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Rubbish Politics in Buenos Aires

Thesis submitted for the award of
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**THESIS
CONTAINS
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Rubbish Politics in Buenos Aires

Abstract:

This thesis investigates the politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires. In the aftermath of the financial and political crisis of 2001-2002, the proliferation of *cartoneros* (rubbish pickers) on the streets of Buenos Aires provoked a controversy around rubbish. This thesis examines the issues that were raised and the changes that followed this controversy in order to understand the different ways that rubbish matters matter in how politics is done, and in how democracy is enacted in Buenos Aires, Argentina. It uses insights from actor-network theory and theories of materiality in dialogue with political and democratic theory, worked through an ethnographic study in two different sites, Moreno and Bajo Flores.

The thesis makes three main claims. First, the analysis of the ways rubbish became political challenges discursive and agonistic accounts of the relations and things that count in the making of an issue. Secondly, this thesis shows how paying attention to the material practices that are involved in the way rubbish is governed, from its administration, collection, burial, to separation by a cooperative of *cartoneros*, shapes a material politics that cannot easily be reduced to the formation of a unique social ordering, and thus, complicate the ways that the 'good' can be defined. Finally, this research shows how the 'good' is constructed through the staging of devices that enact and specify the meaning of particular democratic principles in the development of a participatory environmental project. In this way, this thesis demonstrates how the material geographies of rubbish matter to how politics and democracy is practiced.

Rubbish politics in Buenos Aires

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List of things not bound with thesis:

Participatory video DVD

List of Abbreviations

ANT: Actor-Network Theory

CABA: Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires (Autonomous City of Buenos Aires)

CDM: Clean Development Mechanism

CEAMSE: Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado (Ecological
Coordination of the Metropolitan Area of the State)

CERBaF: Cooperativa Ecológica de Recicladores del Bajo Flores (Ecological Cooperative
of Recyclers of Bajo Flores)

DGPRU: Dirección General del Programa de Recuperadores Urbanos (General Direction
for the Programme of Urban Recuperators)

CGP: Centro de Gestión y Participación (Participation and Management Centre)

IDRC: International Development Research Centre

IDUAR: Instituto de Desarrollo Urbano, Ambiental y Regional

IIED-LA: International Institute for Environment and Development Latin America

IMF: International Monetary Fund

INAES: Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Empresa Social (National Institute for
Associations and Social Enterprise)

INDEC: Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (National Institute for Statistics and
Census)

RMBA: Región Metropolitana de Buenos Aires (Metropolitan region of Buenos Aires)

GBA: Gran Buenos Aires (Greater Buenos Aires)

GMO: Genetically modified organisms

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

OU: Open University

PNUD: United Nations Development Programme

PRU: Programa de Recuperadores Urbanos (Programme of Urban Recuperators)

PV: Participatory Video

SIGA: Sistema Integral de Gestión Ambiental (Integrated Environmental Management System)

STS: Science and Technology Studies

UK: United Kingdom

UPE: Urban Political Ecology

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Introduction

This thesis investigates the politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires. In the aftermath of the financial and political crisis of 2001-2002, the proliferation of so-called *cartoneros*¹ on the streets of Buenos Aires provoked a series of controversies around rubbish: who was responsible for it, who owned it, how and by whom was it to be managed, and who got to decide. This thesis examines the issues that were raised and the changes that followed this controversy in order to understand the different ways that rubbish matters matter in how politics is done, and in how democracy is enacted in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

The starting point of this thesis is that to understand what politics and democracy are in particular places we have to look at *how* things are being done in everyday practices. In this sense, this thesis places itself within studies that attempt to refigure politics, and I would add democracy, as the ‘work of constitution or assemblage in which things force thought, association and attachment’ (Braun and Whatmore 2010b: xxix). This thesis aims to show how politics and democracy are made up from the multiple ways in which we (humans and non-humans) assemble.

The particularity of the case of the politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires is not construed as a way of demonstrating an established theoretical idea, but to contribute to its making. The dialogue that this thesis generates between actor-network theory, studies on materiality and of rubbish, as well as political and democratic theory, is worked through an ethnographic study in the metropolitan region of Buenos Aires (RMBA) in

¹ *Cartoneros*, which means literally ‘cardboard people’, is the name used since the crisis of 2001-2, for those who go through the rubbish bags to separate materials that can be sold, such as cardboard – hence the name- but also plastic bottles, cans, metals and glass.

two different sites: Bajo Flores and Moreno. Through the study of the particularities of the politics of rubbish, this thesis aims to elucidate how the specificity of this case, that is, the different political ways in which rubbish is done in Buenos Aires, is important to the study of actor-network theory, politics and democracy.

In this introduction, I aim to give a more personal account of how the research issue was constructed, give a sense of the context in which the rubbish issue became important in Buenos Aires, as well as describe the order of this thesis.

The making of the research issue

When I started this PhD, my proposal was to study the politics of urban environmental issues using an actor-network theory (ANT) approach. Once I started, I needed to define further my research issue. I wanted to do fieldwork in Buenos Aires, as I wanted an opportunity to go back to where I was from for different reasons. It was a change to study environmental issues, through an approach that was not prevalent in Buenos Aires and that I felt could make a contribution to the ways these issues have been understood, and at the same time, a study in Buenos Aires could make a contribution to understanding how this approach could travel. Second, it was a place I was familiar with, and where I could speak the language, which was an asset in many ways for doing fieldwork. Third, it would be an opportunity to get re-acquainted with family and friends that I missed from having lived in England for the previous 7 years.

The next thing was to decide what to work on. It did not take me long to realise which environmental issue I wanted to look at. Rubbish was one of the few environmental

issues that become more obviously political, that is, that became a matter for public debates, featured prominently in the media, and was the subject of different changes in legislation. This happened at the time of the Argentine crisis of 2001-2.

In December 2001, a political, social and economic crisis exploded in Argentina. The long hot days between 20th December 2001 and 1st January 2002 were full of social and political drama. As Tedesco points out, in one decade, Argentina went from being the International Monetary Fund (IMF) role model, with some of the highest economic rates, to witnessing a spectacular economic meltdown (Tedesco 2002: 470). At the time of the crisis, President Fernando de la Rúa, who belonged to one of Argentina's main political parties, the Union Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union Party), and governed through an Alliance with another party called the *Frente País Solidario* (FREPASO – *Country Solidarity Front*), was just halfway through his four year term. Already he faced a lack of confidence and of legitimacy (as the Alliance started to disintegrate), as he seemed to have already betrayed the hopes for economic recovery, transparency, and new directions promised in the elections (Tedesco 2002). The entrenched economic recession, escalating amounts of capital flight that started in the previous months, the possibility of the collapse of the Convertibility Plan – the tagging of the Peso to the Dollar - along with the lack of confidence and trust in De la Rúa's government, meant that the attempt to control the collapse of the financial system by restricting the amount of money people could withdraw was met with spontaneous protests, mobilisations and riots (Klein 2004, Rodgers 2005b, Tedesco 2002).

Rioting and looting took place in different provinces, and in the autonomous city of Buenos Aires (CABA), especially in lower-income areas, along with middle class

protesters banging pots and pans (*cacerolas*) in the streets in what is called the 'cacerolazo', and roadblocks made by *piqueteros* (the name for the movement of the unemployed) (Klein 2004). In response, President Fernando de la Rúa imposed a state of emergency. This was the element that provoked a spontaneous massive protest, and led to civil strife which ended in what is called the *Argentinazo* (López Levy 2004: 8, Rodgers 2005a: 12). The effect of this protest was the resignation of the Minister for Economy, and then that of the President. President de La Rúa was forced to leave the *Casa Rosada* (Pink House)² by helicopter due to massive protests on the 20th of December. In less than two weeks, three more Presidents came and went, until Eduardo Duhalde, Senator for Buenos Aires Province, was made President in January 2002 to serve the remainder of De la Rúa's term (Klein 2004).

The end of De la Rúa's presidency also signified the end of an era. Argentina had, in the last decades, experienced deep transformations. The political, economic and social changes that took place, especially during Menem's presidency in the 1990s, are described by many as the construction of a neoliberal order, creating the double dynamics of polarisation and fragmentation and leading to an exclusionary society (Basualdo 2002, Svampa 2005, Torre 1998). Different analyses of the crisis point to the economic model, to the particularities of the political practices and the form of democracy in Argentina, international pressures, and to cultural characteristics (Basualdo 2002, Fiorucci 2004, Fiorucci and Klein 2004, López Levy 2004, Rodgers 2005b, Svampa 2005, Tedesco 2002). This crisis was significant as it produced a reaction from the population against politicians and the state, which is reflected in the slogan and chants that characterised the period: 'everyone [meaning politicians] must

² The Pink House is the building that houses the President's offices and acts as official seat of the executive branch of the government of Argentina.

go', which did not end, as so many times before, in a *coup*, but in a claim for real democratisation, transparency, and accountability.

Privatisation, new forms of management, changes in the political and economic model, and the economic and political crisis affected the city of Buenos Aires in particular ways and interacted with other processes that were part of the material formation of the city. These problems and events were also shaped by and through what took place in the city. Some of the effects that these processes and events had were seen in tendencies to spatial segregation and micro-fragmentation, in privatisation processes that created new urban forms, in the territorialisation of politics, the loss of public spaces, the drive to become a 'global city' and the effects on the finances of the city (Gorelik 2004, Pérez 2002, Svampa 2005). But they were also visible in the new relationship and place of the city in its relationship with the federal government: its autonomy opened up new possibilities of citizenship and participation (Gorelik 2004, Pérez 2002).

The roots of the crisis and its effects are far too complex to be analysed here in any detail. However, it is useful to convey the situation in which the controversy around rubbish flourished. In the midst of this crisis that continued well into the next year, one of the figures that were cast prominently was that of *cartoneros*. *Cartoneros* was the name used for people who went out on the streets to pick through the rubbish in order to find valuable materials to sort and sell. *Cartoneros* became especially visible as their numbers multiplied as a consequence of the high unemployment levels and the rise in price of re-usable materials. Their presence was controversial, which had to do with the type of work, and with the material they work with: picking rubbish. The

thought that people had to go to these lengths to survive meant that *cartoneros* became visible as a sign and a symptom, of the crisis.

Cartoneros became a prominent figure in the city, in the media, and in city government practices. The focus on *cartoneros* brought about a questioning of the ways that rubbish was being done. Many of the narratives around rubbish and *cartoneros*, however, seem to load *cartoneros*, and especially those who organised in cooperatives, with many other associations that romanticised the work of *cartoneros* as a movement resisting capitalism or as the more ideologically and politically progressive form of organisation for the collection and separation of materials (for a critique see Schamber 2007c, Schamber and Suarez 2007a). For this reason, I felt an initial resistance to tackling the work of *cartoneros*, as I did not want to stick with what seemed the latest trend in what I saw as glamorising 'resistance' actors. Interest in the work of *cartoneros* could be seen in the explosion in the number of articles in national newspapers (Schamber 2006), but also, for instance, in the creation of special 'packages' for tourists to experience the lives of *cartoneros* through the '*tren blanco*' (white train)³. If I was to undertake research on rubbish, which included inevitably the *cartoneros*, I was determined to look more carefully at their work, and to tell other, hopefully more complex, stories about their work and organisational efforts, ones that were more specific as to *how* things worked. This preoccupation aligned with ethnographic studies being done around *cartoneros* and rubbish that were more attentive to the complexities of the matters at hand in Buenos Aires and beyond (Schamber 2007b, Schamber and Suarez 2007b, Suárez 2001).

³ The *Tren Blanco* was the special service organised by the train company, Trenes de Buenos Aires (TBA), that transported *cartoneros* from the outskirts of the city of Buenos Aires to the centre and back. It was called the *tren blanco* because it was service of trains stripped down to the bare minimum and painted white. Sometimes it was also called the ghost train as it was white, and travelled near midnight.

Cartoneros were the spark for the debates on rubbish and the spark to start thinking about the different ways that rubbish was done, which were also political, even when there were no controversies around them. This meant paying attention to how rubbish was shaped as an issue in different sites, and to the different ways in which rubbish was political, which highlighted particular material qualities of rubbish at different times.

In terms of what rubbish I was to study, I followed the case in Argentina and decided to focus on urban household waste. This is the reason why I stuck with the term rubbish, as it is my view the nearest translation of the word *basura*, which is the most common way of referring to what others call urban household waste in Buenos Aires. Part of what drew me to rubbish is the complexity of relations, of meanings, of effects/affects that it can bring. I wanted to understand what rubbish was by seeing how it got done in different sites, by understanding the different relations that make it. And the way its construction through everyday practices makes it more than an individual problem, and makes it political.

This introduction gave an overview of the different interests, things and events, which made me curious about how and where rubbish was done, and what made rubbish what it was in particular places. From these, I discerned three areas that needed to be weaved together, and for which I articulated different theoretical approaches through the empirical material that became the research issue of this thesis. These areas were: a concern with the everyday practices and sites of politics; understanding the normative links between these doings and the way democracy was done in Buenos Aires and a question about how the materiality of rubbish mattered in these political practices. For this I turned to ANT, political and democracy theory and studies of

materiality respectively, with specific attention to those related to rubbish. These different literatures helped me to create my own particular approach to the material politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires.

Order of the thesis

The map of issues I have traced here is divided in particular ways in the thesis. Chapter 1 analyses and articulates the theoretical framework of the thesis. I start by analysing different actor-network theory studies, specifically in terms of the ways in which they approach the political. Second, I turn to political and democratic theory, especially that which engages with environmental issues, in search of more specific ways in which to think about the normative link between everyday material practices and democracy. Third, I analyse studies on materiality and waste, to find ways to bring in the materiality of rubbish into the analysis of politics and democracy.

In Chapter 2, I describe the process of generating materials for this research through doing ethnographic work in two sites, Bajo Flores and Moreno. I describe how I adapted ethnography for the purposes of my research and attuned it to the particularities of the site. I describe how I 'created the field' in two different sites of the RMBA: Bajo Flores and Moreno. I analyse next the process of putting methods to work, through the description of two particular methods: participatory video and participant observation. Finally, I reflect on the analytical work and the process of writing the materials generated into this thesis. The next three chapters analyse and describe the three different ways in which I analysed the material politics of rubbish.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to analysing and describing the ways in which rubbish became political in the two sites I worked in, by looking at the ways rubbish was made into an issue. In each, the forms and materialities involved in making the issue of rubbish were very different, as one had as a starting point a controversy around the work of *cartoneros*, and in the second one the articulation is done through spaces of deliberation set in place by the collaborative project on environmental participatory planning processes driven by a non-governmental organisation (NGO), called International Institute for Environment and Development Latin America (IIED-LA). The analysis of the ways rubbish became political challenges discursive and agonistic accounts of the relations and things that count in the making of an issue.

Chapter 4 traces other trajectories of rubbish, those more linked to governing rubbish, such as government offices, waste collection companies and a landfill site, and new associations in the form of examining rubbish practices in the co-management of a separating plant between *cartoneros* and the city government. Each poses a particular sense of the political, which is complicated and troubled by the different relations that form them, and the particular materialities of practices, but also by the material at stake, that of rubbish. This chapter shows how paying attention to the material practices that are involved in the way rubbish is governed, from its administration, collection, burial, to separation by a cooperative of *cartoneros*, shapes a material politics that cannot easily be reduced to the formation of a unique social ordering, and thus, complicate the ways that the 'good' can be defined.

In Chapter 5, I address the ways in which everyday material practices of a participatory and deliberative process were developed in Moreno, through a collaborative project between an NGO, the municipality and neighbours of Moreno. This chapter builds on

the ways I describe the making of the rubbish issue in Moreno in Chapter 3, but focuses on the material practices and devices of the unfolding of the process to make more specific links to the ways in which such a process enacted democracy in this site. In this way, this chapter extends the types of materialities that need to be taken into account if we are to understand how materialities matter to the way democracy is enacted. The chapter shows how the 'good' is constructed through the staging of devices that enact and specify the meaning of particular democratic principles in the development of a participatory environmental project.

Chapter 6 brings the insights of the thesis into focus, and describes the key methodological and empirical contributions as well as how these speak to studies of ANT, materiality, politics and democracy. Therefore, it shows how this thesis demonstrates the way in which the material geographies of rubbish matter to how politics and democracy is practiced.

Chapter 1: The material politics of rubbish

I wait for a minute in this badly lit hall, sitting in a well-used, springy sofa while I wait to be told I can go ahead and interview the chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene. Once given the OK, I am directed to an office. For this, I pass several desks, mountains of folders, papers sticking out, people talking, having mate⁴, listening to the radio and working. His office is just as crowded, and his attitude is welcoming. In the two and a half hours we talk, he explains the different ways that he and his team work around rubbish, pulling out CDs, reports, stickers, campaign posters along the way. At the beginning it sounds like any management job, in a particularly messy place maybe, but the added hassles of working in the city government, as well as the particularities that rubbish brings to this process, start to crop up in the conversation.⁵

Sitting in the midst of a pile of rubbish in an impromptu chair made by an empty paint can, I rest for a minute, while my co-workers from this cooperative of cartoneros continue their sorting. Some are quicker than others. The pile seems never-ending. I think how good it would be for everyone to take turns doing this job. That would surely make them think twice before putting their toilet paper and uneaten lunches in these bags that supposedly only contain recyclable materials. One of the workers finds a broken toy and puts it aside, she explains to me that she can fix it and give it to her nephew. Magazines fly to one side, though some are kept for later reading or are leafed through quickly, newspapers fly to another; cardboard, plastics, nylon, office paper, the remains of a sandwich and a half-eaten banana, broken toys, they all go in

⁴ Mate is a typical Argentine infusion, usually drunk in social settings, such as family gatherings or with friends.

⁵ Fieldwork Notes, October 2006, Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

different places. Some will be recycled, others fixed and re-used, and yet others just have an extra stop before continuing their way to the landfill site. The stuff of rubbish is mostly looked at in terms of sorting it, which already is a form of giving back value and life to rubbish, but there are other moments where things are recovered as valuable in themselves, not just for their materials, but for the particular assemblage created with those materials that makes it a thing. These moments range from brief moments of attention, to using them to make jokes with to be discarded later, or to restore them.⁶

I stare at the massive landfill site. Before I even get there, I start to sense it through the different smells. During the tour I am guided to differentiate between smells that are more gas-like and some more putrid. The swarms of different things; food, materials, nappies, papers, plastic bags, can be glimpsed as waste collection trucks dump their products, but soon after, they are run over and over by other specialised vehicles that take care of flattening the rubbish into the site. I'm told a layer of soil is put on top of the rubbish twice a day so as to manage the smell spreading, and to stop the rubbish that escapes by flying away or in the beaks of the many birds that are flying over the site and dipping in to grasp something that caught their eye. As rubbish transforms and its materials start to interact with other elements such as water and heat, it resists easy containing, and seeps into the soil in the form of leachates contaminating the soil and water sources. It also finds other ways of transforming and escaping through turning into gas that tends to produce spontaneous flares. The guide explains the different ways they work around the different forms rubbish takes. From people who are in charge of picking out the bits that fly and that get stuck in the trees and bushes that surround this site, to putting special soil, thick membranes, pebbles, tubes and

⁶ Fieldwork Notes, November 2007, Separation plant, Cooperativa Ecológica de Recicladores del Bajo Flores (CERBaF), Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

pumps to capture leachates and take them to be treated, to the tubes and sites for burning gas and the more recent attempts at transforming gas into electricity. Apart from this, there are attempts at recovering the materials of rubbish, through composting and more recently, through separating plants. It all looks quite impressive, and professional. The conversation then inevitably flows - or more precisely, I direct it - to the massive protests, trials, and scandals regarding contamination, diseases, that surround landfill sites at the moment. A very protective guide jumps to the site's defence.⁷

I have to say I am curious. This NGO is trying to set up a participatory process around environmental issues in one of the poorest municipalities in the Greater Buenos Aires area, known more for its clientelistic modes of governing than for their democratic procedures.⁸

This thesis is an investigation into the politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires. The different extracts from my fieldwork notes above give a flavour of what looking at rubbish politics mean for this thesis. The extracts describe different moments and sites of the trajectory of rubbish, from government offices, to separation of materials done by a cooperative of *cartoneros*, a landfill site, and a participatory process in Moreno led by an NGO, which construct rubbish in particular ways. These notes bring attention to the materiality of practices around rubbish, and of rubbish, in particular sites. The making of rubbish, as we can start to see from these quotes, involves many different articulations of different actors, human and non-human, forms of relations and practices that create particular assemblages, which enact rubbish in particular ways in

⁷ Fieldwork Notes, January 2007, Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado (CEAMSE), Buenos Aires

⁸ Fieldwork Notes, December 2006, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires

particular sites, but that also somehow work together. These different ways of doing rubbish are related and coordinated in many different ways; but they are far from being a tightly managed linear process. These sites, and moments of rubbish, are some of the ways in which rubbish is done in Buenos Aires, Argentina. These assemblages are political in different ways. From more eventful forms where rubbish became political through controversies and deliberative spaces, to the everyday governing of rubbish and the more novel associations found in the way *cartoneros* collected and separated the rubbish and organised in cooperatives to do so in partnership with the city government. These political practices also relate to normative principles, in the different ways these had of defining notions of the 'good'. And for all of these, the materiality of rubbish mattered.

