonisms are expressed in order to lessen and restrain the intensity of social conflict.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the organization of the unemployed and the blockades lie outside all state regulations—hence their transformative potential and threat to the neoliberal order. Direct action without an institutional source is what distinguishes social movements, penetrating the legitimacy of procedural democracy.

These thoughts lead us to the following questions: To what degree do employment programs attempt to regulate social conflict? How does their weak institutionalization mitigate conflict? What kind of resistance did the piquetero organizations present, and how were they able to modify the state’s goals with regard to these policies?

Temporary social assistance to the unemployed became a mechanism of extortion. The impossibility of maintaining the excluded as a dark presence by the mid-1990s led to a type of state intervention that sought to contain conflict with conditional, temporary “assistance.” The unemployed participated in the employment programs via projects of limited duration (between three and six months [see Svampa and Pereyra, 2003: Chap. 2]) managed by “responsible bodies” that, because of the criteria established, were in most cases municipalities.<sup>8</sup> The amount of this “assistance”<sup>9</sup> only guaranteed the reproduction of poverty while enabling the survival of its beneficiaries—a type of survival that could prevent death but meant a malnourished and sickly existence lacking human dignity. In short, these programs were state instruments that, while functioning within the wide, arbitrary margins established by the ambiguous rules that regulated them,<sup>10</sup> served to reduce the visibility of the organized unemployed. They were established in exchange for the demobilization of the piqueteros. The extortion here consisted of the permanent surrender of their recovered visibility.

This state intervention partially achieved its objectives, but the instruments of domination created for the implementation of these projects (temporary assistance and the designation of municipalities as the responsible bodies)



were defied, and their disciplinary effects were therefore neutralized. In the first place, the transitory status of the beneficiaries was strongly questioned. The blockades increased when the state showed intentions of writing off some of those beneficiaries. The imposed extortionary relationship was inverted when the popular perception of “nonremunerative assistance” was endangered and the so-called transitory employment positions became permanent. Secondly, the organizations of unemployed workers were gradually able to evade the multiple requisites that prevented them from becoming the bodies responsible for administering the programs. This strengthened their bonds, since the political struggle of the blockade was no longer the only thing they shared: neighborhood assemblies<sup>11</sup> led to a multiplicity of communal experiences. Thirdly, this territorial dimension increased their organizational capacity, and they began taking on new projects: different types of productive enterprise led to piquetero slogans such as “The Neighborhood Is the New Factory” (see Cross, 2004) and “Creating an Alternative Economy” (see MTD Solano y Colectivo Situaciones, 2002).

### REPRESSIVE INTERVENTION AND THE CRIMINALIZATION OF PROTEST

*Coercion becomes both determinant and dominant in the supreme crisis, and the army inevitably occupies the front of the stage in any class struggle against the prospect of a real inauguration of socialism.*

—Perry Anderson

At the very limit was repressive intervention. The blockade was viewed as a crime, and the intervention was realized through the criminalization of social protest by distorting and falsifying the visibility of the demonstrations: burning tires, covered faces, and sticks were the images chosen and amplified by the neoliberal visual order as it prepared its repressive machinery.

Perry Anderson (1976), in his analysis of the Gramscian concept of hegemony, points out that “capitalist power can . . . be regarded as a topological system with a ‘mobile’ centre: in any crisis, an objective redeployment occurs, and capital reconcentrates from its representative into its repressive apparatuses.” While he succeeds in locating the moment of repression and violence, he obscures the multiplicity of elements that make up a sort of neoliberal mechanism of domination, among them darkness and obscurity, individualization, blame, extortion, criminalization, and repression. That said, we can go back to Anderson’s statement about coercion’s being the determining factor in the power system. Here we are talking not about the “power to let die” that is exercised when the workforce is rendered useless but, particularly, about the power to repress, to kill. In order to do this, the system must build a physiognomy of the piquetero whose features can be re-created as insignias of violence: the smoke, the fire, the broken glass, the bandanna over the face, the sticks, etc. This is the visual and semantic moment of repressive intervention, the moment when the dangers of the protest are revealed and the threat posed by its protagonists, the piqueteros, is asserted.