The aim of this chapter is to map the road I took to understanding how the materiality of rubbish, and of rubbish practices, are crucial in understanding and specifying the ways politics and democracy are done; how they are part of what *makes* politics and democracy in Buenos Aires. Throughout this thesis, I adopted, adapted and combined different theoretical approaches to articulate how the different ways in which rubbish is done can speak to what is political and how democracy is done. In this sense, this thesis is an attempt to work different theories through an issue.

In the next three sections, I define three different areas of work that I drew upon, which gave me the theoretical tools to understand, analyse and describe the material politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires. In the first section, I describe and analyse different actor-network theory (ANT) approaches to the materiality of everyday practices and the different forms of analysing politics that these imply. These different approaches coloured and shaped the way I analyse materiality and politics throughout this thesis.

However, as Latour (2007) admits, ANT's scrutiny to the practices of politics and its relation to normative practices of democracy are still in need of development. This gap has also been identified in Geography. As Barnett and Low (2004), and more recently Stokke (2009), show, there is a need for more studies in Geography which link questions of the complexity of everyday practices in different sites, which are political in different ways, with the more normative dimensions of democratic practice.

This made me turn, in the second section, to political and democratic theory, especially as they relate to environmental issues. I start this section by analysing Marxist urban political ecology (UPE), which is useful in terms of understanding how socio-natural arrangements are political, particularly in two ways: in the way new associations are created through the ways we metabolise nature and through the controversial moments in which these processes are disputed and turn into conflictive matters. However, their analyses of how of nature is something that is mobilised in particular ways for the purpose of maintaining oppressive relations does not specify how the different materialities of environmental issues are important to the way things take shape from the outset (Braun 2008b). In addition, the approach to democracy that Marxist UPE engages in, linked to that of radical democracy, does not provide me enough tools to analyse the practical ways that democracy is enacted in particular places. For this, I turn to Seward's (2003) notion of reflexive proceduralism in combination with ANT theoretical devices, which I found crucial as a mediating link between theoretical formulations of democracy and analysing how it is done in everyday practices, in particular sites, in particular ways, without neglecting the materiality of practices and of things. This approach allows me to understand how the geography of democracy matters.

In the third section, I examine different literatures that work around materiality and rubbish, and elaborate on the ways that working with the materiality of rubbish and of rubbish practices can be thought of as fundamental to how politics and democracy work. In this way, I describe, analyse and build the different pieces that I articulated to make sense of the material politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires.

Actor-network theory: the materiality of everyday practices as political

Actor-network theory (ANT) is a particular approach in social theory that came out of science and technology studies (STS). It is important to note that different scholars take ANT in different directions and apply it to different issues. However, there are some basic premises that can be seen at work in most ANT authors' work. ANT proposes itself, as John Law (2005) points out, as a semiotics of materiality, in that it 'takes the semiotic insight, that of the relationality of entities, the notion that they are produced in relations, and applies this ruthlessly to all materials - and not simply to those that are linguistic' (*Ibid.*: 4). It is then a relational materiality. This means entities achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located, they are performed in, through and by these relations (*Ibid.*: 4). Therefore, ANT has a *performative* definition of society, in that actors - in their relations - define in practice what society is (Latour 1986: 272-73).

Latour (1986) calls this a shift from a *diffusion model* to a *translation model*. The translation model does not assume human and non-humans as patients, as either resisting or accepting the inner force of an order, of an institution, but as actors that

are the ones that make things happen, that make society hold together, that make the powerful, powerful. To understand how this happens, the focus is on describing how material-semiotic relations become a network and how this network acts as a whole. ANT authors, such as Latour (1986), propose to trace *associations*. Associations don't just happen, they are an 'intense activity of enrolling, convincing and enlisting' (*Ibid.*: 275). And associations are always in-the-making. This, however, does not mean that everything is re-invented from scratch at every passing moment. More stable associations can be found as these associations enrol a whole list of human and non-human resources to keep relations stable, to keep things in place. So ANT proposes to study how things work together, and to trace those connections, and these connections include more than just humans.

The way ANT approaches non-humans is quite distinct. Non-humans, as well as humans, are described in some studies as *actants* (see for instance Latour 1988). *Actants* are those that make a difference in the way an action is done. Agency is the effect of an actor-network more than of an individual. ANT understands actors as *mediators*, that is, as actors that transform, translate and distort and modify the meaning and or elements that they are meant to be carrying rather than as *intermediaries* (that would transport meaning or force without transformation) (Latour 2005: 39). Many ANT studies have started to use the term *assemblage*, following Deleuze and Guattari (1987). *Assemblage* is a translation of the notion of *agencement*, which rejects more humanist notions of agency. This concept combines the idea of a coming together of heterogeneous elements and their capacity to produce an effect, and thus relating the capacity to act with the ways that things come together, which is a necessary precondition for action (Braun 2008b: 670-1). This term is useful in making

clear how agency is distributed, and avoids the confusions that the term *actant* provoked (*Ibid.*: 670). In this thesis, I use the term actor, as it is a convenient word, but attempt to show how this acting is always the work of an assemblage.

Notions of power in ANT go back to the notion of a translation model. Callon (1986) describes how this is the case:

'Translation is the mechanism by which the social and natural progressively take form. The result is a situation in which certain entities control others. Understanding what sociologists call power relationships means describing the way in which actors are defined, associated and simultaneously obliged to remain faithful to their alliances. The repertoire of translation is not only designed to give a symmetrical and tolerant description of a complex process which constantly mixes together a variety of social and natural entities. It also permits an explanation of how a few obtain the right to express and to represent the many silent actors of the social and natural worlds that have mobilised' (*Ibid.*: 224)

In this way, power is understood as the outcome of processes and not as a departure point. This understanding of power builds on Foucault's work. Foucault's work on power and knowledge changed the way that the building of social order was understood in the social sciences. Through his work on medicine and discipline (Foucault 1995, 2003), he demonstrated how normative modes of ordering were a historical construction. His studies show this in different ways. For instance, he looks at medicine as a form of knowledge that creates discourses, that is, a coherent body of knowledge, which sets the standard of what is normal. This knowledge is also material

as it structures buildings, instruments and gestures (Mol 2005a: 61), and creates different geographies through gestures of territorialisation. But ANT moves away from Foucault in two ways, as described by Mol (*Ibid.*: 69-70). She describes two possible roads that are taken. On the one hand, the distance is a product of doubts about the *force* by which a discourse hangs together. It takes distance from the coherence of structures and their power to impose themselves. This is the road that Latour takes and that I have described above in terms of not taking for granted structures, but understanding the networks of associations that make them into what they are. This, she states, leads to the invention of networks made up of associations that have to be able to be pointed out in practice. Chains of association may be long, short, weak or strong. Latour's work shows that how the world hangs together is a matter of practical associations (*Ibid.*: 65).

On the other hand, another way of moving away from Foucault is a product of the doubts about the *extent* of the notion of discourse. This leads to the pluralisation of a single order into different co-existing modes of ordering that 'interact, change or face extinction' (*Ibid.*: 70). This is the road that Mol and Law take. Mol's critique stems from the homogenising effect of talking of associations, as an association is made or it isn't, elements are either inside or outside the network, coordination is established or not. She criticises the fact that there are no distinctive forms of coordination. These different ways within ANT to understand how the social is constructed lead to different ways of understanding the political too. This is what I turn to now.

One of the things that STS, and then ANT, have done in terms of politics, as Latour (2007) points out, is to put onto the map of politics different actors, passions, moments and sites that were previously considered apolitical (*Ibid.*: 812-3). Politics is

conceived as 'the building of the cosmos in which everyone lives, it is the progressive composition of the common world' (*ibid.*: 813), and thus the use of the term *cosmopolitics*, as coined by Stengers (2010). This stretched the meaning of the political in different ways. First, it meant that there were new places, such as laboratories, hospitals and companies, added to the *sites of politics* apart from those of streets, parliament and government offices. Other *actors* were added apart from government officials, citizens, votes, elections, such as scientists, technicians, managers, doctors, vaccines, cows, viruses, equations, and new *forms of passions and activities* apart from anger, violence, indignation, solidarity and lobbying, deliberation and accommodation, to show that everyday activities and dispositions were also political (Latour 2007: 812-3).

These studies, by reconfiguring concepts of political community to include non-human entities, have been crucial in illuminating how physical and material entities may figure as active elements in political configurations (Marres 2010: 187). However, as Latour (2007), following de Vries' critique (2007), shows, this meant extending the notion of the political to everyday practices, but without showing how this related to normative practices, such as democracy, and thus making it less effective as a term or description. Furthermore, as Marres (2010) points out, these studies have not broken with the link present in many STS studies between material politics as a form of subpolitics (see de Vries 2007), that is, a politics that plays itself below the threshold of public perception. This exclusion of considerations of publicity makes it hard to consider the relations between material politics and democracy (Marres 2010: 185-9).

Another way in which STS and ANT studies expanded the meanings of the political was to broaden the issues and the ways that things were political by bringing the domain of

sciences into existing political structures and procedures. Different authors highlight how STS, and I would add ANT, has shown a commitment to the democratisation of expertise and participatory politics (Marres 2007, Whatmore 2003: 101) in different ways: from studies on the democratisation of science and technology (Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe 2009, Davies 2006, Leach, Scoones and Wynne 2005) to issue framing in public engagement with science (Chilvers and Burgess 2008, Jasanoff 2007), to issue formation in controversies (Barry 2001). Many of these studies, especially those that focus on instances of publicisation of the non-human (see for instance Latour 2004), bring in the principle of 'affected interest', which is a basic tenet of democratic practice and theory. This might give us further tools to link everyday material practices with normative dimensions of democracy. The limitations come too from using political theories and practices without so much scrutiny (de Vries 2007, Latour 2007, Marres 2007). Furthermore, as Marres (2010) shows, in focusing on procedural designs for the moments of democratisation of the politics of technology these studies move away from material practices to settings of discursive engagement and present discursive processes of negotiation and debate as the principal conditions for democracy (*Ibid.*: 187). More recent work has started to engage and redistribute the meanings of politics to attend to these limitations (see for instance Braun and Whatmore 2010a, Marres 2007). One of the ways in which this is done is the work done by Marres (2005, 2007, 2010), which focuses on attempts at the public-isation of issues by attending to a broad array of events in which issues are articulated as objects of potentially general concern (Marres 2007: 775-6).

Issue definition has long been considered an important dimension of democratic politics, especially for agenda-setting and studies of deliberative democracy (*Ibid.*:

761). Marres argues that what STS, and I would add ANT, can bring to the understanding of issues in democratic politics is that it 'problematizes the distinction between objectively existing issues and discursive definitions of these issues' (*Ibid.*: 776). In understanding that issues and publics are co-constituted, as public affairs and organization of affected publics are considered a practical achievement of issue articulation, this challenges a more 'objectivist' account of public involvement in issues where actors are objectively pre-defined in terms of their affectedness (*Ibid.*). By bringing to the fore the socio-ontological dimension that mediates the actors' involvement in issues at stake and that are an important dimension of issue articulation, it challenges more discursive definitions of issues. Marres (*Ibid.*) shows how focusing beyond discourses and frames, that is, on attachments that are entangled in issues - including material, physical and technical associations - that people depend on and are committed to, recognises these entanglements as sources and resources for enacting public involvement in controversies.

This brings a different focus in terms of the practices to look out for in the search for democratic engagement. Marres (*Ibid.*) suggests that this way of understanding issue articulation makes clear that such practices are not necessarily tied to institutional procedures, though this conception of issue articulation can also enhance the study of socio-technical arrangements that make possible public involvement (*Ibid.*: 776). Thus, Marres (*Ibid.*) states that public involvement in the articulation of issues is important in terms of democratic practice not only for issues of inclusivity, accountability and the making of citizens, as many STS and ANT studies have done, but for the way they facilitate 'a distinctive articulation of issues, as matters of public concern' (*Ibid.*: 776).

Latour (2007) also uses this notion of issue articulation and extends it further than just the moment of controversy that Marres (2007) highlights. Latour takes Marres' insight on the building of political issues, and uses it to define politics not as a procedure or a domain of life, but rather as a type of situation where an issue creates a public around it (Latour 2007: 814). The question for Latour (*Ibid.*) then becomes that of looking at how politics turns around issues, which would allow us to understand the different meanings of the political beyond that of controversies. Latour (*Ibid.*) describes five moments of the possible trajectories of issues that define different ways in which issues are political, which I will closely follow in the description below.

A *first moment* when issues are political is when new associations are created between humans and non-humans. This happens in almost any everyday activity and is political in the sense that new entanglements modify the collective and forces us to re-define the world we live in. This stage is one that many STS and ANT studies focus on. A *second moment* is when entanglements generate unexpected consequences and with it a concerned public around it. This is the moment where the work of Marres (2007), as described above comes in, when something becomes a controversial issue, an issue that overflows the normal procedures used to deal with it. A *third moment* takes place when an issue becomes articulated within government structures and procedures as one related to the question of the common good and to sovereignty issues. The *fourth moment* of an issue is when the issue is sufficiently digested to be channelled through deliberative procedures that involve citizen engagement. Finally, *the fifth moment* he describes is that when it stops being political in all other senses and becomes part of the routine way of managing and administrating an issue, such as vaccines, or sewers.

As Latour (2007) points out, this is the stage that Foucault and those interested in governmentality issues frequently focus on.

What Latour (*Ibid.*) makes clear is that not all issues have to follow this trajectory. Different issues may travel through these different stages at different times, others will remain or never pass through these different stages. What he does here is describe different ways in which issues are political, each of which imply different sites, actors, passions, instruments and devices that can be counted in the practices of politics. Latour (*Ibid.*) proposes that we look at each issue as deserving of its own protocol, without expecting it to fit into each or all these different moments of what it is to be political. This allows us to follow the particular political trajectory of an issue, and also to figure out in which ways it links to a democratic politics.

The different moments that define and describe how things are political are useful in examining a particular issue. However, this conception of an issue as being political in different ways, depending on its time trajectory has its limits, mainly in that sometimes issues are political in different ways, at the same time, in different sites. Taking a spatial approach gives us another element in understanding an issue. This is what I take from Mol's work on the body multiple (Mol 2005a). In this book, Mol does an ethnographic study of atherosclerosis in a Dutch university hospital. She sets out to understand how atherosclerosis is enacted in practice, and thus follows different practices within the hospital that deal with this disease. She looks at how objects, such as atherosclerosis, are handled in practice. She finds that as practices differ between different sites, the disease is not a singular object, but 'more than one and less than many' (*Ibid.*: 55). This multiplicity does not imply fragmentation; she finds that atherosclerosis somehow hangs together (*Ibid.*: 5-6).

Mol unfolds a double move in this study. She shows how a single disease is multiple and, at the same time, how this multiplicity is coordinated into singularity. She does this by paying attention to the enactment of the disease at different sites and the way these different enactments are also coordinated in different ways: addition, translations and different forms of distribution. In this way, she shows the different ways that differences are managed, and how differences are not necessarily opposites; that objects-in-practice have complex relations, side by side, mutual inclusion, inclusion-in-tension, interference, and that 'ontology-in-practice comes with objects that do not so much cohere as assemble' (*Ibid.*: 150). Mol's way of thinking leads us to the multiplication of a single order into different co-existing modes of ordering that interact in particular ways, compete, change, or die out (*Ibid.*: 69-71).

Her notion of ontological politics is defined by opening up the permanent possibility of different configurations that result from stressing multiplicity (*Ibid.*: 164). Therefore, the politics of ontology come from understanding that ontology is not given in the order of things, 'but ontologies are brought into being, sustained or allowed to wither away in common day-to-day practices' (*Ibid.*: 6). Her spatial understanding of politics is helpful in that it makes more complex the different ways of doing politics, of being political, that I have described above. Her engagement with normativity is about specificity and appropriateness. The normative question in ontological politics is about opening up differences in the way things are done, to create better access to them and a theoretical repertoire to think about the appropriateness of different enactments. However, her book leaves some blank spaces that need to be filled to understand how this view of politics can relate to other ways of doing politics, and other normative

issues, than that of managing differences, and enacting disease in particular ways, in the everyday practices of atherosclerosis.

I find that what I needed to do for this to work in terms of understanding how rubbish is political is to elaborate, combine and extend the connections that these different authors provide. The way ANT authors had found different ways of things being political, which are summarised in Latour's five stages of the meanings of an issue being political (2007) with Mol's work, which starts to make this stages more complex. In this way, I could start to see how an issue can be enacted differently in particular sites, but at the same time be coordinated into one by different means. As I mentioned above, if we just follow Latour (2007), we find ourselves limited in terms of just showing particular associations in time, but if we follow Mol we found ourselves limited to one way of being political, because an object is multiple as practiced in different sites.

The way round it is to combine both: in finding ways of understanding how an issue is political in different ways, in different sites at the same or different times, and how this works together. That is, I found that ANT is useful in terms of politics, and in terms of this thesis, in that it gives me tools to understand and analyze how things, such as rubbish, are political in different ways, at different times, but also, in different sites at parallel times. It also helps to understand how things become political that goes beyond controversies or opposition, to cover different ways of being different and of coordinating those differences in everyday practices. At the same time, it gives me a way of understanding how politics can link to normative elements that relates to the appropriateness of practices to a specific place and situation, rather than to an ideal and transcendent world.

However, there is work to do regarding this view of politics. As I described above, ANT has not yet fully developed its scrutiny of political practices and its relation to normative issues. It sometimes implies a managerial view of politics, as it seems that politics is about ordering, and about managing differences in particular locations, which lacks the building of relations and complexity between different ways of being political. In addition, I need some help in translating the concerns of science and knowledge practices into other more mundane practices such as waste management. Finally, the relationship to normative issues of democracy has not been the focus of many of these studies, and thus the description of how different political practices relate to democratic normative issues has not been very explicit. For help with these matters, I turn now to political theory.

The search for the normative link

In this section, I will work through different approaches in order to understand how the materiality of everyday practices, especially those related to the building of socio-natures, relate to more normative dimensions of politics. The first literature I analyse is that of Marxist urban political ecology (UPE), as it links environmental issues, politics and democracy, and shows a commitment to bringing in the materialities at work. However, as Braun (2005) notes, some of these studies do not show clearly how non-humans can be accounted for in the making of these relations at the outset, rather than as a recalcitrant resistance that is encountered in a subsequent stage of the making of dominant economic processes. Furthermore, its engagement with democracy, in the form of radical democracy, again leaves me without a way of

understanding *how* particular issues connect with democracy in distinctive ways. In order to address the gap in Geography between complexities of space and normative practices and to give a more ethnographical account of the makings of democracy, I turn then to the work of Paley (2002) and Seward (2003).

One of the things that interested me when defining how to work on these issues was to find different ways of understanding nature-society relations, and more specifically urban-nature relations, to try and understand how rubbish fits in. One of the literatures that is relevant here is that of Marxist UPE. This literature within the Marxist tradition deals with issues of nature and the city, and provides an explicit attempt to create a theoretical and political approach to analysing socio-environmental processes in the city in the context of capitalism. One of the premises of this approach is that, under capitalism, urban environments, due to structural inequalities, are produced in a way that create highly uneven, spatially differential and unjust urban landscapes, that is, benefiting the interests of the elite, at the expense of marginalised groups (Keil 2003: 726, Swyngedouw and Heynen and Heynen 2003: 898). This is linked to economic, social and political processes as well as cultural constructions of the urban and the natural (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003: 898).

Marxist UPE understands cities as a complex space where social and physical processes are interconnected to create and maintain urban life. Thus, they do not consider nature as separate from the city, but understand that cities are places where the social and natural are produced simultaneously. Nature and society are 'fundamentally combined in historical-geographical production processes' (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003: 901), which also produces new environments and natures.

The main concept this approach uses to understand the relationship between humans and nature is *metabolism*, as used by Marx. They state that nature is incomprehensible except as mediated by social labour. Labour is the way humans interact with nature in a metabolic way, and nature is an intrinsic part of the metabolism of social life. They argue that this metabolic interaction is the basis of society at any time, but that the particular relations through which this is enacted, gives this process a particular shape. Metabolic interaction is not understood only as interaction and reproduction, but as circulation, exchange and transformation of material elements (Smith 2006: viii, Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003: 905). Under capitalism, the metabolic process produces use values under specific social relations of control, ownership and appropriation, in the context of mobilisation of these to create commodities (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003: 905). This dialectic of environment and urbanisation consolidates social relations that attempt to maintain their power and takes place in the context of power struggles, not only related to class, but to gender, race and ethnic struggles.

Marxist UPE is concerned with how nature is *mobilised* to serve particular purposes, linked to strategies of achieving or maintaining particular positionalities of social power. Many authors state that UPE recognises the acting of non-human actors as *actants* (Heynen, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2006: 12), following ANT, 'but insists on the social positioning and political articulation of such "acting"' (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003: 902-3). Different Marxist UPE authors, such as Swyngedouw (2004) and Kaika (2005), are concerned with socio-environmental processes and the importance of nature to understanding the city, and these authors have concentrated on water flows, sewage and other infrastructural issues, in the city. They show how cities are cross-cut

with the non-human. However, as Braun (2005) points out, 'it is often unclear what nonhuman nature adds to these accounts, except the presence of a static stock of things that are necessarily mobilised in the urbanisation process' (*Ibid.*: 645). Agency then seems to belong to humans. Nature is something that is related to, but mainly mobilised, in the building of power relations. Thus, UPE does more work in terms of recognising the relations between nature and cities, but still leaves the onus on humans. Furthermore, as Castree and MacMillan (2001) point out, though such analyses make the human-nature divide more permeable, they still retain this dualism (*Ibid.*: 210).

This is different to ANT's emphasis on relational materiality, and still more, from those debates on vibrant materialities (see for instance Bennett 2004), as I will describe further in the next section. However, Braun's critique is relevant even then. ANT has been better at articulating this theoretical idea, than providing good examples of it. This is simply because it is difficult to do. I have struggled with this same issue and suspect that the same critique may apply to this research. The ways that materialities became obvious, is as they relate to humans and this then tends to be the focus of the relations with materiality. There are ways in which this can be done differently, which I explore further in the next section.

Marxist UPE is concerned with the causes and results of the way nature and urban relations are done. It provides an interesting way of thinking about the political, in terms of making political the way the relations between nature and cities are at play. This can be linked to the meaning of the political that Latour (2007) called, as I described above, the first moment (new associations) and second moment (controversies) of the political. However, the way, the *how*, this happens is less easy to

gauge from the case studies. The causes of these relations are assumed as being struggles for domination, in the context of capitalism. As useful as this is in terms of mobilizing anger and political action, and in relating the different problems to a main cause, it is less useful in terms of trying to describe the different ways that this takes place that would 'prove' or maybe question such a powerful base narrative. In addition, nature still plays quite a passive role in this state of affairs. The political is restricted only to humans, those with the capacity to act with intention.

Recent UPE studies, as Braun (2008b) points out, have attempted to understand the ways that non-humans resist their incorporation into particular economic and spatial forms, and hence, give more space to agency of the non-human (see for instance Bakker 2004, Castree 1995, Prudham 2005). However, these studies also circumscribe the 'liveliness' of the non-human, as they hold on to a modernist separation of domains, not now in terms of society or nature, but in terms of the economy. The economy is taken as 'an already constituted structural unity *that only subsequently comes into contact with a recalcitrant non-human nature*, rather than, as some may have it, a realm constituted from the outset through a set of practices – including the 'performances' of non-humans – and thus neither a bounded region of being, nor one which has an original form prior to its entanglement with a thing' (Braun 2008b: 669 - emphasis in original). Thus, UPE poses some limits to showing how everyday material practices are involved in constituting political relations from the outset.

The lack of detailed descriptions on how these processes include non-humans in the making of political relations from the outset, is also a feature in their understanding of democracy. This approach is concerned with how these socio-natural processes bring about injustices, and how and where this can be changed, bringing about a more

democratic and inclusive way of producing socio-environments (Swyngedouw and Heynen 2003: 898). Their engagement with normative issues of democracy is in terms of pre-defined theoretical *ideals* of justice and equality. However, how this is to come about in terms of democratic practice is unclear. Furthermore, how the non-human is present at the outset of these political relations is also unspecified. In many cases, the model of democracy is that of radical democracy (for an example see Swyngedouw 2009).

Radical democracy is an approach to democracy, articulated by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), that challenges liberal and deliberative versions of democracy. One of their main arguments is that the reliance and focus of liberal and deliberative democracy on consensus, silences and oppresses difference and dissent. These authors argue that democracy not only should include difference and dissent, but that democracy is built on this. Mouffe (1999) understands 'the political' as the antagonistic dimension inherent in human society, which takes many forms and is located in diverse social relations and 'politics' as an ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organise social life in conditions that are always potentially subject to conflict precisely because they are influenced by the dimension of the political (Slater 2002: 257).

Radical democracy authors, as with many UPE authors, focus their attention on instances in which 'politics' is challenged by the dimension of the 'political', that is, on moments in which different alliances and movements changed how politics was conceived. This focus on the political, in moments of change and contingency, has been interesting in terms of understanding one way of being political, that is, when things are controversial or become an issue. But the link with democratic politics

remains unclear. This is because radical democracy authors do not seem to leave much space for collective decision-making and the resolution of social problems, as they hold with disdain the possibility of consensus as a mask of power, which is what allows decisions to be made (Dryzek 2005: 221). The concern with collective decision-making in radical democracy only comes in terms of the need to be open to further contestation. As Barnett (2008) points out, radical democracy and similar ontologies of 'the political' engage with the normative dimension of democracy in a very prescriptive form, as these approaches abstractly define the ideals of what democracy should be, and use these as the regulatory principle against which political processes are assessed (*Ibid.*: 1638). Furthermore, as the emphasis is on agonistic contestation, other, less eventful ways in which politics is done that are important to democracy are put in a secondary position. Thus, not much attention is paid to important moments of decision-making and the shaping of the common world.

This gap, between more complex thinking on how things can be political and the normative politics of democracy, is one that is noted also in Geography more generally. As Barnett and Low (2004) observe, there seems to be a disconnection in Geography between questions of the complexities of space and scale and questions and theories regarding the practices of democracy. Barnett and Low (*Ibid.*) argue that there has been little impact, though there has been a ghostly presence, of democracy or democratisation processes in Geography. The main problem they point out is that Geography has not given detailed attention to issues of normative political theory: to normative presuppositions of political institutions; to basic criteria of political judgment underpinning democratic processes. By this, they mean 'criteria concerning what is right, what is just, what is good, and concerning *how* best to bring good, just,

rightful outcomes about' (*Ibid.*: 3). They show how areas of Geography that deal with more practical issues, such as Development Studies or urban planning, have engaged more with these issues, whilst, for instance, radical traditions of geographical research have avoided this in order to engage with more abstract ethical issues, or 'the certainties of radical political critique' (*Ibid.*: 3). More recently, Stokke (2009) confirms this continued void in the literature, especially in the mainstream debates in human geography. He recognises that there has been work done on issues such as civil society participation and representation in the 'global south', but this is usually relegated to a secondary position in 'applied development geography' (*Ibid.*: 739).

The need to find ways of filling this gap also comes from calls to understand postcolonial democracy, such as that of Slater's (2002) postcolonial critique of democracy, O'Donnell's (1999) critique of the export of a particular teleology of democratisation and Jones' (2004) argument for a more complex geopolitics of democracy that expands the spaces of democracy beyond those of formal institutions. These authors work around issues of democracy in Latin America, which make it particularly relevant for this research. Slater (2002) is concerned with issues of spatiality and how to open up the discussion of democratic politics so that the geographies of democratisation can be explored in ways which broaden our perspective on power and geopolitics, as much of what is written on democracy is limited to a number of universalistic assumptions. Slater (*Ibid.*) brings the notion of 'trial by space', which challenges us to see how these ideas work in practice, or more specifically, how democracy works in practice. O'Donnell (1999) also warns against the entrenched idea in the literature of a single 'trajectory' for democratisation, that of the 'west'. This also comes attached with a teleology of institutionalisation, of the

consolidation of democracies. He criticises that these types of study underline what is absent from these 'new democracies', which do not follow the patterns they are supposed to follow, or which lack the type of institutionalisation that can be found in many parts of the 'North'. I argue that this has close links with Latour and Callon's (Callon 1986, Latour 1986) definition of a *diffusion* model, that could be understood to be present in most accounts of the 'path' and consolidation of democracy, rather than a translation model. Moreover, Jones (2004) points out the need to open up the study of other spaces of democracy that are not solely those of procedural institutions, especially when these do not 'fit' this universal teleology, so as to understand how democracy is practised in different ways, at different sites (*Ibid.*: 161). Slater (2002), O'Donnell (1999) and Jones (2004) highlight the importance of understanding the particularities of democracies, to broaden the scope of inquiry, and not be constrained by a particular experience passing as universal and self-contained.

The question then is how to go about doing this. One way is to understand how democracy is enacted through the study of everyday practices in particular sites, that is treating democracy as 'ethnographically emergent' (Paley 2002). For Paley, this means looking at how democracy is enacted through different practices, not necessarily those of formal political institutions. Moreover, it highlights the importance of paying attention to the way democracy is articulated in practice, that is, the principles and devices that accompany it in particular utterances and practices, and to its uncertainty and incompleteness. Paley (*Ibid.*) makes a case for widening the studies of democracy to include anthropological studies, that due to their ethnographic methods and concern with local meanings and practices as well as different forms of power relations and contestations, can reveal other aspects of democratisation and democracy than

those focusing solely on political institutions and formal regime shifts (*Ibid.*: 469-70). The studies that Paley (*Ibid.*) reviews are very wide ranging, in terms of the sites as well as the ways, entry points and issues they look at: from human rights, social movements, civil society to law, globalization and post-colonialism. As important as these studies are, in terms of providing another methodology to scrutinise politics, and to widen the practices that are political and that relate to normative political meanings such as democracy, they can go too much in the opposite direction. That is, studying informal and everyday settings without the links to formal political structures, procedures and events that also make up what democracy is. The issue is to find ways to theorise democracy ordinarily that address normative dimensions of democratic practice, which includes the attention to the dimension of democracy as a form of rule (Barnett 2008). To do this, it is necessary to pay attention to the ways in which the contestation over the meanings, values and principles of democracy are being enacted through practices in particular sites.

However, it is hard to pinpoint what democracy is. What many of the studies above do is to separate democratic aims and means. Most authors would agree on democracy being the sovereign rule of the people built on a sense of equality. But the specifics of it are always in dispute. And the studies on democracy in particular contexts show us that democracy is an unstable signifier. That is, that it evokes, means and is different things, for different people, in different times and sites. And that these meanings are open and contested. In terms of then understanding what democracy is in practice I found Saward's reflexive proceduralist approach very useful.

Saward (2003) offers a different approach to democratic theory by steering away from giving another model of democracy, to concentrate on the principles and devices that

enact democratic principles. For Saward (*Ibid.*), principles and practices of democracy are things that we 'conceive, make, argue about and revise – constantly - in part because there cannot be a final end, a grounding version of an indisputable principle to stop all legitimate disputes' (*Ibid.*: 163). As he points out 'Democratic principles are primarily things that we *do*, rather than rights or statuses that are conferred' (*Ibid.*: 164 - emphasis in original). Thus, the way principles are enacted in practice helps to specify its meanings in a particular context. This way of looking at democracy has the advantage of giving us tools for understanding how democracy works in particular settings. Devices are those mechanisms and procedures that contribute to making collective and binding decisions for a particular political community (*Ibid.*: 167). Some of the devices that he mentions are: parliament, implementational public agencies, elections, referendums, majority rule, proportionality, deliberative opinion polls, citizens' juries, delay or pause, voting. The question is to see which devices – and in what combination- are being used, to enact particular democratic principles (*Ibid.*: 168). The devices mentioned, however, pertain to large scale modes of decision-making.

I argue here that if we are to understand the ways in which democracy is enacted in practice, we need to attend to the different practices that make democracy what it is, in particular places. Saward focuses on wider procedural forms of enacting democracy, but we could use his insight in terms of how democracy works through the interrelation between principles, devices and the staging of these devices to go beyond the devices he suggests. As I have described in the first section, ANT is especially suited for this purpose as much of it focuses on how things are done and paying attention to the different assemblages of people and things that are political in different ways and

that enact reality. If we turn the attention to specifying the ways in which democracy is being enacted, I argue ANT can provide critical theoretical tools for this task.

ANT studies pay attention to different forms of mediation and representation that can extend the ways that practices can be considered to enact democracy. Furthermore, a concern of some of these studies with the 'affected principle', which relates to principles of democratic practice and theory as I described above, can be developed to understand how everyday and more eventful material practices can be linked to normative dimensions of democracy. Marres (2010), following the work of American pragmatist John Dewey (see especially 1989), defines the specificity of the political as a 'particular mode of association among social actors: that of being jointly affected by actions beyond their control' (Marres 2010: 200). For Marres (*ibid.*), there is something distinctive about being implicated in heterogeneous assemblages as a member of the public, which relates to the ways in which this affectedness plays out. This is because, as Marres (*ibid.*) points out, the specificity of a political mode of association is one in which there are two ways of being affected at play. One is a more intimate form of being affected, which relates to a concern for, in a broad sense, a particular threat to livelihoods. At the same time, this involved another way in which this affect is important in terms of associating as a public, which is related to the way the sources of social problems are beyond individual achievement and control, as are the resources needed to address them (*ibid.*: 200-1). As Marres (*ibid.*) points out, this second dimension of public political involvement has not been highlighted in studies of STS and ANT on heterogeneous associations which concentrate more on situated involvements.

This double sense of affectedness, is one which can connect studies of more situated involvements with more collective forms of engagement that relate to normative issues of democracy. The importance of the materiality of things comes here in the ways that these have particular qualities that can be important for the performance of public involvement in issues. This capacity of material things to affect are not given, and cannot be described beforehand, but have to be understood as a situational achievement (*ibid.*: 204).

In this section, I have argued that it is important to understand how nature-urban processes are political and relate to democratic practices. I described how Marxist UPE is helpful in understanding how socio-natural arrangements are political, particularly in two ways: in the way new associations are created through the ways we metabolise nature and through the controversial moments in which these processes are disputed and turn into conflictive matters. However, the more complex relationship between nature-society that is worked through these studies retains dualisms and lessens the agency and importance of non-humans by not engaging in how this analysis of nature adds to their analysis of capitalist domination. This strong underlying narrative, as useful as it can be for political mobilisation, can be less helpful in terms of describing how things and arrangements take this particular shape. Furthermore, the approach to democracy that Marxist UPE engages in, linked to that of radical democracy, does not specify how these practices need relate to a democratic politics apart from the moment of contestation. Thus, I looked further for different approaches that would allow me to engage in the practical ways that democracy is enacted in particular places. Barnett and Low (2004) and Stokke (2009) have pointed out the absence in the Geography literature of detailed attention to issues of normative political theory.

Slater (2002), O'Donnell (1999) and Jones (2004), further this by arguing for a post-colonial understanding of democracies in particular settings. Saward's (2003) notion of reflexive proceduralism is useful to do this. I argue here that ANT may help in this way in terms of describing and analysing everyday practices which do, and undo, and make social relations. As I have described above, different theoretical tools from ANT are useful in terms of being more open to how associations work to build particular relations, and to possibly expand the practices that construct and enact democracy in particular places. To understand further how everyday practices that make the rubbish process a political process that can be linked to the enactment of democracy, I need to analyse how the particularities of rubbish makes this process distinctive. To this I now turn.

The difference rubbish materialities make

'For rubbish to be framed differently it needs first of all to be noticed, it has to become conspicuous. Before other possibilities and potentials emerge, before other games of value and use are activated, the phenomenological reality of rubbish has to be acknowledged. We have to recognise discarded objects not as passive and redundant context for our lives but as mobile, vital matter open to reconstitution' (Hawkins 2006: 80)

Rubbish is an interesting thing. It is not one particular thing or material per se. It cannot be defined beforehand, as what rubbish is, is the product of the relations that

make it. It is a mix of heterogeneous materials that are discarded by someone. It goes by many names. However, even if rubbish cannot be defined to be anything in particular beforehand, it surely is specific things in actual situations. In this section, I will identify different ways in which research on rubbish has been done contributes to understanding the particular materialities of rubbish and its relations to politics and democracy.

I will start with an approach that concentrates on the materiality of rubbish. The work of Hawkins (2006, 2009) is especially relevant for my research as it looks for ways in which to engage with the materiality of rubbish and its effects/affects, starting with the ethical resonances of rubbish (Hawkins 2006), to more recently, its political involvement (Hawkins 2009). The quote that starts this section is especially poignant for the case of Buenos Aires. The quote points to the need to first acknowledge the materiality of rubbish, before it can be framed differently. Hawkins sees the ethical-political challenge of waste as that of being able to imagine a different materialism, one that would change the way we relate to those things we pretend not to notice, such as rubbish (Hawkins 2006: 81).

In a sense that is what happened with the work of *cartoneros*: it paid attention to its materiality, to its thingness. They might not have had in mind generating this acknowledgement, but through their work, and through the effects of their work, somehow made it happen. The association with *cartoneros* made this happen in two related ways. First, *cartoneros*, by picking rubbish and recovering materials that were useful and able to be re-valued, acknowledged the materiality of rubbish and made it possible for it be framed in different ways. Second, the work of *cartoneros*, by ripping bags open and leaving detritus behind, put rubbish out of place. By scattering the

rubbish, by making the materiality of rubbish more proximate, and thus, the relations that rubbish partakes in and invites (such as those of decomposition, contamination and other non-humans, which spread diseases), was also part of the way that rubbish was acknowledged. These are different ways in which the materialities of rubbish were present for middle class urban dwellers of the autonomous city of Buenos Aires (CABA). To understand this further, I turn to the work of Bennett (2004), as this particular understanding of the importance of the materiality of rubbish follows from Bennett's notion of the capacity of things for material disturbance.