On the one hand, this distorts the visibility of the protest. On the other, it distinguishes “good” and “bad,” “violent” and “peaceful,” those “driven by ideology” and those who “really have needs.” The impossibility of coming up with a direct “piqueteros-violence” correlation (that is, the notion that “all piqueteros are violent”) is based on the limits that the resistance and the struggle sustained by visibility imposed on the neoliberal state.

I should explain the concept of the state employed in this paper, especially since we are referring to the various forms of state intervention (see also Castel, 1997; Abal Medina and Cross, 2005). I base my definition on the concept developed by Poulantzas, in which the state—along with capital—is a “relationship of forces or, more precisely, the material condensation of such a relationship among classes and class factions” (Poulantzas, 2000: 129). Let me briefly explain some of the elements that follow from this concept in an attempt to provide a partial answer to the above question, one focused on the relation between the state and popular struggles:

1. The state concentrates not only the power relations between the factions in command but also those between it and the dominated classes.
2. Political struggles between subaltern sectors always have effects, albeit at a distance, on the state.
3. State bodies organize and unify the power block and disorganize and permanently divide the dominated classes, polarizing them toward the power block and short-circuiting their own political organizations.

I believe that these elements sufficiently explain my stance with regard to the incapacity of the neoliberal state to identify the piqueteros with violence without employing selective criteria.

The increase in numbers of the piqueteros, their consolidation and collective expansion, and their increasing political centrality derived from demands that were increasingly hostile to the neoliberal system and allowed for the preservation of their visibility as political subjects with only occasional retreats into darkness. During every moment of one or another neoliberal domination strategy, the newly visible and organized unemployed put up visual, semantic, and tactile resistance, creating a complex network of relations that encompassed moments of development, coexistence, subjugation, collision, and vindication. If, as Poulantzas suggests, the state is crisscrossed by popular struggles and always affected by them, then we can say that the piqueteros’ centrality placed limits on state action and, in particular, the possibility of fighting their visibility through repressive intervention. The attempt to create internal friction within the piquetero movement through selective categorizations that singled out the “violent ones” and the use of repression as a last resort are evidence of the high degree of internal contradiction within the neoliberal state.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of an essay are always complex. I have here essayed an examination of the occurrence of exclusion as an ideological construct of

neoliberal capitalism in the political visibility expressed by the organization of unemployed workers. This examination necessarily contains imprecisions, questions, and unresolved problems, and therefore I want to stress the limits of my text. My intention has been to show the transition from subjects of exclusion to piquetero subjects, but the subjects are not linear and are criss-crossed by the complex networks of domination that characterize the neoliberal order and its reproduction of relations of exploitation. In any case, the paths of subjectivity opened up by collective struggle have built new geographies that resist the established boundaries and alter meanings while, at the same time, reproducing the social order. I am not espousing any kind of determinism; I simply want to avoid underestimating a social order that has remained unquestioned for many years. This is the dual nature of political practice expressed by Françoise Proust: political action “limps and gives in, and yet, this is the way in which it acts upon the world and makes the world act” (quoted in Bensaïd, 2006: 36).

Neoliberalism has created new material and symbolic tools for domination. The recommodification of labor was based on a new social dichotomy of excluded/included. Imposing a dark and indecipherable presence, treating the excluded unemployed as individuals and making them responsible for their condition, blaming the situation on the included employed, using transitory state assistance to contain social conflict; criminalizing social protest and, consequently, piquetero protest subjects, selectively stigmatizing certain unemployed workers' organizations, and utilizing repressive state intervention are all elements of a mechanism of domination that is certainly much larger and more complex than has been shown here. While we can of course establish certain temporalities in the succession of these elements, it is only with regard to their predominance at certain moments of neoliberal development, since what is distinctive about them is their coexistence.

The collective organization of unemployed laborers, their struggle for visibility, the blockades, the inversion of extortionary practices with regard to temporary state assistance, and the emergence of new types of vindication weakened the efficacy of the instruments of neoliberal power and led to the “explosion of a new light” that exposed the new forms of organization of capitalist production. Here I have called attention to the different technologies of domination employed by neoliberalism against the excluded and the ways in which the latter resisted these attempts at reproducing their imposed condition. But I have not analyzed the elements that affected the included: all I have done is state that they are threatened by exclusion and point to certain selective acts of inclusion focused on privileged workers.