Bennett's work in *The Force of things: steps to an ecology of matter* (2004), attempts to analyse thing-power, that is, 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (*Ibid.*: 351). In this sense, she aligns with ANT work on non-human *actants* and their understanding of agency. She specifies, as ANT does, that the agency of thing-power is, following Spinoza (1992), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the property of an assemblage, and that things tend to make connections and networks that hold together with different degrees of stability (Bennett 2004: 354). However, she distances herself from a strong notion of material semiotics, as described in the first section, by following Thoreau's notion of the *Wild* (Lyndon Shanley 1973). In this way, she proposes that there is an existence to the thing that is irreducible to the way they relate to humans, and that things are never entirely reduced by semiotics (Bennett 2004: 348-51). This is something that many recent ANT studies have also started to discuss (see for instance Bingham 2006, Hinchliffe 2007, Lulka 2009). Hawkins' (2006) argument above, in which she frames this moment of the acknowledgement of the materiality of rubbish as crucial, stems from the understanding that the materiality of rubbish first needs to be acknowledged, its

thingness validated and counted, before it can be linked to other relations and to other possibilities.

This understanding of the materiality of rubbish as a vital player in the relations that it forms is important to my research in that it gives me tools to understand why and how the materiality of rubbish matters. The work of Hawkins (2006) around the ethics of waste was crucial in understanding how she managed to convey the ethical implications of everyday practices around rubbish at the same time as keeping present and giving texture and agency to the materialities of rubbish. The work of Bennett (2004) is also important for my research as it further highlights the importance of finding innovative ways to bring in the materialities of things, as a way to give space and voice to the 'other' that is part of and shapes our daily lives. Her political aim here is to induce new ethical engagements with things, through a renewed, less human-centred, understanding of the interconnectedness of humans and non humans (*Ibid.*: 367).

However, Bennett's and Hawkins' work analysed here is more concerned about ethical orientations, which does not give me enough tools to connect how these practices, this awareness to the materiality of things, explicitly links to how different politics are done around rubbish, apart from those that attempt to affect individual ethical choices. For instance, Bennett's focus on re-enchantment techniques, such as forcing naive moments (*Ibid.*), are not sufficient to provide me ways of linking these practices and types of politics, to different moments of politics where this capacity of the material to affect is more explicitly linked to more practical normative issues of democracy.

A more recent intervention by Hawkins (2009) contributes to thinking about the relationship between materiality and politics, through the analysis of the role of plastic bottles. In this paper, she links the materiality of plastic bottles as critical to particular political associations, and shows through three different examples, how the politics shifted according to the ways in which plastic bottles were enrolled and enacted in particular situations (*Ibid.*: 183). Therefore, in each case, the associations made engaged with particular materialities of the plastic bottle, and not others, and thus created different political practices and associations (*Ibid.*: 188). Her work on plastic bottles gave me one of the keys to understanding how to show the different ways in which materialities specify, and in this way make, how politics is done. Hawkins is inspired by the work of Mol (2005a) on ontological politics that I have analysed in the first section, but finds a different way, more attuned to the issue she is looking at, to use it in her study on the material politics of plastic bottles.

Hawkins' work (2009) gives me a way to start connecting the analysis and descriptions of how things are enacted in practices, as Mol (2005a) does, to the ways these are enacted and mediated in more public ways. In this way, Hawkins helps me to bring in the materiality of rubbish, the thingness of rubbish, without needing to resort to skilled descriptions of moments of naivety, as Bennett does above, and to describe the different enactments, as Mol (*Ibid.*) works does, but in ways that start to connect with more than one political register. As key as this work was for giving me a way to bring in the materiality of waste, its lack of engagement with normative dimensions of democratic politics, makes me turn to the other literatures around rubbish.

The recent work coming out of an Economic and Research Council (ESRC) funded project called 'Waste of the World', also aims at bringing attention to how materiality

and materials matter (for an overview see Gregson and Crang 2010). Their work is relevant in that they focus on how to engage with 'the *stuff* of waste', through thinking through the materials, rather than the more stable materialities of objects or things (Gregson and Crang 2010: 1026). Their critique of social science literature on waste as waste management, stems from the way these literatures don't engage with the materiality of rubbish, but tend to focus on its translation into treatment technologies, or as resource recovery, and thus, into different forms of metrics (Gregson and Crang 2010: 1026). I will argue that their focus on materials is relevant to enliven the accounts of the moments of rubbish when rubbish is 'managed' too. Their insistence on the becoming of rubbish is important to unsettle more unquestioning models of rubbish management.

Furthermore, their critique of the emphasis on re-enchantment and generosity of the vital materialism debate, by highlighting the difficulties that some materials present, such as those that are dangerous for humans like asbestos, contributes to extend the ethical encounters with materials to more than generosity, and to encompass other relations, such as respect (Gregson, Watkins and Calestani 2010). This is important in terms of my research as the ways the materialities of rubbish were articulated in the controversy were not so much about enchantment and generosity, but nearer the notion of respect that Gregson *et al* describe (*Ibid.*). However, once again, their engagement with politics, and more so, of normative practices is not the focus of their work, and thus is not worked through enough. So I turn to other literatures on waste that focus on different types of politics, from the governance of waste, Douglas' (1969) sense of dirt as a form of ordering through to struggles for environmental justice.

One of the literatures that moves away from a more technical perspective on waste management and starts linking waste with how politics is done, is that which focuses on policy outcomes (Davoudi 2009), or on the governance of waste (see for instance Bulkeley, Watson and Hudson 2007, Davis 2008, Fagan 2004, Myers 2005). These studies serve to show the complexity of dealings with waste that go further than just being a technical problem. Bulkeley, Watson and Hudson's work (Bulkeley et al. 2007), is especially important as it bridges the notion of governmentality and governance in a fruitful way. This is important as it shows a way to link issues of structure and process of governing, recognising the multiplicity of governing sites and activities that coalesce around particular entities, such as waste (*Ibid.*). In this way, this study gives a more complex political and geographical understanding of the management of waste, and one that links with normative issues. However, the materiality of waste, the specificity of it, is many times side-stepped by either a focus on policy or with its governmentality, on the ways that humans govern waste, which leaves how the materiality of waste matters unattended.

Re-engaging with waste in a less fixed manner takes me back to Douglas' (1969) crucial classic comparative anthropological study, *Purity and Danger*, which set the tone for numerous other studies focusing on rubbish. Douglas' approach is relevant here in that it gives me tools to construct a creative, relational and geographical way of looking at waste, and one that focuses on the ordering power of waste. Her understanding of dirt as 'matter out of place', proposed rubbish as relational, and one in which its geography mattered. For Douglas, waste is related to our desire for order, to keep things in place: 'uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained' (*Ibid.*: 40). Dirt was not inherently so, but made so within the context of a system of

relations. In this way, Douglas gives us a sense of how waste is relational, avoiding thus making essentialist assumptions about rubbish. Douglas (*Ibid.*) conceives of dirt as out of place. Dirt is that which violates a sense of order in the world.

This study of rubbish proposes a more systematic, structural and symbolic approach to understanding its materiality, and links the notion of waste with how the social is ordered. However, some authors (Hetherington 2004, Zitouni 2005) have rightly pointed out that Douglas' work stands on the assumption of a stable order, and an essential need for order, thus missing the way in which order is being constructed in uncertain ways (Hetherington 2004: 163). Moreover, the construction of orders does not necessarily need to be conceived in terms of a basic human need, but could be thought of as, following Foucault (2006) built through historical processes that slowly prepare for this moment of disconnection and separation. Thus, this segregation and separation from things that we have been living together with, such as rubbish, is not given but a slow historical construction (Zitouni 2005). Furthermore, as Gregson and Crag (2010) point out, as important as this relational construction of waste is, it does not give much importance to the materiality of those things that are separated, as orderings are done through materials, but these materials do not seem to matter in terms of how these orderings are done. Thus, this relational definition of dirt, or of rubbish, is not explicit about how 'different matters, matter differently' (Gregson and Crag 2010: 1027). One of the ways in which the symbolic dimension of the relational construction of rubbish starts to link with the materiality of rubbish is in struggles for environmental justice, to which I turn next.

The symbolic relations between waste and rejection can be seen at work in the literature on environmental justice in ways that are useful for my research as they link

symbolic, material and geographical dimensions of waste to forms of political struggles. This literature focuses on struggles of marginalised people around pollution but, most significantly for this research, it focuses on the environmental problems that more poor and marginalised people face in relation to waste dumps, nuclear and toxic waste. This literature is more concerned with environmental justice aspects of waste dumping (Bullard 2005, Gandy 2002, Pellow 2002), which differs from strict environmental arguments in that they focus mainly on social justice issues and links with issues of race, class and social justice. This literature follows urban social movements who have mobilised since the 1960s to contest the disproportionate exposure to high levels of pollution, from many different types of waste (sewage, household, hazardous and nuclear) that millions of poor people have to endure, as these get dumped in the most poor and vulnerable parts of the city.

This literature connects with my interest in the politics of rubbish, in that it starts to link the importance of the geographies and materiality of waste to political struggles that relate to normative issues of democracy. It starts to include more of the geographies and the materiality of waste, in the sense that *where* waste is matters, and starts to bring in the materiality of waste in the sense that *what* it is dumped as waste has an effect on the relations that are created around it, as well as the particular effects and problems it brings. Furthermore, many studies analyse and evaluate the ways that involvement in more formal political processes, such as the legislative system, may hinder and/or help these processes of mobilisation for environmental injustices (Lekhi and Newell 2006).

In this way, some of the studies around environmental justice start to show how these issues can be more specifically linked to procedural and normative democratic issues,

though a lot of the literature relates to more ideal normative dimensions of democracy, rather than on practical ways these struggles relate to normative democratic issues, as with the Marxist literature I described in the section above. These literatures are concerned mainly with issues of social justice, and on particular moments in which rubbish, and other environmental issues, become controversial through the work of social movements. These are all elements that are present and that I needed to articulate for this research. However, I needed to make the links that this literature makes in a way that attended more to the importance of the materiality of rubbish, and to other moments of the trajectory of this issue.

Each of these particular literatures on materiality and waste that I analysed here, contributes to an understanding of the different elements that need to be taken into consideration when thinking about materiality and politics. The work of Bennett (2004) and Hawkins (2006), puts the materiality of rubbish in focus, by underlining its power for material disturbance. Furthermore, Hawkins' later work on the material politics of plastic bottles gives me a key tool to articulate a material politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires, by analysing how politics shift according to how the materiality of rubbish is enrolled and enacted in the making of the rubbish issue (Hawkins 2009). The work of Gregson and Crang (2010) builds on this work, and extends this concern on materiality from things to the materials of rubbish, and brings to attention different relations that are built around different materials, apart from that of generosity, such as respect, especially for those materials that are harmful for humans. However, as I said above, the work tends to put the onus on altering everyday ethical practices around waste and thus does not develop an engagement with other types of politics, or more explicitly to normative political practices such as democracy.

The literature on governance and governmentality of rubbish (Bulkeley et al. 2007, Davis 2008, Davoudi 2009, Myers 2005), seems to go in the opposite direction, paying attention to structures of government and governmentality, that is of the materiality of human practices around rubbish, but leaving the materiality of rubbish deadened and boxed in. The work of Douglas (1969), and the different critical engagements with it, move me to pay attention to the relational, spatial and historical ways that the definition of rubbish is used as a form of social ordering, thus underlining the symbolic power of rubbish. The problem here is that the specificity of the materiality and materials of rubbish seems to fade in terms of its symbolic power. Finally, the literatures on environmental justice, which start to link the symbolic power of rubbish, with its geography and, incipiently, with its materiality, allows a link to a different type of politics, that of controversies and social movements, but one that lacks a further engagement with materiality and normative and procedural political practices relating this politics of rubbish to democracy in other important ways.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to map the road I took to understanding how the materiality of rubbish, and rubbish practices, are crucial in understanding and specifying the ways politics and democracy are done. But that they also are part of what *makes* politics and democracy, in this case, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. For this, I articulated different literatures on rubbish and materiality, ANT, politics and democracy. The attention to the capacity of material disturbance of rubbish, as Bennett (2004) and Hawkins (2006) show us, can be linked to the controversy around

cartoneros and rubbish in Buenos Aires. However, this moment is just one of many other possible engagements with the material politics of rubbish. Hawkins' articulation of material politics, inspired by Mol's (2005a) work on ontological politics, pays attention to the ways that an issue is enacted and enrolled, and to the ways in which the association with particular material qualities provoke particular politics around it. Her work gave me tools to trace the different ways in which rubbish is done, and how the material qualities that are enacted at each particular site, or practice, produces particular politics around it, and a different sense of the political. This can be linked to the ways that Marres (2007) understands the creation of an issue, and its extension by Latour (2007), into not just the moment of the controversy, but to different moments of the making of particular issues. Thus, it helped me understand how to pay attention and highlight how the materiality of rubbish affected, was enrolled and enacted in each of these moments and sites of the political.

The literatures on rubbish show some of the different ways that rubbish can be political, which include governance, social policy, environmental justice movements, and everyday ethico-political practices. The work of Mol (2005a), further helps to punctuate the need to look not only at the different moments of the making of an issue, but at the different sites in which this takes place, to the ways the practices enact rubbish and how these are coordinated. This is important, as rubbish is done differently in particular sites. The work of Hawkins (2009) and Marres (2007), as I analysed above, gives me tools to translate these concerns with materiality of practices, of rubbish, and of politics, by getting inspiration from Mol, but not getting tied to the descriptions of orderings and coordination work in one political register. The work of association and articulation that Hawkins (2009) and Marres (2007)

propose, in terms of understanding how the materiality of rubbish and the practices that make the issue of rubbish what it is in particular times and sites, supports a relational definition of rubbish, and one which might bring different kind of relations and associations to it, and not just privilege one kind of relation such as opposition or generosity.

Marres's (2007, 2010) work also starts to specify the ways in which this material politics can relate to the enactment of democracy in terms of the making of the rubbish issue. She does this by looking at the ways that the affectedness of issues relates to the ways these issues are articulated and intervene in the livelihoods of those affected (humans and non-humans), and to the ways that this more intimate sense of affect becomes important in terms of collective forms of engagement such as democratic politics, as the issues at stake are outside the reach of particular individuals, as are the resources required to address them (Marres 2010: 200-1). The importance of the materiality of things comes here in the ways that these have particular affordances for the performance of public involvement in issues. These material qualities, however, are an accomplishment of political processes rather than pre-given (*Ibid.*: 204).

Finally, the way these different types of politics around rubbish link to democracy can be more explicitly made if I combine the work of Paley (2002), Saward (2003) and ANT, to look at the different devices in everyday practices that can be said to enact particular democratic principles, and thus enact democracy in particular ways, in particular sites. This take on the enactment of democracy in particular sites, aligns itself with calls for post-colonial and for more ethnographic understandings of

democracy (Corbridge et al. 2005, O'Donnell 1999, Painter 2006b, Paley 2002, Slater 2002, Stokke 2009).

These different literatures helped me to create my own particular approach to the material politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires. The theoretical map I have traced here will be one that is also taken in steps in the thesis, as I have described in the introduction. The next step is to show how I articulated these concerns in the work of generating materials for this research through ethnographic fieldwork and how these got translated into this thesis, which is the matter of the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Generating materials

'The world massively underdetermines what can be said about it. How it is envisaged necessarily depends on what technical instruments, practices, and forms of reasoning are brought to bear' (Barry 2001: 23)

'What is being done and what, in doing so, is reality in practice made to be?' (Mol 2005a: 160)

Doing research is an assemblage of different practices. As the first quote above highlights, practices, instruments, techniques and forms of reasoning are crucial for what we can say about the world. Furthermore, as Mol's question brings up in the second quote, practices are fundamental not just to construct what we can say about the world and how we can describe it, but because they intervene and help create the world (Law 2006). In terms of this research, this means considering fieldwork as *generating materials*, that is, understanding and showing how knowledge production is 'always, and unavoidably, an *intervention in the world* in which all those (human and non-humans) enjoined in it can, and do, affect each other' (Whatmore 2003: 90). What practices I engaged in, and which interventions my research got involved in were then critical to what and how I constructed this research and this thesis.

The starting point of this research, as I have shown in Chapter 1, is that to understand what politics is and what democracy are in particular places we have to look at the way things are done in everyday practices, such as those of rubbish. In order to do this, I

needed to be attentive to the materiality of things and of practices. In the previous chapter, I articulated different theoretical literatures in order to construct an approach that would allow me to analyse the particular ways in which different dimensions of the materiality of rubbish and rubbish practices construct how politics and democracy are done in particular sites. In this chapter, I will describe the methods I used in order to generate materials for this research.

The most relevant approach for engaging with everyday material practices of doing rubbish was ethnography. However, the particular challenges involved in exploring the material practices of rubbish, which involve many parallel practices in dispersed localities, meant that I had to adapt ethnography to the aims and possibilities of this research, to the places, things and people I worked in and with, and to, for instance, the limits and possibilities imposed by violence and gender. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss why ethnography was suited for understanding research as generating materials, as well as how I adapted and adopted it for my research, which includes the ways in which I created the field in two sites of the metropolitan region of Buenos Aires (RMBA): Bajo Flores and Moreno.

The particular methods used intervened and created spaces and relations that helped me understand processes. In the second section, I describe the practicalities, challenges and materials generated by using participatory video in Bajo Flores, and participant observation in Bajo Flores and Moreno. The materials generated during fieldwork took first the shape of photos, notes on observations, audio and written recordings of interviews to name a few. These materials were further transformed and translated into themes, codes, categories and descriptions that constructed this thesis. In the last section, I describe the challenges involved in the more intensive processes

of analysis and in the translations that were implied in the iterative process between theory, fieldwork and crafting this thesis. I reflect particularly on the transcription of interview material, on building themes and on the challenges of writing this thesis. By mapping the process that ended with this thesis, I show, following Latour (1999: 58), some of the ways in which this research attempted at keeping something constant through a series of transformations, or, as Mol puts it, to 'actively constitute a traceable link between an object that is studied and the articulations that come to circulate about it' (Mol 2005a: 153). Knowledge constructed through this research is inevitably partial and localised (Haraway 1988). In this chapter, I aim to make present the links between the sites and practices of rubbish I intervened in/with, the methods used, materials generated, their translations and the articulations I have crafted through this thesis.

I intersperse throughout the chapter some fragments, clearly marked in italics, where I give more personal accounts concerning the experience of doing fieldwork. These fragments come from elaborations of fieldwork diary notes.

Adapting ethnography

Ethnography is a practice that has changed and been modified in different ways since its inception as a descriptive narrative account of distant communities by travellers and missionaries (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 1). Ethnographic practices were slowly transformed, becoming the core of anthropological studies, and were later further tailored for sociology and for other disciplines, such as geography. In this

journey, it was adapted from its settings in distant (non-western) small rural communities to proximate, western, urban areas (Cloke et al. 2004, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 1-2, Jackson 1985). There is not a standard definition of ethnography that works well in every context. It is easier to state what ethnographic work usually involves. First, it is about accounts and actions of people in everyday life settings, which means the researcher gets involved in people's lives through fieldwork (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). By getting involved in daily activities for a period of time, ethnographers follow processes as they unfold (Tilly 2006: 410). The practice of ethnography implies treating people as knowledgeable agents from which the researcher can learn (Agar 1996, Cloke et al. 2004), and the knowledge produced is considered a relational effect of the researcher's presence and the people with whom s/he is researching with. Engaging with those whom we are researching, being affected and being reflective about the particular interactions generated by our interventions are crucial elements in ethnographic methods and align with my interest in fieldwork as generating materials.

Within an ethnographic approach, materials are generated from different methods, though participant observation is usually the main one (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Tilly 2006). Ethnography can also involve different forms of observation, interviews, conversations, shadowing, diaries, visual methods and secondary data. A mixture of observing, asking, listening, interviewing and doing have been used to understand the complexity of different issues (Barry 2001:22-24). This involves studying what people say, but also what people do (Cloke et al. 2004: 169). Ethnographic methods are flexible enough to allow different ways of adapting towards particular settings and research interests, such as those that involve more-than-

humans (see for instance Barry 2001, Latour 1988, Law 1994, Mol 2005a). This different array of methods that ethnographic work was important as it allows paying attention to and engaging with the materiality of everyday practices as well as with discourses on these practices.

I think of ethnography, following Law (2006), as a particular method-assemblage: that is, a way of using different methods to 'detect, resonate with and amplify particular patterns of relations in the excessive and overwhelming fluxes of the real' (*Ibid.*: 14). I chose an assemblage that would intervene and create different things, in order to allow me to look at how rubbish was being done in different sites. To the most traditional methods used in an ethnographic approach, such as different levels of participant observation, in-depth interviews, conversations, I added that of participatory video. I also took photos, and used secondary materials. I will detail more the way I used these methods in the second section. But first, I will show the particular adaptation of ethnography for my research through the creation of the field sites. I turn now to the mix of organisation, work and chance that led me to create the 'field', and work in two sites: Bajo Flores and Moreno.

Creating the field: Bajo Flores and Moreno

I am from Buenos Aires. It is the city where I was born and where I grew up and lived until I was 25 years old. I have lived in England since 2002, and have only been back for short visits. This makes it a distant home I suppose, as gradually England has become more and more my home too. The good thing about going to Buenos Aires is that it is going back to where I come from, and have lived almost all my life. I chose Buenos Aires as it is a place I know well, I know the language and I had a place to stay and

loads of family and friends to get re-acquainted with. In some senses it was easier to go back than to choose an entirely different place. The difficult thing about going back is balancing fieldwork, but also all the very demanding expectations of family and friends, who tend to forget you are there to work, and not for an extended holiday! Doing fieldwork at home also has some downsides. As I am considered Argentine I am not allowed to play the innocent outsider, and I'm treated as implicitly knowing things which I would like to question but found hard to⁹.

Traditional ethnographic accounts are most of the time set far away from home, or in some way distanced from everyday familiar environments (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). One of the issues I faced was creating a field, at home. Creating a field and doing ethnographic work seems to require this distance, as it involves getting to know 'another world'. This distancing need not be physical, but refers to the need to 'step back' in order to observe. As Czarniawska (2007) puts it, 'fieldwork is an expression of curiosity of the Other- of people who construct their world differently than we researchers construct ours' (*Ibid.*: 9). As different scholars have shown, it is not necessary to go far away to do ethnography (Amit 2002, Crang and Cook 2007, Hume and Mulcock 2004, Jackson 1987). There is a range of the familiar even within what one would call 'home'. The rubbish circuit, and the different actors that make up the process of rubbish, were far removed from my experience and interactions in the city. An added distance is that between how we construct our different narratives, in our different ways of producing knowledge (Strathern 1987).

One of the first decisions I had to make was about how to understand and describe the multiple socio-material practices that make rubbish. Rubbish being everywhere, linked

⁹ Fieldwork Notes, January 2007, Buenos Aires

to almost all of our everyday practices, and Buenos Aires being a large city, where 13 million people live and where many more than that work, transit, visit, make and pick rubbish from.

Figure 1: Map of Argentina¹⁰



¹⁰ Map taken from: <http://www.visitingargentina.com.ar/mapas/mapa-politico-argentina.htm>

Figure 2: Description of RMBA

The RMBA comprises the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires -CABA) and Greater Buenos Aires (GBA). Both areas experienced major changes and growth during the 20th century. However, stark differences arose. The CABA grew from over half a million inhabitants in 1895, to one and a half million in 1914, to almost three million in 1947; thereafter the population level remained stable until today. In the meantime, the GBA area grew and keeps growing at a dramatic rate. From half a million in 1914, it almost doubled its population by 1940, and reached more than eight and a half million by 2001 (INDEC 2001). The RMBA had by 2001 almost fourteen million inhabitants (*Ibid.*). At the beginning of the 20th century, the quality of services and infrastructure could be compared to those of the major cities in the developed world (Pírez 1998: 210). By the 1980s, the city was at a verge of an urban crisis in terms of the quality and extension of infrastructure and services (*ibid.*). Pírez identified the main cause for the failure of the different models of management and administration of public services in the RMBA as the absence of a sustainable public strategy for the services (*Ibid.*). This failure led to problems such as corruption, inefficiency, lack of investment and maintenance (*Ibid.*).

Since 1994, the CABA has become autonomous; previously it was administered by the federal government. Now the city has its own constitution, executive and legislative authorities. The rest of the municipalities that make up the RMBA have little autonomy. Their administration is defined by the provincial government and also by the federal government (Pírez 2002: 145-6). Historically, the RMBA has been divided by two axes: north-south and centre-periphery (*Ibid.*: 146-7). The division is one of resources. The north is the more affluent area, while the south is poorer in resources

and more marginalised. The periphery is continually expanded and occupied by successive immigrant populations, which created two 'rings', the outer ring being the one that continues to expand demographically. The CABA has traditionally been richer in resources, while the more peripheral districts house the low income populations that settled in popular lots, many times lacking services and infrastructure (*ibid.*: 147).

Classical ethnographic studies have tended to be done in spatially specific localised institutions or groups and have sometimes treated these as localised knowable communities (Barry 2001: 24, Marcus 1995). However, this is not the kind of ethnography that I practised. Instead of having as a starting point a knowable community, my field-work was to literally work to create the field, the sites. I narrowed and focused my fieldwork through three different processes: by deciding on a 'starting point', by creating shape to the practices and sites and by deciding which particular sites to work with.

It was not easy to decide where to begin. From the different kinds of rubbish that can be studied and the vast array of practices that are done around it and make it what it is, I decided to start by focusing on what is called 'urban solid waste'. This seemed to be the most obvious part of the rubbish process, what is called the 'end point' in the literature. By the 'end point', I mean the process of collecting municipal waste. This process includes collecting rubbish from households, businesses, and organisations; its treatment and final disposal. This finality was a good starting point for me, I thought, as it gave me a clear practice from where I could expand/contract/go

forwards/backwards or whichever way seemed more interesting, practical and related to my research interests. This still was a vast field, too vast.

Since my research aimed at following the practices of and around rubbish, I decided a model of 'following-the-thing' could be one I could use to start constructing my fieldwork sites. Many studies work on following different things: some studies follow people, others metaphors, objects, a story, a life, a conflict (for example see Appadurai 2006, Marcus 1995, Martin 1995, Mintz 1986, Netz 2004). In Geography, there are many studies that use the design of 'follow-the-thing', especially in terms of following products 'up' the supply chain, that is, that follow the chain of production of a commodity; particularly commodities such as food and fashion (for instance see Cook et al 2006, Dwyer and Jackson 2003). Until recently, though there has been some work done on the extended life of products, for instance in terms of second-hand exchanges (see for instance Gregson and Crewe 2003), there has been less done on following products at the other end of the chain, that is, when and where products are disposed of, turn into rubbish, or when and where products get transformed into different materials (Gregson et al. Forthcoming).

My research has in its design an element of 'following', as it follows rubbish. One of the options was to follow a chain of rubbish: to follow the trajectory of a product or material, for instance paper or plastic, from its consumption to its disposal, transformation or burial. This was one of the paths I thought I could take. However, this idea turned out not to be so easily achievable in practical terms. This is because the chain of rubbish, especially the process in which rubbish is separated, cleaned and processed so as to be sold to industries as raw materials has been a trail of rubbish that was mostly illegal and informal. This makes it difficult to follow for different

reasons. First, the illegality and informality of this part of the process made this trail more of a dangerous environment, though this risk varied depending on the type of materials at stake. Second, this risk was enhanced in my case as the rubbish process in general is a very 'male' environment, which can be threatening to a lone female researcher, and even for male researchers¹¹. The exception in this sense was the work of *cartoneros*, which seem to involve many women, and families, though some of the issues were present for women *cartoneras* too (Ageitos et al. 2006, Anguita 2003). Third, some studies were already done, or in the process of being done that followed a material, which meant that there was little point in repeating a study, with less time, resources and support than these others studies had at hand (see for instance Schamber 2007b). In any case, there are degrees of risk I was willing to take in order to do this research, but I considered this too far. The risk made me put aside this model of following, which involved following a particular material product at the back-end of the chain, for this research.

I had to find another way of defining the way I was to follow rubbish. My main research interest was about how rubbish practices were done in everyday practices and how they were political. For this, I did not necessarily need to follow this chain of rubbish. Therefore, in pursuing particular opportunities in the field, my research differed from other following acts, as I did not end up following the particular chain of a product or material from its consumption to its disposal and reuse. What I did instead was to relate different sites, each with its own particular ways of enacting rubbish, which made them political in particular ways. This type of following did not end up making a chain that went upwards, downwards, forwards or backwards. I

¹¹ Interview with Suárez, F., 12.10.2006, Anthropologist working on waste issues, Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento (UNGS), Instituto del Conurbano, Buenos Aires

'followed' certain practices and sites, some of which had a sense of order in a process such as the moments of administration, transport and disposal, but some which did not necessarily fit neatly within this process, such as the ones in the Moreno site, or the work at the separation plant in Bajo Flores, as I describe below.

I slowly constructed what would become my two field sites, Bajo Flores and Moreno, through my initial interviews and conversations. Bajo Flores was the site of a separating plant owned by the government and managed by a cooperative of *cartoneros*. I chose to work on a separating plant with *cartoneros* as they have been very much part of the controversy around rubbish. The separating plant was situated in the south of the CABA, and to the south of the neighbourhood called Flores, in Bajo Flores, one of the poorest and most marginal areas in the city (see Figure 2 and 3), and an area historically linked to the dumping and treatment of rubbish (Prignano 1998). The fact that a cooperative of *cartoneros* - in itself a form of organisation that was rare but promising - was managing a separating plant provided by the government was an experiment that I thought was interesting to follow. It is important to note that I group under the Bajo Flores site the separation plant, but also the different city government offices of CABA, as well as particular local government officers, academics, waste collection companies and others that relate in different ways to this site, though they are not necessarily proximate in territorial terms.

Figure 3: Map of neighbourhoods of the CABA¹²



The other site is Moreno, a municipality that is situated not in the CABA, but in the periphery; in what is known as the second ring of the RMBA (see Figure 4). This municipality is also historically a more impoverished area, especially compared to the CABA (see Figure 2). Working in Moreno gave me an interesting counterpoint. Moreno is one of the poorest municipalities in Greater Buenos Aires. It has the third lowest

¹² Map taken from CABA government website:
http://estatico.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/med_ambiente/imagenes/mapa-barrios.jpg

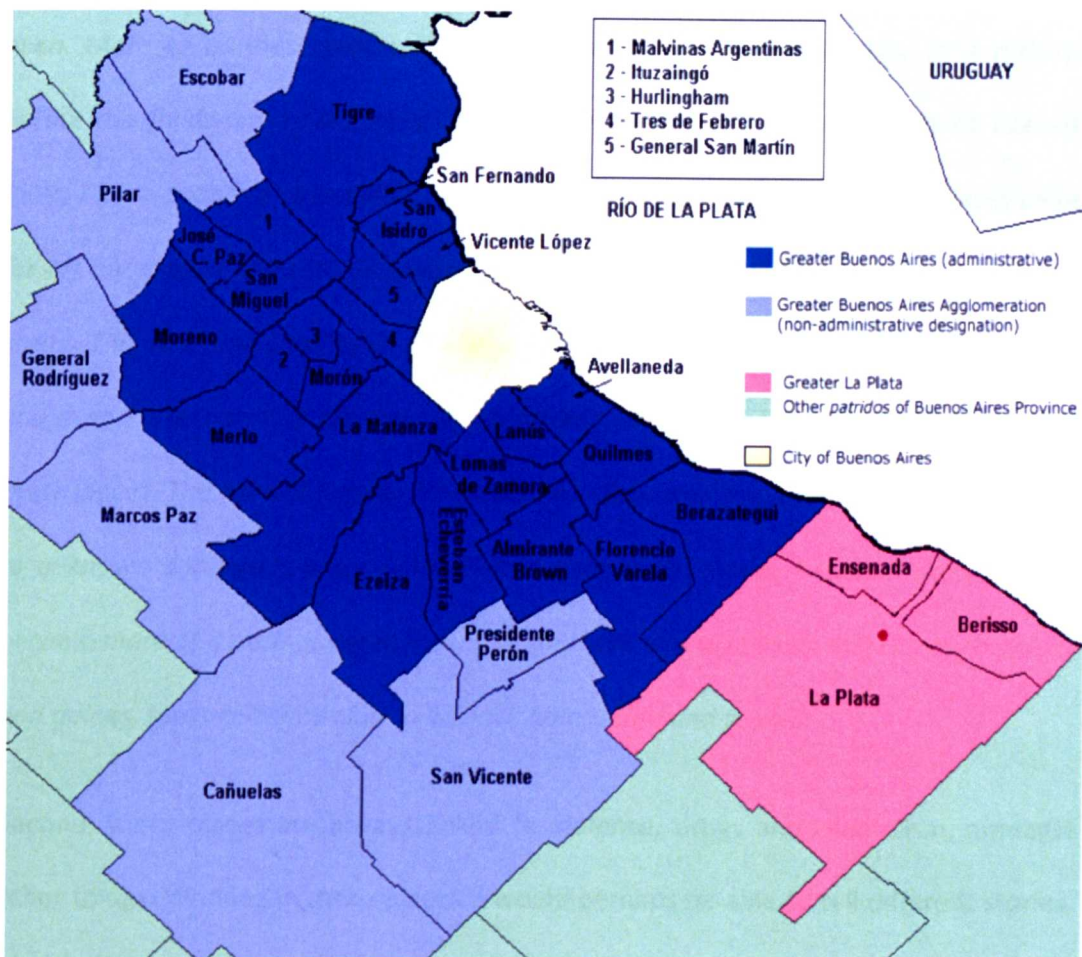
value in the Human Development Index in Buenos Aires (Auyero 2007: 129-30)¹³, and more than half the population is below the poverty line. Moreno has witnessed high population growth, and this, combined with the inability of the municipality to provide for public infrastructure, has meant that Moreno has one of the higher deficits in terms of the provision of public services. Its lack of infrastructure and the lack of capacity and resources of its municipality compared to the CABA make it different yet again. My work in Moreno was to follow a project called 'Focus Cities', which aimed at improving the environmental living conditions of poorer people in Moreno. It was driven by a non-governmental organisation (NGO), called the International Institute for Environment and Development Latin America (IIED-LA). Moreno, as Bajo Flores, is used here to convey not just one place but multiple and connected sites. Moreno itself is a vast municipality, its territory as extensive as the city. My work was based in different municipal government offices in Moreno and meeting sites as well as participant neighbours' houses. Connected to this site is also the NGO's headquarters in Saavedra (then Florida), a place distant from Moreno itself, in the border between the province of Buenos Aires and the CABA. The idea of working in two different sites within the RMBA was not to create a comparative study, but to bring to the fore differences that could be interesting and relevant.

One of the differences involved is that these two sites had very different political compositions. First, to put this in context, it is important to know that two political parties have dominated the political scene in Argentina. The Justicialist party, also known as Peronist party for its most influential leader, Juan Domingo Perón, is one of

¹³ The human development index takes into account three element, health (life expectancy), education (combined index of literacy and school attendance) and living conditions (estimated through per capita income utility) (Auyero 2007: 130).

the strongest parties in Argentina. Its main rival has historically been the Radical Civic Union. Historically, the Peronist party has represented workers and poor people, its aim was social justice, and it has close links with trade unions. The Radical Civic Union, has, on the other hand, been representative of the middle and upper classes, and stands for creating a country in which civic institutions are strong, and for the respect laws and institutions. These two parties have been disputing government since the late 1940s, though these had been interrupted by military coups until 1982. More recently, these parties have suffered major changes, fractured and created new parties, and lines within the parties (for more on political parties and democracy in Argentina see Auyero 2000b, Calvo and Escolar 2006, McGuire 1995, O'Donnell 2004, Svampa 2005, Torre 2003). The way this influence plays out in each site is important. In the CABA, there are usually several small political blocs that stand for office and that are present in the legislature. For instance, at the moment there are 13 parties that have members of the legislature. The Justicialist party has not ruled in many years. In Moreno, a deep-rooted Justicialist party dominates the political forces. The work of this party is known for mixing more formal forms of representation with more informal political forms such as clientelism (Auyero 2007). The different political composition and dynamics present has effects on the political processes that take place in these sites.

Figure 4: Map of the RMBA. Moreno is part of Greater Buenos Aires (in blue)¹⁴



The two sites I chose are poorer, more marginalised areas within the RMBA. There were at least three reasons why this was important for my research. One is about the necessary distance and difference needed to create a field. These were places and people that were far from my usual itineraries and interactions in Buenos Aires. These were places I had never been to and that were very different from where I live, and the way I do things. This also made it uncomfortable, which added to the easier realisation of difference.

¹⁴ Map taken from: <http://www.atlasdebuenosaires.gov.ar/>

I was afraid in confronting places and people that are different, places that I have never been. More so as these places have a reputation for being dangerous and violent. Before this fieldwork, I have never been in these places. In such a big city as Buenos Aires, I have a kind of circuit that I know, around which I move. These two places were far off my map of the city. So I was curious, and also afraid, to go to these unknown areas. This fear and anxiety is a very physical force. I paced and paced around the house and was not very pleasant to be around, as I was so nervous about going to these places. The normal fidgety pre-interviews state was compounded by having to go to unknown dangerous places. Once I had gone a few times, I calmed down, and it became more of a normal experience, though there was always an edge to my comings and goings. I was certainly glad to be back home, safe and sound¹⁵.

Second, these places are always linked to violence, drugs and clientelism, amongst other things. Working in these places, I would perhaps be able to tell different stories. So it was about symmetry too. Ethnography is intended to enable researchers to connect and understand the way things are done by others, and in the process, also give these others the chance to speak back.

A third reason to work in these areas is that it is in marginalised places where things more blatantly don't work, so it is perhaps easier to see what is wrong, or how things are done, or should be done. Rubbish is also historically linked with these places, either because these areas are linked with rubbish, or where people working with rubbish are more likely to come from.

¹⁵ Fieldwork Notes. November 2006, Buenos Aires

All these reasons for choosing and creating these particular fieldwork sites were intertwined with the very important practical issue of the opportunity to work in these sites. I chose these sites because they were amongst the sites I was given the chance to work in. This does not mean that I had not any other way of constructing this research, as the different contacts and interviews I set up initially, as well as throughout my fieldwork, provided me with many different paths I could have followed. In addition, these opportunities did not necessarily mean that I would be able to construct my research around these sites, as the creation of access, and more broadly of fieldwork sites, did not end and start with these first moments of opportunity (Crang and Cook 2007, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

I found that 'access' was a constant process of positioning and negotiating. This process involved being attentive to different issues, ranging from understanding who the gatekeepers were at different points in time, to creating and maintaining trusting relationships, finding different and appropriate ways of explaining my research interests and choosing what to wear. The process of constructing the fieldwork sites was constant work. Especially taking into account the way I divided my fieldwork.

I divided my fieldwork into two different periods. The first period of field work was undertaken from the end of September 2006 until the end of January 2007; and the second period from the beginning of October 2007 until mid January 2007. The rationale for dividing fieldwork this way was to have a first phase where I could try out methods, generate contacts and materials, and then be able to come back to the UK. There I could take some distance, reflect on my experience, and evaluate the need for changes or re-focusing, through writing some of the materials up, reviewing other literatures that might be helpful, and through supervision. It was meant to make it

more of a reflexive iterative process. This first period fed into the next and final period of field work. This break-up of fieldwork worked well in terms of reflection, refocusing and gathering more energy. It also built a sense of iteration, of going back in different ways, changing in the process. One of the drawbacks of this separation is that it takes some time to re-connect with the different sites, so some time has to be built in for this. An advantage in my case is that in Buenos Aires, people are quite open, give time, and are in many cases quite relaxed about being interviewed, sharing their views and time with researchers. Furthermore, this drawback is made up for with a better sense of what one is after, and a more focused and energised drive. Overall, it worked for me, but it may be harder in other cases where the research culture is different.