Exclusion and the cracks and fissures that erode the neoliberal order have all been discussed, but inclusion has appeared to be reproduced in resounding silence. Therefore, I cannot finish this essay without posing a new batch of questions: What are the elements of the neoliberal system that account for the reproduction of domination among the included? To what extent does resistance to the exclusion/inclusion dichotomy require fissures on both sides of the boundary? How is the meaning of this dichotomy modified when the object of exclusion becomes the piquetero subject? Finally, and taking into account the events of December 2001, can we say that the piqueteros expressed a social protest that resisted categorization as “included”? How can we account

for the reality underlying this expression of protest? Did these events place a limit on the repressive aspect of the neoliberal state?

The events of 2001 are shot through with the polysemy of collective cries, unexpected happenings, and extraordinary temporalities (see Abal Medina, Gorbán, and Battistini, 2002; Svampa, 2008b): *cacerolazos* (the beating of pans in the street), neighborhood assemblies, the recovery of public spaces, interaction between the middle and the lower classes, political reformation, debate among subalterns, and a slogan that clearly expressed one of the meanings attached to that year—"Piquete y cacerola, la lucha es un sola" (Blockade and pan-beating, it's the same struggle). Some might think that this slogan has been extinguished, but areas of social inclusion have been reconfigured by emerging forms of politicization; workers' precarious position has been questioned, initially in the neighborhoods and, particularly since 2005, in the workplace, largely because of the struggles of organized groups of unemployed workers.

## NOTES

1. Jay maintains that ocularcentrism developed with the rise of modern science, the Gutenberg revolution in printing, and the Albertian emphasis on perspective in painting.

2. For more, see Svampa's (2008a: 25) work on the expert in local academic spaces, who is "supposedly neutral and dispassionate, a 'legitimate' model of knowledge" but "suspicious of any sort of research that attempts to undertake analysis from a militant point of view." An alternative analysis can be found in MTD Solano y Colectivo Situaciones (2002).

3. I thank Richard Stahler-Sholk for his comments on this issue.

4. What was initially a marginal voice in *The Road from Serfdom* (first published in 1944) became the undisputed ideal of neoliberalism starting in the 1970s.

5. One of the most controversial reforms of the decade took place in 1991 with the passage of Law 24.013, which introduced new forms of temporary hiring that eroded principles of labor stability. At the same time, labor costs diminished considerably because of the drastic reduction or elimination of employer contributions and compulsory compensation.

6. This reform project was one of the laws that most relentlessly attacked individual labor rights, and it has been partially revoked.

7. The emergence of collective labor rights is one of the forms taken by these kinds of regulation. Examples include regulations on the right to strike and the implementation of "compulsory conciliation."

8. The bodies charged with administering the employment programs had to have had legal capacity for a set minimum time and were required to ensure the supply of the necessary consumables and materials, provide training courses, have previous experience in carrying out activities related to the project proposals, and so on. These requirements prevented grassroots organizations from becoming such bodies. Also, even if a given body fulfilled the legal requisites, its proposal could still be rejected because the criteria included technical, logistic, and financial capabilities.

9. Most of the employment programs financed only "nonremunerative economic assistance" packets of US\$120–\$200.

10. The ambiguity of criteria such as "poverty level and conflictive nature of the area chosen for the implementation of the project," "coverage of the program's intended population," and "quality and pertinence of the project" allowed for the discretionary approval of projects. Proposals were evaluated by the Office of Employment and Labor Training Management, which directly depended on the Ministry of Labor, and the latter directly appointed the managers.

11. This article does not address the neighborhood assembly as a political tool for creating a collective bond among organized unemployed workers. This is, however, a very significant factor in the development of social struggles and has diversely impacted a significant

number of heterogeneous social movements in Latin America (see Svampa, 2008b; Stahler-Sholk, 2007).

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