Next, I will describe in further detail the challenges and experiences involved in putting methods to work during fieldwork.

Putting methods to work

Figure 5: From bright blue and red to this: my dirty and battered trainers after working at the separating plant¹⁶



Fieldwork was about getting my hands - and body and clothes - dirty, as the picture above shows. This happened both in a literal sense, as I worked separating rubbish in a separating plant, but also in the sense of actually putting methods to work. I took this photo one day after working at the separating plant in Bajo Flores. My dirty trainers (see Figure 5) reflect for me the hard work, the close contact with rubbish, and show the build up of these experiences. Doing fieldwork was amongst other things, exciting, frustrating, illuminating, and tiring. It was a very involved process. This was because it meant putting my body-mind-emotions-rationalities, in the creation of different instances to understand how things work.

This section deals with the socio-material practices of doing methods, of being in the field. I describe and analyse how different methods were put into practice, their

¹⁶ Unless otherwise stated, all photos were taken by me.

materiality, difficulties and practicalities. I used some of the same and some different methods for each of the sites, and also staged them in different ways. Initial interviews allowed me the opportunity to make a participatory video with a cooperative of *cartoneros* in Bajo Flores. Alongside this, I interviewed different city and local government officers, as well as academics working on rubbish issues. This was what took most of my first fieldwork trip in terms of the Bajo Flores site. On my second field trip, I focused more on participant observation through working at the separation plant, and on interviews with people at the plant, government officials, waste collection companies and academics.

At the same time, I was also involved in creating another field site, Moreno. In Moreno, I mainly worked doing participant observation of meetings (arranged by IIED-LA), worked an afternoon a week with this NGO, had serial interviews with IIED-LA members working on this project, and in-depth interviews with municipal workers and neighbours that participated in the 'Focus Cities' project. These interviews took place at the meetings, some in participants' houses, in their organisations, or in convenient places in the centre. In addition, I worked with secondary materials such as the books where the minutes of the meetings were recorded, bulletins, leaflets created by the NGO through the process, as well as different NGO reports. In Moreno, I relied more on interviews and participant observation in both fieldwork trips.

I will describe and analyse here the experience of doing participatory video in Bajo Flores, and participant observation in both Bajo Flores and Moreno. I use this format to highlight the most interesting aspects of doing methods, to avoid repetition and because these methodologies, along with interviews, generated the richest set of materials for my research.

Doing participatory video

The opportunity to work with the *Cooperativa Ecológica de Recicladores del Bajo Flores* (CERBaF - Ecological Recycling Cooperative of Bajo Flores, or Bajo Flores coop for short), came about in an interview with Francisco Suárez, an anthropologist at the *Universidad General Sarmiento* that works on rubbish issues. At one point, when we talked about methodology issues, I mentioned I wanted to use participatory video (PV) for my research. He told me that the people of the Bajo Flores coop were interested in having a video done on their cooperative, and asked me if I would be willing to do it, so I jumped at the opportunity.

I was enthusiastic about the possibilities of participatory video as a method for research, though a little apprehensive due to my lack of experience with this method, and the few precedents in using this method for research. Participatory video is basically a 'set of [participatory] techniques to involve a group or community in shaping and creating their own film' (Lunch and Lunch 2006: 10). This broad definition allows this method to be adapted to many different purposes. Participatory video has been used in many ways over the last 40 years; mostly in community development, public consultations, policy dialogue and for empowerment and advocacy (Harris 2009, Lunch and Lunch 2006, Menter et al. 2006). More recently, participatory video has started to be used for research (Kindon 2003, Parr 2007, Pink 2004, Wheeler 2009, White 2003). As Dwyer and Davies (2010) point out, geographers working with participatory methodologies have been more recently experimenting with different methods, such as video, as a powerful way of engaging with those, especially more marginal groups, with whom they are researching (*ibid.*: 91). PV is a different, more

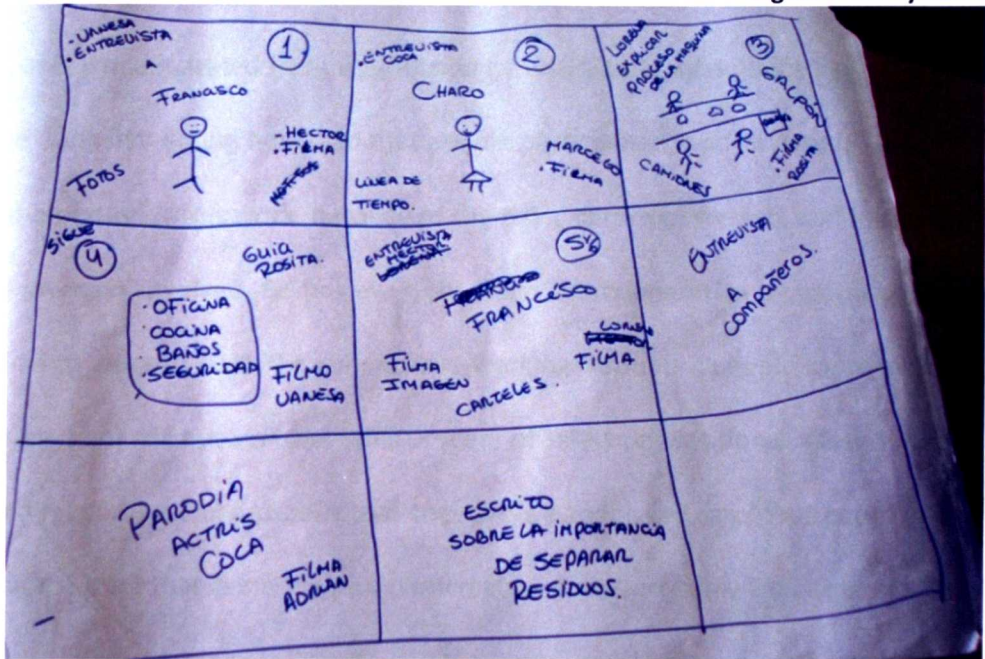
visual, way of generating materials with people and things, and a practical way of giving people with whom you are researching the possibility of answering back. This ethical concern is shared with other participatory methodologies, and with concerns raised in Geography on the colonial and/or 'masculinist' ways of looking present in this area of studies (Kindon 2003: 142-3). Kindon (*Ibid.*) shows how different disembodied and distant 'gazes' have been used in Geography in ways that create and re-create power imbalances (*Ibid.*: 142-3). Using PV is a way of challenging this imbalance by producing a different 'practice of looking' that reduces this imbalances and produces more equitable outcomes (*Ibid.*: 143). The versatility of this method, its visual nature, and the ethical charge it implied meant that I wanted to give this method a try as a way of generating materials for my research.

I called the president of CERBaF and we arranged a time to meet in order to discuss the making of the video. The president of the cooperative had a particular kind of video in mind. Or more precisely, he knew what he did *not* want. In that first meeting he told me that he had been part of documentaries, but that he was not happy as he did not get to see the films, nor had much control over the process. He was going to travel to Colombia, for a Latin American meeting of 'urban recoverers', and wanted a video to showcase their work. He knew other organizations were going to present videos, and he thought it would be good to have his own. It seems it had become a kind of social movement 'repertoire'. He wanted a video that showed their different realities. A view from *cartoneros*: from themselves to themselves; not from the government or from a technician. I thought this corresponded well with what PV was all about, as I described above. In terms of doing video, PV implies a more distributed authorship in the sense that the people I was working with would be the ones deciding

what stories to tell, what to film and what the film would look like. In terms of my agenda for research, I thought of it as a 'way in' for me in a cooperative of *cartoneros*. In the end, the project could not be done for the meeting in Colombia, as that would only leave us a week to do everything, and the camera was not working correctly so this delayed things. Once the camera was fixed, we set a date to start the work.

The process of making a participatory video involved many different activities. I provided training in participatory video and camera skills to a group of workers of the cooperative. For the training, I used different participatory exercises that involved the camera and associated equipment, such as the tripod and the microphone. These exercises were also meant to make the participants aware of the different aspects of making a film, for instance the importance of getting the sound and lighting right, and the different possibilities of the editing process. The participatory planning of the video involved making a list of the participants' different ideas and proposals for the film, prioritising them, thinking of audiences, and translating these ideas into a script in the form of a storyboard that represented the order of the stories (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Storyboard



It also involved participatory exercises to practice using the camera and equipment, interviewing and listening skills, the collective creation of lists of questions for the interviews of the film, as well as assigning the rotating roles of filming, interviewing and directing. The equipment I used was a video camera, a photo camera, a microphone, a tripod, flipcharts, markers, cards and some food and drink. These different activities built the necessary preliminary stages of making the film. The filming took, in total, around six days (plus more when nothing much happened) and the whole process, which included training, planning, filming and showing it, took around two intensive weeks of work spread over a month and a half.

The question of who participates was important in doing a video, as in other participatory exercises, because it had an impact on the process and on the 'output', depending on who/what is represented (Chambers 1997). The separating plant was chosen to be the place to film, as it was the place that reunited them all (some people

came from very far away), and also a 'safe space' in the most basic sense of personal security, as it was separated from the outside by walls, and had a policeman on site. It was to be done in working hours, so that people participated, and as people had to go back to their houses after work, because of the tiring nature of the job, and because of the long journeys involved. So not everyone from the cooperative joined in as some people had to work to keep the cooperative working. Around 7 people came along to the training. I am still not sure how this process of selection was done. When I asked I got mixed responses. I heard both that they were handpicked, and that people were asked and the ones that came forward participated. It was probably a mixture of both.

While doing the video, I found out that the workers of the cooperative were mostly not ex-cartoneros. The president and his 'core' family have been cartoneros but the rest seemed to be working there through other connections. In the video, people actually mention this, so it was not a secret. So this representation was mostly about working in a cooperative of people that now worked separating rubbish. A bit different.¹⁷

Who was represented affected the stories that the video would tell. As my fieldwork notes above suggest, not many of the members of the cooperative that participated in the making of this video used to be *cartoneros*. Thus, the content of the video focused, in the end, in their work as a cooperative in a separating plant. The questions asked in the interviews to members and to outsiders, such as government officials, hinged on different aspects of working in the cooperative. This is connected to the stories that the more active participants in this process wanted to tell.

¹⁷ Fieldwork Notes, December 2006, CERBaF, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

The last step of the making of the video was editing. This has been identified as the hardest moment in the PV process to extend participation, due to the technical literacy needed (Wheeler 2009: 15). In this case, it was compounded by my lack of editing skills, and the need to rely on an external editor. The way I found around this issue was to make sure that the process reflected the storyboard (see Figure 6). However, this still left a margin of important micro-decisions to be made by the editor and me. I spent long hours with the editor, trying to edit the film in terms of the script. In this process, a good communication with the editor on the process involved and the things that needed to be included were crucial, as this information provided another form of shaping the editing process to reflect the ideas in the script. After a first cut, I showed the video to all of the people working there on a lunch break. I discussed after their views about the video. In spite of trying to make the editing as representative as possible of the participant's work, ideas, and plans for the film that I got from the process, the film made some people figure more than others, and this made some people feel left out. This meant another round of editing, one which included these other participants more and we showed the video again. This time it worked better. I took enough copies for the members of the cooperative and some more spare in DVD format (which was their preferred format) and included the raw material in another DVD together with the photos that were taken, so they could keep them.

This process may sound straightforward enough, but it was not. I will describe below the most challenging aspects of working with participatory video, as well as analyse the materials generated for my research. I will not describe or discuss the content of the video as this did not end up being the most important aspect of the process. However, as I will describe below, the film does work to give texture to my research,

which is the reason I attach it as part of the thesis. Some of the most challenging issues that came up were learning to facilitate on the job, the visual element in this method, and the difficulties conciliating the different agendas of participatory video and my research. I will examine these issues next.

Learning Facilitation

I found leading and facilitating the process of doing a participatory video without having much experience really challenging. The harder part was to manage my role as a facilitator. Being a facilitator implies different skills than those of other research methods such as interviews or participant observation (Braakman 2003, Chambers 2002). I had read around this issue, but doing it was another matter. So I had to learn to do this on the go and was full of self-doubt at every step of the way. During the process, I struggled with the level of direction I should provide. On the one hand, I wanted to be as participatory as possible, and I understood this at first as trying to interfere as little as possible, and to let the participants lead. However, it was not easy for participants to just take the initiative, be in charge, or participate. Entrenched roles, such as the 'teacher-student', had to be managed so as to be displaced by different dynamics. This was a constant feature. The creation of a space for participation did not immediately translate itself into such a space, and the process of facilitating was a crucial aspect in its success.

In the process of training, planning and making the video, an important lesson was that I did not need to disappear or be invisible in the participatory process. There needed to be someone creating a process of engagement, keeping momentum, mediating, motivating. And this was not static. It changed with different situations. An example of

this was when I felt there was a lack of momentum and my normal communication strategies – talking on the phone and face to face – did not seem to work. What worked was getting angry. For a few days I went and could not get anything done: energy was gone, people could not participate. It felt like a total loss of momentum. I decided to confront the issue. I told them that without participation, there was no video, and if that was the case, it was fine but I needed to know about it. I posed it as a question of respect towards me, as it was a waste of time for me to go when nothing could be done. They agreed, and commented that it was because they were short of work. On the side, I was told that they got bad looks if they did come along and spent time filming. Something was not right. Whatever it was, I didn't get to know. But it became obvious that the then president of the cooperative was the one that made things happen or not in many ways. The reasons for the construction of this dynamic are multiple. What matters here was that somebody must have told him about me being angry and this seemed to work like magic. When I met him next, the president commented that he did not mean to make it hard for me to work. I took my chance to tell him clearly all we needed to make it happen, and this, at last, seemed to work. The notion of respect towards others is at the core of facilitating (Braakman 2003, Chambers 2002, Luch and Luch 2006). However, as Chambers puts it, facilitators should strive to find a way of 'leading while withdrawing' (Chambers 2002: 132). I understood this to be accommodating, open and understanding at all times, but in this case being more visible and assertive seem to work better in terms of building mutual respect.

Difficulties in creating visual material

One of the reasons that I was curious to try participatory video was that it involved more visual forms of generating materials for fieldwork. In terms of my research interests, I thought that this added visual element, especially as filmed by those who worked on rubbish issues, would be a way of paying attention in another way to the material practices around rubbish; that it would help me go beyond words (Cloke et al. 2004). However, the visual content ended up being mostly about people interviewing other people, and about their experiences of the cooperative. Rubbish hardly figured, and the materiality of practices was something that they did not seem very interested in filming. Reflecting on the process, I found three issues that might have contributed to this: lack of visual training, a less strict form of facilitation, and a resistance from members to focus on the materiality of their everyday work.

My lack of visual and technical training, might have contributed to a less striking visual material content. I could have geared them more towards my interest in the material practices I was interested in, but not being very 'visual' myself, I found it hard to know what this would have meant. If I had wanted to get more than people talking in a video, I would have had to drive the process more, or maybe work with someone who knew better how to do this. However, this would have brought other agendas and negotiations to the process that would have affected the process in other ways (for an example see Parr 2007). Editing was another tricky aspect of participatory video, as I described above, but one that makes a big impact on the end product.

The challenge of the role I had as a facilitator was also a struggle in terms of the quality of the video. As others before me, I was afraid to drive the process and direct either

too much or too little (Menter et al. 2006). I erred on the side of not trying to drive things too much, keeping an open agenda in terms of the contents and forms of the video, which meant that I did not push people in terms of being more adventurous with their filming, or make them do something more polished. This meant that the quality of the video, the impact of the content, its critical edge was not as great as it could possibly have been. A more experienced video-facilitator would probably be able to achieve a more professional outcome while maintaining an open process. However, each process needs to balance the different expectations and priorities present, for the particular aim of the project (Menter et al. 2006, Parr 2007). In this case, I concentrated on keeping the process more open, relaxed and fun, but this meant that the product was not all it could be. The participants seemed pleased and proud with what they had achieved, which was also a priority in this type of process. In later visits, I was told that they used the video to present themselves in different opportunities, for instance, when doing talks at schools and other institutions.

The materials of rubbish were not the focus of the video, even if they were the matter of their everyday work. There could be several reasons for this. The two I describe here are the ones that resonated with other material generated during fieldwork. First, as I mentioned above, most of the members of the cooperative who participated in making the video had not been *cartoneros*, but became members of the cooperative when looking for a job, which probably meant they were less invested in the particularities of the practice of separating materials. Second, working with and around rubbish was stigmatised. Even though this video was meant in a way to counter this stigma and to show that their work was important, it still was done through creating a certain distance with the materials. The focus of the video was on the

important work the cooperative was doing by separating materials, and on the significance of working in a cooperative for its members. It is not that the video did not show the materials or the process of work, but this was not an important focus, and when it was done, it was mostly in a didactic manner, that is, to explain the importance of their work. This distance, or the more professional work with the material, which the video highlights, could be constructed as a way of distancing from the stigma attached to working with rubbish. This is related to the issue I analyse in Chapter 3, regarding the symbolic orderings of rubbish, which were made evident in the controversy around *cartoneros*. This showed the difficulty that some materials, such as rubbish here, had in lending themselves to be 'enchanted', because of the particularities of the associations that rubbish generates, which are dangerous to humans, but also because this material is layered with symbolic constructions that keep people at a distance. This difficulty, coupled with other encounters of the sort during fieldwork, contributed to my understanding of the difficulties that a focus on human and non-human relations can bring to the study of an issue such as rubbish in the context of Buenos Aires.

Process as outcome

Approaches to participatory video, as with other participatory methods, enhance the importance of the process (Kindon 2003, Lunch and Lunch 2006, Parr 2007). In this case, the analysis of the process was also what became more important in terms of my own research. Through the process of making this video, which was also an instance of participant observation, I learnt a lot about the dynamics at work in the cooperative. Making a participatory video was an intervention, a sort of experiment from which

many ways of relating and managing things came about. For instance, I could see how the president seemed to be the one making most of the decisions regarding the cooperative; that he was the one that mainly maintained relations with 'the outside', and thus the one with the contacts. The different tensions I encountered during the process of this video were useful in terms of understanding the day to day politics of the cooperative and also my role as an outsider. It worked to show me in practice how a method such as PV can create an intervention that allowed me to understand processes, dynamics and the relations that construct them. It was also very useful to gain access to a cooperative of *cartoneros*, a site where rubbish was done differently that became crucial for my research.

There were other aspects of the video that I expected to be more useful than they turned out to be, such as the video interviews. As my role was that of facilitating the process, the participants were in charge of creating the questions and carrying out the actual interviews. These activities were not so easy to do. First, figuring out which questions they wanted to ask took time and a lot of encouragement from me. However, the main problem was that once the participants decided on the questions, and were in the process of doing the video interviews, they would get so nervous about getting the next question right, that they did not listen to the answer they were given, and did not, for the same reason, re-ask questions, or went into something that was not clear. Having a camera rolling added to the pressure. This meant that the interviews were less a series of in-depth conversations about their work in the cooperative, as the plan seemed to be at the beginning of the process, and more of a mechanical posing of questions. With hindsight, my expectations were not attuned to what a participatory video entails. Even if people had been versed in interviewing, the

time of the video does not allow for much more than a short, hopefully powerful, intervention. As Plush (2009) points out, people share experiences differently in video than in other exchanges and that this has to be taken into account when thinking about which method would be best for fulfilling the project goals (*Ibid.*: 127) . Also, the ‘publicness’ of the video does not always lend itself to intimate honest reflections, and confidentiality issues come in (Kindon 2003). In this case, I realized later that people working there probably did not feel they had the authority to make such comments or thought that it might not be wise – i.e. they could lose their job if they did.

Even if the content of the video was not useful to my research in the ways I had envisaged, it works as a way of giving ‘texture’ to my research (Rose 2007: 247). Furthermore, the importance of leaving something that they found useful behind was important for my own sense of how research should work, which aligns with the ethics of considering fieldwork as generating materials and in terms of the ethics of participatory work, as I described at the beginning of this chapter.

The doing of this video also intervened in other ways, by creating another, very modest, layer of politics. Participatory video processes have aimed at transforming power relations (Chambers 1997, Harris 2009, Kindon 2003). I have aimed at a very modest version of this: creating a space where people could have a say about what and how they wanted to do the video, learning the skills to do so, initiating a dialogue on what and how the cooperative worked, getting to interview people in government, and keeping the result of their work. All this contributed to a different way of doing things and to a space to think about issues that was not there before. These things worked alongside and in friction with other dynamics and relations. These are small ways in which this process contributed to a different type of intervention in research.

However, as suggested by more critical voices in participation and Geography, I am less confident about the extent and significance of these contributions, in terms of their transferability to other areas and spaces, their endurance over time, and because of the complexity that this type of change involves that goes further than the experience of doing a participatory video (Cahill 2007, Cooke and Kothari 2001, Jupp 2007).

The process of doing participatory video was important in terms of learning from and with the people I worked with, as well as being an experiment, and intervention that generated materials for research. Through this intervention, I generated ways of understanding, in a different way to other methods, some of the dynamics of the work inside the cooperative. It was also important in terms of providing a way of enacting the ethical preoccupations in the research process of displacing a dynamics of more extractive or dominating versions of the research process. However, there are limitations of this method in terms of usefulness of the material generated through this type of process for research such as this which is not geared towards policy, advocacy or development work. The visual product, if it is to be engaging in terms of the rules of this type of media, forces the content to be more superficial than what is needed for a research project such as this one. There is certainly scope for the product to be more polished, engaging and higher impact if the researcher is more technical and visually literate, and if these skills can be 'passed on' to the participants. Though this is at the moment is constrained by the time-consuming, technological complications of the process of editing. Furthermore, I encountered another limit for my research in that the practices and materialities of rubbish were ones that the participants seemed to be less willing to engage with, which as I described above, can be linked to the relations that these materials generate and are loaded with. For these

reasons, I think that participatory video as a stand-alone method does not provide the depth, or the scope, that is needed in a research context such as this one. Participatory video was one intervention, one way of interacting, one way of generating materials, but it was not enough, at least in my case, to be used on its own to base my research. This is why I also worked with other methods such as interviews and participant observation, which I describe below.

Doing different forms of participant observation

In this section, I describe the different ways in which I engaged with participant observation. My work in Bajo Flores and Moreno involved different forms of participant observation. The way that this worked out in practice generated materials for my research in distinct ways. I reflect here on the practices, challenges, limitations and possibilities of these different ways of engaging with one method.

In Bajo Flores, I did participant observation throughout the participatory video process and when I was working in the separating plant. As I have gone into detail about making the participatory video above, I will focus here on my second visit to the site where I worked in the separating plant. I worked there once or twice a week for a month and a half, making in total 12 days of work, plus more days when I went to do different interviews. When I left the first time after doing the participatory video, I had asked to come back to work there. Even though they told me I would be welcome, I sensed it was going to be hard. Indeed, negotiating access for this was not at all easy.

On my return, when I first visited the plant to talk to the former president of the cooperative, he refused to let me be part of the cooperative meetings. He said that during meetings, sensitive issues were discussed and outsiders were not welcome. He

disregarded the idea of me working there, he literally laughed it off. A few weeks later, I called and asked his daughter, now the president, if I could go to interview her. It was a long interview. She liked to talk. I decided to try my luck again: 'Could I come to work here a few times a week?' She laughed, she thought, like her father, that it was a crazy idea. I tried to make her take it seriously. She wanted to know why I wanted to come, to which I responded that I wanted to learn how things worked, and how rubbish is separated in this separating plant. So she let me do this.

It was a very different experience to work in the Moreno site. The opportunity to work in Moreno came about, not through an interview, but a chat with one of the members of an NGO, IIED-LA, that works on development and environmental issues. I got in touch with IIED-AL at the beginning of my fieldwork; more because I was interested in the way they did research, as they used participatory methodologies, rather than because they worked on rubbish issues, as there was nothing on their website that indicated that this was the case. However, when I visited IIED-AL to talk about their work and the methodologies they used, Gastón Urquiza, a member of IIED-LA, told me about a project called 'Focus cities' in Moreno. He invited me to come along to see how the participatory planning workshops developed.

I joined in one of the areas in which Moreno was divided for the purpose of this project. My participatory observation in the Moreno site consisted mainly of observing the participatory planning meetings that IIED-LA organised on what the project called 'Area 4', which included central and south Moreno, Francisco Álvarez, La Reja and Paso del Rey. When I joined them, they were about to start the meetings in this area, so I got to attend a whole round of meetings and gained a better understanding of the whole process. After the first round of meetings in each of the areas, representatives

of each area were chosen to keep participating in the committee that would make joint decisions along with the NGO and municipality on the projects to be done, as well as monitoring this process. In the second phase of my fieldwork, I observed mainly these inter-area meetings. Part of my observation was also of the work of the NGO, while I worked in their offices once a week.

Participant observation generates a vast amount of materials and experiences to recount. Apart from the very common feelings of being overwhelmed, lost and anxious about what and how I was doing things, which seems like a rite of passage in ethnographic work (Crang and Cook 2007, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Hume and Mulcock 2004), I order and shape here these experiences through the challenges faced around three different issues. These were: the types of participant observation that I was able to do, the related problem of being present and attending to practices; and issues of 'siding' and positioning during the process. I will conclude by reflecting on the complex maps of relations that this method generated along with other methods, and on writing up notes and leaving the field.

First, I will start with a description based on my fieldwork notes and reflections of my work there, to convey what was involved in each process.

The first day I went to work in the separating plant, I arrived in the morning, wearing old and not so dear clothes: old jeans and trainers, t-shirt and jumper. When I arrived, Lorena gave me a pair of gloves, and went with me to the separating line, and stayed with me for a bit to explain what I had to do. I was supposed to stand, on the side of the line, with the two holes on my left and right, that had bags at the bottom, and distinguish what is called 'segunda' or 'second' – basically every paper that is not office

paper, cardboard, newspaper or magazines (which is separated too) nor toilet paper (which went into the rubbish). It could be plastic paper, and coloured envelopes for instance or very thin cardboard. On the left hand side, I had to separate newspapers. Lorena left me after a while. The first day seemed eternal. I thought two hours have passed and it had only been ten minutes. Each hour that passed became hotter and hotter up in the line. The tin roof.

I spent the morning in the separating line. I was glad when we were called for lunch. I sat in the kitchen, where all the women sat; in the adjacent room sat all the men. The women's table was very silent. The first time I asked them why they sat separately but they just laughed and when pressed said they did not know, that was how it was. In the afternoon, I quickly realised that being in the separating line was much better than the afternoon shift where we had to separate the mountain of rubbish bags that were dropped by the rubbish trucks on the floor. At some point, I was too hot, it was not wise to work with long sleeves. I had a t-shirt underneath, but was reluctant to take my jumper off. When I finally decided to do it, one of the girls said 'Now they would fall in love with you' that really meant that it would be noticed by the guys, which highlighted why I was a bit hesitant to take it off. There seemed to be a bit of tension between the men and women.

Everything in my body hurt. It was not only that it was physical labour. It was very badly done, in terms of health and safety issues. This work implied ripping open rubbish bags, and putting the different materials in the different sacks. This required bending down, stepping onto glass, and basically being in close proximity with the rubbish and the rubbish dust. I blew my nose after this and it was full of black dust. Bending down meant that I had backache, and a splitting headache and got quite dizzy

if I stood up quickly. I tried not to show how tired I was, and to keep up the work. It was getting hotter and hotter. This work lasted until a bit before five, when the clearing and cleaning began. Some stuff was separated and put altogether in one sack quickly, and dumped for the separating at the line for the next day. What was still considered rubbish after all this was put together and one of the guys would use the fork-lift truck to pick it up, to be put outside in the dump to go to the landfill site. After the plant was relatively cleared and swept—relatively as there were always remaining piles of rubbish to sort and gathered materials to sell - we went into the toilets to get clean, some took showers, and changed into 'normal' clothes to go home.

At the end of the first day, the women asked how I felt, I told them everything hurt, and that it was hard. They congratulated me on my work, said they felt the same when they started, and it still hurt for them. They also thanked me for helping out and told me that nobody had done that before, and wanted to know when I was coming back. This made me feel good, feeling I had done relatively well. This was a Friday. I drove home, and as soon as I arrived, I dumped my clothes in a bucket with soap and water, and went into the shower. This became my routine. I thought how lucky I was I did not have to do this for a living. I am not sure I could take it.

My plan was to come back on Monday. However, the whole weekend I felt awful. On Monday, I had a fever, and could not get up, so I decided to postpone going until Wednesday. I called early on to tell them, and Lorena laughed and said it was OK. When I came back, they all sympathised and said they suffered the same as I did so I did not feel so bad. The only difference was that they had to go anyway and I had the luxury of staying at home to recover. Each day I did I got better and better, though my

*headache due to the back-bending still remained. I tried to sit down on a bucket when separating or avoid doing the worst of it, and started to try not to work so hard too!*¹⁸

To get to the meetings in Moreno, I would travel in my own car, but more often than not, I would share a car drive with some of the NGO members. This was a very enjoyable part of the work. We would chat about our lives, the project and gossip. When we got to the meeting place in Moreno, the meeting would normally start about half an hour late at least as people drifted in slowly. In the meantime, I helped prepare the room – moved desks and chairs, searched for missing equipment, put signs up, and chatted to the people as they started to come in. Once the meeting got going, they lasted about 2 hours.

*Each meeting was different and covered different ground, but they were all around informing people about the project and doing environmental participatory planning for their areas. I took notes of what happened in the meetings and the discussions. I was introduced as somebody doing research on rubbish that was interested in seeing how the project worked. My presence was not discussed or questioned much, though people would ask me more about my project in informal conversations. I observed and participated in the meetings, I talked to people informally, and eventually also had interviews with some of them. Each meeting would end with setting dates for the next meeting, and gathering up all the stuff.*¹⁹

¹⁸ Fieldwork Notes, November 2007, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

¹⁹ Fieldwork Notes, January 2007, Moreno, Buenos Aires

Participant observation can mean different levels of involvement, and different types of activities, as can be seen from the descriptions in the notes above. On the one hand, the work of Bajo Flores implied getting involved in the physical labour of separating materials, incorporating myself in the routine of their work, learning new skills, and negotiating my much more visible identity as an outsider. On the other hand, the work in Moreno involved being present and helping out in the preparation of more eventful moments in a project, such as meetings. In the case of Bajo Flores, I had to work harder to create the site, as I was the one creating the process, while in Moreno, I followed a process already organised by the NGO.

According to the classification proposed by Spradley (1980), the type of involvement, which works in a continuum, could be classified according to the level of engagement with people and with their activities, which range from no involvement (non-participation), to presence without interaction (passive), a similar balance of participating and observation (moderate), involvement in activities (active) and being one of them (complete) (Spradley 1980: 58-62). My involvement could be classified as active participation while working separating rubbish in Bajo Flores, and a more moderate type of participation in Moreno. The participatory video challenges this classification as it involves being an active participant in an activity brought in by the researcher. Throughout the participatory video process, I was doing participant observation, probably moderate, through a different type of involvement: that of an external, particular time-limited project.

In Bajo Flores, I was highly involved in the work being done. I could participate in this way because separating rubbish was something I could do as it did not require much training or skills (Crang and Cook 2007: 38-39). Participant observation helped me

understand things in a different way, an embodied way: through the physical work it required, through the aches and pains, through learning to differentiate, to discriminate between materials day to day (Cloke et al. 2004). Conversations and interviews that were woven into this process also provided me with different narratives of what was going on. Even if I was an outsider in many ways, by sharing their work and their food, it gave me a way, space and time for building trust. I got to know them and their work in a way that I do not think would have been possible just by doing the video or by interviewing them. In Moreno, I was involved in a different way. I did not shadow NGO workers, or join their team, but assisted their work. As you can see from the notes above, the work was less physically demanding, and more in tune with the range of practices I felt more comfortable with: talking, observing, writing. Both these practices built trust and rapport, which were crucial for how fieldwork worked (Agar 1996, Crang and Cook 2007, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). And both forms of participation had their own challenges and possibilities.

One of the most challenging things was dealing with my anxiety about being present and attending to practices. As I have described in the first section, I was drawn to ethnography as a way of getting at the materiality of everyday practices. This was not so easy for many different reasons. First, I found that the pressure to be attentive to practices brought questions about what this actually meant. This is because there was so much that I could pay attention to, and because there were so many different things that the materialities of practice could refer to, such the things people used, the way practices were embodied, the discourses around what was happening, the stickiness of social relations. Second, attending to two different sites meant that there was a limit to how I could divide myself and where I could be at one time. The anxiety

to be at the right place at the right time was heightened in this case by the different intensities that my fieldwork had in the two different sites. Third, access was not always forthcoming or even feasible in some cases. Doing participant observation is awkward and arouses suspicion at the best of times (see for instance Czarniawska 2007, Law 1994). However, this was compounded by the lack of precedence and violence of some of the sites, where it would be high risk to sit and observe. This meant that wandering around by myself and getting to know more of Moreno and Bajo Flores was not an option, so I had to find other ways of getting to know the sites, which involved different opportunities where people that were knowledgeable about the places would allow me to tag along, or would act as guides.

In the case of Moreno, the difficulty also lay with the fussiness of the site. As I mentioned above, I was following the development of a project for which there was not a main site to observe. I centred then on the participatory meetings as these were spaces where people collectively discussed and made this project work. These were eventful spaces; spaces that were created for a particular thing, such as meetings, but that did not retain much meaning for this research after the event. There were other spaces and times where this project was done, but which I did not have access too, such as daily negotiations, emails and telephone calls, 'bilateral' meetings and negotiations between the NGO and the municipal government, as well as decision-making meetings of the NGO itself. So, even if I went to the NGO offices for an afternoon, this did not give me enough to observe how things were done on a daily basis. In this case, I had to rely more heavily on interviews. I relied on people being their own ethnographers (Mol 2005a: 15). Though this in itself is also problematic. For instance, many people, even if asked, don't think to mention the everyday, routine and

banal activities that I was interested in observing. As Mol notes, some people are better ethnographers than others (Mol 2005a: 17). The lack of precedence and suspicion towards practices such as shadowing meant I did not have access to many crucial and delicate negotiations and meetings.

The different activities I was involved in at each site also meant that the attention I could give to practices was different in each case. In Moreno, as I could sit back more and take notes, it was easier to observe and to pay attention to what people were saying and what was happening. In Bajo Flores, the difficulty of being so thoroughly involved was that I had less time to observe others working and to pay attention to what was going on around me. I would get absorbed in the job at hand and forget to look around. In addition, taking photos was very hard as I had gloves on and to take them off was annoying, not to mention that my hands were filthy and that there was nowhere around to put the camera down safely either. This meant that, for me, attending to practices and finding ways of being present was a complicated juggling experience. It was difficult to observe and work at the same time, as observing required some form of stepping back and reflection, which was harder to do in the midst of doing such work.

In doing participant observation, I had to negotiate and play different roles at different times. For instance, in Moreno, my role as an independent researcher was not very clear as I have always been seen to come and go with the NGO workers and also was introduced by them. This meant that I had more access to people, and a good starting point in terms of getting interviews, but also people invariably thought I was part of the NGO. I left interviews for later on in the process, which was helpful in terms of having a better foundation for interviews and for choosing who to talk to, but at the

same time it meant that my identity as an independent researcher probably suffered because of it. Even though I explained each time that I was doing my own research, my close links to the NGO probably meant they were more careful and chose accordingly what to say. This association with one group was also an issue in Bajo Flores, though it played out differently. One of the challenges I faced while doing participant observation in Bajo Flores was that I found myself slowly siding with one group over another. This happened while I was working at the separating plant. The separating plant was divided physically and, I understood later, symbolically, between those working at the back doing the actual separation, and those working at the front – doing more administrative tasks. The people working there referred to the site and themselves in terms of this division: the people ‘at the back’, and the people ‘at the front’. At the beginning, I was known to talk and be more with the people ‘at the front’, which happened as it was in this part of the plant that most of my work with PV was done.

The shifting roles I played at the separation plant were also marked in spatial ways. For instance, when I just started working at the plant, my place at lunchtime was allocated near the president of the cooperative. I know this was important because once I made the mistake of sitting in another place during lunch, but it was quickly pointed out to me that the girls, which were the women ‘at the back’, liked to sit together, and they showed me another place, nearer the people ‘at the front’. Gradually though, as I worked more and got to know them better, this changed. One day, when one of the women at the back was absent, I was told I could sit with them. These micro-geographies gave me an idea of how I was perceived and how positioning and access is built through our relationships in the field. This little details made me feel I was doing a

good job, though I had to be careful not to get too comfortable, as the notes below show.

We were having lunch one day, when I had been there for a few weeks already, and Lorena, the president, talked to me. Nobody talked much at lunch, and for Lorena, 'the boss' to talk to me familiarly was normally OK, as we had a good relationship, but for some reason I winced a bit. It was as if I was embarrassed to be talked to, as if I was going to be considered more linked with the people 'at the front'. This was stupid of me, but it happened.²⁰

This slide in my positioning also meant that I, unconsciously, slowly started to side more with one group over the other at times. As the notes above show, I had to remind myself to be attentive to this issue, so as to remain more open and to have a more symmetrical perspective of the work in the cooperative.

Participant observation, participatory video, interviews, texts and reports, all allowed me to slowly construct the different ways that rubbish was being done. One difficulty for me was at times to make sense of the different materials generated during the research. For instance, I mentioned above how I realised there seemed to be a gap between those working 'at the front' and 'at the back' at the separation plant in Bajo Flores. I found that the narratives about events differed and were in friction between the people 'at the front' and those 'at the back', and with my own experience of working there in terms of how things worked as a cooperative. The opportunity to do participant observation was to not only hear what different people have to say, but also see what they did. Throughout the participant observation I asked and sought to

²⁰ Fieldwork Notes, December 2007, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

understand things in different ways, especially events that I did not participate in, such as meetings, or things that I did not understand how they worked, such as the way decisions were made as a cooperative, or the distribution of resources. In these cases, I strived to find different ways of getting a sense of how things worked. I was attentive to different practices: to the ways people narrated events, to the things that they thought of telling me, to body language, to the ways in which the work was physically organised and distributed, as well as eliciting responses, such as in the example below.

We were near the end of a long and hot day. We were complaining about how tired we were.

L (me): At least you know that the harder you work, the more money the cooperative makes, and thus you will be better off

As I said this, one of the members of the cooperative laughed, the other one snorted. When I asked why they laughed, one of them answered in the following way: 'if only it worked that way. However much we work and however well we do, we always get the same'.²¹

I used these kind of statements to elicit responses from the different people working at the cooperative. I used this technique as I wanted to see if the more general imaginaries of the workings of cooperatives and especially the narratives I was getting from the people working there would be accepted by other people working there. I also used it to see how, for instance, government workers reacted to narratives from the cooperatives and vice versa. The same issue arose in Moreno. What I found is that some things did not get clearer, but more confusing. This troubled me as I was worried

²¹ Fieldwork Notes, December 2007, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

that I would not understand what *really* happened. However, I realized that although understanding events and issues around rubbish was part of what these methodologies allowed, *how* and *what* people were doing by telling certain stories was also important. These were different narratives and experiences of practices and events, mine included, which were significant in that they showed me the way people organised their realities.

Trying to convey and remember what happened during fieldwork turned out to be harder work than I had envisaged. After working at the separating plant, I have to admit I was too exhausted to sit down at my computer. At the beginning, I tried to write a few brief notes at midday, on the lunch break, but this meant I could not have a chat with people. What I did most of the time is write very brief notes on things that happened, and that reminded me of further things, and to discuss it, after a good shower, with my partner, which helped me elaborate on my experience of the day. I have good memory of conversations, especially with the help of triggers, so I used this method. I would also, when I had a day or afternoon when I could stay at home, write more elaborate notes. I recorded most of the interviews, and took notes at the same time. In Moreno, making notes was part of my job at meetings, so in this case it meant I had less to do at home. As I found the time I spent with the NGO and in Moreno less tiring, I also managed to make more notes or at least transcribe the ones I got fairly quickly, as I also had to send them to the NGO as agreed.

Finally, one tricky issue was how to leave the sites. In Bajo Flores, some members had the impression that I would be able to change things. I tried to make clear that I was just trying to figure out how things worked, but that I would give feedback to all the people involved. The 'giving back' this time was not as easy as with the participatory

video, which had a tangible product. I knew that my future thesis might be of interest but would a) be too far away in the future and b) too academic for what they might find useful. I decided that I would summarise some of the problems I found and present them to both the people at the front and the people at the back, separately. I am not an expert in organisations or cooperatives, but I could tell that things were not working well and that discontent seemed to be brewing quite quickly. I tried to put the frictions I found in the nicest possible way when I talked to the president of the cooperative, and when I talked to the workers with whom I interacted with more. The new president of the cooperative was the most sensitive case as she could feel I was trying to attack her. I carefully thought through how to put my points forward, but I think she still felt under attack, as she tried to defend herself on every point I tried to make. I am not sure if what I said was useful, but I thought it was the right thing to do.

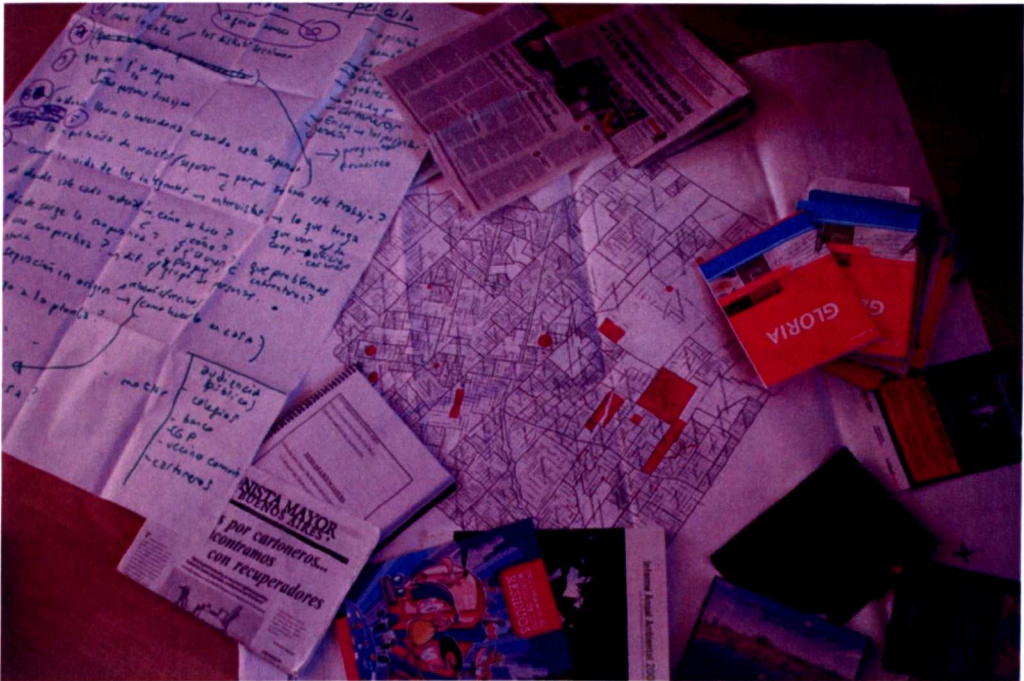
On the other hand, for Moreno, it was a bit easier. I promised the NGO members to send drafts of my chapters, and eventually my thesis, as well as to keep in touch for possible collaborations. The fact that the NGO used email, and that they were a research and practice oriented NGO meant that the relationship I built with them and managed to maintain was different.

Throughout this section I have shown how I put these methods to work, and reflected upon its practicalities and difficulties. One of the tasks of a researcher is that of translating - not only in the literal sense though language is important - different things, practices and events into something else, in this case, a text. This inevitably involves, as Law points out, an act of treason (Law 2005). The possibility of translation relies on an incompleteness of things, which allows them to be taken and put in other places, in different orders, transforming them along the way. This is something that

researchers do in particular ways. The way I translated these materials into this thesis is the matter of the next section.

Crafting knowledge through writing

Figure 7: Sample of materials that travelled



Following the euphoria of doing part of my fieldwork, and my relish at being able to just read and write at home instead of running around Buenos Aires, it dawned on me that I had to now deal with the mound of material generated during those months. Thankfully, as my fieldwork was divided in two phases, this job was distributed into its corresponding two periods. This photo (see Figure 7) shows some of the ways in which my experiences and the things generated during my research travelled from Buenos Aires to the United Kingdom (UK). This included several orange notebooks with

hundreds of pages of notes from interviews and participant observation; photos; the results of the participatory video planning, an edited participatory video and raw video material; recordings on the ipod of interviews and thoughts; newspaper clippings, and e-clippings; printed and visual materials (leaflets, reports, videos) from government, rubbish collection companies and from the landfill site; books and manuscripts on rubbish in Buenos Aires and other places; many stories/experiences stored in some part of my brain and body and new ways of being affected by smells, materials, colours and understanding the materials in rubbish and the laptop in which I write things up. In this section, I focus on how these materials were translated into what became this thesis. I focus first on the work of analysing while doing transcriptions, next on the progressive building of themes and finally on the different issues that arose while writing the thesis.

Analysing while transcribing

One of the ways of dealing with this was to immerse myself in doing a job that needed to be done: that of transcribing my notes from participatory observations and the recordings from the interviews. This brought about its own set of issues. Many interviews were eternal and it took me on average three hours to transcribe 30 minutes of an interview. This meant I had to make some choices: either spend the next three months just transcribing or find a practical and valid way of shortening this process. As I was not concerned about doing conversation or discourse analysis, I did not feel compelled to transcribe each word, pause, and emphasis (Silverman 2001). I was interested both in the content and the manner, the *how*, of describing events. I decided that I would not transcribe every bit of content but focus more on what I found interesting. This of course meant that I might miss some material that may

become important later on as the analysis was more developed. In order to avoid this, I decided to go through the raw material again once I had done all my fieldwork and started writing the thesis.

This model of transcribing meant that I already started my analysis by selecting the material to be transcribed. The idea was to work iteratively between my research and theoretical interests and the material generated during fieldwork. The built-in flexibility that the iterative ordering of the fieldwork gave me was useful for this purpose. As Silverman (2005) points out, however, as fieldwork progressed, my observations and interviews ‘funnelled’ inevitably into what I was more interested in. This progressive building of interests was what informed the process of transcription. The recording and transcription of interviews was useful in another way. After 10 months of maternity leave (1st of December 2008 – 1st of October 2009), I felt the need to reconnect with my fieldwork materials before embarking upon a revision of the different chapters I had done before I started my leave. By listening and reading my notes, I could also see and hear with fresh interest these materials. This gave me another opportunity to gauge if I had missed some interesting leads, themes, quotes and events.

Building the meanings of the politics of rubbish

The process of analysing was not one that started when I came back from fieldwork, as analysis did not take place in a separate and detached sphere, but was part of the whole process of research. For instance, *what* we observe and *how and what* we write up in these observations, as well as which questions we ask, and how we transcribe interviews are already theoretically-driven activities (Crang and Cook 2007, Silverman

2005). However, there were moments when this was done more intensely, as when returning from the two phases of fieldwork. After the first trip, and having transcribed my notes and interviews, I gathered all the different materials and went through them carefully, reading and re-reading them, writing notes, annotating and highlighting the transcripts and notes as I went along (Crang and Cook 2007: 133-146). This first general level of coding was quite an open process. I made a special effort to pay attention to how 'the world presented itself' (Whatmore 2003: 91) instead of trying too hard to organise it according to particular themes or interests. However, I unavoidably kept in mind what my broad interests were: paying attention to the materiality of practices, being attentive to the construction of different ways of doing rubbish and different ways of doing political relations.

As part of this process, I wrote short notes on emergent themes, inserted codes coming from what I was reading and hearing, followed leads, and marked loose materials, i.e. material that was interesting but that I could not tie so easily with broader emergent themes. From this first general coding, I tried to group and map some emergent themes and categories together and to look into the literature for help and ideas on their development, as well as to start developing a working narrative that would bring them together. I also wrote short essays on some of these issues. After my second fieldwork visit, I had to confront once again the material generated. I reiterated the process described above, but this second time I was more focused on elaborating on my first general analysis and category work.

The work of building themes was progressively more detailed, and ended up becoming the chapters of this thesis. I will give below a simplified account of how the broad interest in the practices around rubbish and how these were political were slowly

specified by working on the materials generated during fieldwork in dialogue with different theoretical approaches. The multiple meanings of the ways rubbish was political were defined through different conversations, interviews and observations. As an example, I list some of the quotes I categorised as referring to the political below, which are ones that I use also in different ways in other chapters:

'Four years, three law changes. We are in a process of change and public debate over what to do with rubbish'²²

'The *cartonero* phenomenon put recycling on the political agenda'²³

'We work at the same time on proposals and in ways of making the issue known. We do actions that come out in the papers so that people become aware of the issue. If people do not know, we put it on the public agenda. In this way, people help you campaign'²⁴

'Allegations in Gonzáles Catán [landfill site] that rubbish makes people ill and kills'²⁵

These four quotes show different ways in which rubbish became political: through entering deliberative processes, through controversies, allegations, public debate, public events and media attention that constructed rubbish as an issue in particular ways. There were still other ways in which rubbish was political, as shown by the following quotes:

²² Interview with Hurst, C., 23.10.2007, Director of CEAMSE (landfill site), Buenos Aires

²³ Interview with Suárez, F., 12.10.2006, Anthropologist, Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento, Instituto del Conurbano, Buenos Aires

²⁴ Interview with Schiffman, N., 17.10.2006, Greenpeace officer, Buenos Aires

²⁵ Iglesias, M., 20.1.2008, Denuncian en Gonzáles Catán que la basura enferma y mata, *Clarín*, Buenos Aires

'We do politics, just differently. We work to grow as a cooperative, we consult each other and work together'²⁶

'We are working on complex problems in a complex context. To help people is what gives meaning to my job [...] It is a job of a lower scale that has a qualitative impact. I don't work to change the equation. I am working where it adds up'²⁷

These quotes point to other ways in which rubbish was political: through the everyday practices around rubbish. In this case, they are describing the work of a cooperative of *cartoneros* and the work of an environmental development NGO. There were other ways of doing political work, by particular uses of the word politics, as below:

'I didn't want to ruin my reputation so I stepped outside. I am not a politician, I am a professional'²⁸

'It was a year cut through by the elections. There were differences between the chief of government and the minister of environment over the rubbish issue.

Operative issues and political issues'²⁹

These last two quotes show another way of doing politics around rubbish, but that do this work in another way, that is, in this case the quotes themselves are doing political work by separating the domains of politics from that of professional work.

²⁶ Fieldwork Notes, 9.12.2006, Barbecue at Bajo Flores separation plant, Buenos Aires

²⁷ Interview with Urquiza, G., 1.12.2006, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires, Argentina

²⁸ Interview with Visolini, G., 10.10.2007, City government officer, Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

²⁹ Interview with Villalba, E. 9.10.2007, City environment officer, ex-Chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

All these different quotes reflected narratives that played alongside one another, sometimes in conflict, sometimes cooperation, others still ignoring each other. These different ways of linking rubbish and politics were what pushed me to find ways of understanding the different meanings and activities of rubbish as political. These quotes were always used along with particular associations, and bringing in different issues around rubbish. The political here is not one thing, but many: it is an issue that generates a public around it; an issue that goes through the channels of political procedures; getting involved in certain activities such as mobilisations; raising awareness; everyday work that constructs something different such as a cooperative; making a difference in people's lives through development work; particular activities that are different from technical or professional work, a differentiation where politics carries a pejorative meaning. These quotes, as the last two more clearly show, were also forms of doing politics, as they are forms of enacting particular politics around rubbish. For instance, while some used the division between science and politics in order to place themselves, usually by separating themselves from plays of power and interests, and highlighting their professionalism and technical expertise, others, as in the quotes above, enhance different aspects of their everyday activities as important ways of contributing to the building of different political relations.

Alongside this, I was combining and creating other themes and issues that slowly built up the different chapters. For instance, understanding the politics of rubbish as the creation of an issue led me to look out for the different things that were attached to how rubbish became public and how this played out in the controversy around *cartoneros* and rubbish. For instance, it involved issues of value, of responsibility, of property and propriety and of visibility. Politics as an everyday activity was also

complex: it involved understanding, and challenging too, the notion that the political was mainly about public policies, or something to be discarded as struggles for personal interest, and thus, understanding how different types of work were political in different ways. A third cluster was that of relating how everyday practices and other events of politics created particular ways of enacting democracy, which involved looking for the different devices that helped construct this, as well as paying attention to the principles that were invoked and at play in particular sites. This clustering was done by engaging in constant dialogue between the materials and the theoretical literature. This got translated and divided in the chapters that follow. The process of analysing did not finish once I clustered different themes and issues, but was refined through the writing of this thesis. To this process I now turn.

Writing through theory, stories and materials

Coming back from my second phase of fieldwork coincided with my entering the third year of my PhD. The pressure to start working on my thesis was then increased by this looming deadline. I spent over a month doing the transcriptions, reading, re-reading, sorting and categorising the materials generated. Soon after that, while still in the process of doing this, I had to start thinking about the outline for my thesis. This was a helpful process as the analysis formed and was shaped by the process of focusing on what stories I wanted to tell. It was in the process of writing the different chapters where much of the analysis was done. Apart from the well-known torture of the blank page and the writing process; I faced important difficulties along the way.

One of the most difficult challenges in writing this thesis was trying to be find a style of writing that would be consistent with my theoretical ideas and the stories I wanted to

tell. I found Actor-Network Theory (ANT) very stimulating for thinking in new ways about old problems like politics and democracy. However, as Whatmore (2006) points out, one of the greatest challenges of engaging with more-than-human styles of work is the duty that comes attached to this: experimentation and taking risks (*Ibid.*: 606). Whatmore shows how this type of research needs to experiment with, and extend, more humanist methods of research to include other practices that amplify other 'sensory, bodily and affective registers' (*Ibid.*: 606), as well as extend what can constitute research subjects and the practices of research to redistribute experience and create knowledge (and politics) in other ways. However, I will argue here that the onus is also on experimenting with writing practices. The 'tradition' amongst ANT authors is to be experimental with formats and styles of writing (for good examples of this see Latour 1999, Law 1994, Mol 2005a). But the risks are quite high for PhD students. To describe complex theoretical debates and articulate them through empirical research is what a PhD student is expected to do. However, to add to the experimentations and risks that Whatmore (Whatmore 2006) points out that I described above, those of writing, is quite an undertaking. This is needed and welcome, but hard to achieve. If this is a challenge for more established researchers, it is more so for a PhD student, such as myself, in the midst of learning the craft of doing and writing research. Not counting the added difficulty of playing with language when it is not your mother tongue.

I have described some of the challenges that researching practices, and the responsibility of bringing in the materialities of things and practices, bring to the process of fieldwork. At the time of writing, these problems re-appeared as practices and materialities are difficult to describe and convey. The issue here is that ANT uses

writing as another way of enacting the world, and of conveying complex philosophical concepts, so doing it right is quite crucial for this. For instance, the inclusion of non-humans as actors was for me difficult to enact, and I found that more often than not it was a question of reflecting and stating this was the case. At times, this practice felt uncomfortable for different reasons. First, because I needed to work out which practices and materialities to convey, because conveying every little material and practice, all of which could be said to make a difference in bigger or smaller ways, was just an impossible task, and not a very desirable one either as I did not see how it contributed to the story. That was the crucial point, of course, but until I knew what stories I wanted to tell, it was hard not to be anxious about it. Second, because sometimes this was in tension with telling a more readable story. Too many stops and descriptions made me, literally, lose the plot. This points to the difficulties in creating a good, and by this I mean a powerful and engaging story, when trying to use this approach, but we are still in the process of being 'accepted' in the academic field, and being, at least in my case, a less experienced writer.

Another issue here is that an approach such as ANT, which practises a relational materiality, stumbles upon conveying relations between non-humans, rather than those of humans and non-humans (Lulka 2009). This was especially important for this research, as many times the relations that were at stake were those between non-humans, such as the process of decomposition of rubbish and other associations with other non-humans such as rats. This also relates to the tensions involved in making space for difference in an approach that focuses on a semiotic materiality such as ANT (Bennett 2004, Hinchliffe 2007). The process of writing was another productive

instance in which to think through the tensions involved in making theoretical approaches work for the materials generated during fieldwork.

Another challenge lay in how to articulate the learning and importance of the embodied practices and experiences of doing fieldwork, in terms of how they mattered in the analysis of the issues. Again, the challenge is not only to find, adapt and extend the methods to bring in affect and embodiment, but also how to account for these, and how to link them with more normative issues that need to be translated in a more representational way, as required for a PhD thesis. To include these experiences, I have added fieldwork notes in the chapters, which helps give texture to what I am trying to convey, but is also a way of presenting evidence of how I constructed and generated materials during fieldwork.

Finally, there is also another more literal work of translation at play here, which is the one from the materials generated during fieldwork, which were in Spanish, to those of this thesis, in English, which added to the complexity of crafting this text. As English is not my first language and experimental writing does not come easy for me, I have tried to keep the style of writing in this thesis as simple as possible, and to keep in mind that what I want to do here is make connections within and between different theoretical traditions through telling stories of an issue.

Conclusion

Generating materials and crafting knowledge in this way was hard and creative work. I have mapped some of the ways I have done this work in this chapter. The first step

was to find a suitable way of articulating my research interests, the multiplicity of the sites where rubbish was done, the practicalities of doing research in terms of my gender and the risks I was prepared to take, which generated a particular map of rubbish sites for my research.

My interest in the ways that rubbish was done in everyday practices and the particular ways in which these were political, meant that ethnography was the most suitable approach for this research. Within the range of methods that ethnography encompasses, I added that of participatory video, as a novel way in which to generate more visual materials for this research. Participatory video allowed me to generate a particular process that was useful in terms of creating access, but also in terms of understanding the different dynamics that were at play in the cooperative. The limited use of the content of the video for my research stemmed from the participatory nature of the process, the particular rules of engagement of this format which allows for particular forms of impact that are not always aligned to the needs of a research process such as this one, the technical and visual training needed, as well as from the particular material I was working around, that is, rubbish.

Participant observation and interviews served to construct, along with participatory video, a more embodied and complex understanding of the different rubbish practices. The particularities of doing research in different sites meant that I had to strategically engage at different levels of intensity, which I did through the use of different methods, at different sites and times. Using different methods also meant richer materials were generated through the research process. However, as Czarniawska (2007) warns us, using different methods does not necessarily mean that we will get a more accurate representation of things, as the notion of 'triangulation' promises.

What using different methods does is to reveal the 'unavoidable partial-ness, moment-ness and situated-ness of the research process' (*ibid*: 85). Who I am; where I was and how I went about doing my research, as well as my interactions with people and materials during this period have generated materials that inform my account of them. These different instances of generating materials did not make everything add up, but showed how different practices and discourses enacted different realities, and how these worked together (or not).

The difficulties involved in the process of translation of the materials generated during fieldwork through the writing of this thesis, were another instance which highlighted particularly tricky theoretical issues, such as the ways of understanding a more distributed agency, relational materialities, and spaces for difference in terms of the rubbish process in Buenos Aires; issues which are present in the analysis of the politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires in the following chapters.

The building of the different meanings of the political built by working through the materials generated alongside different theoretical approaches were what slowly came to be the basis of the three chapters that follow. Each chapter focuses on different dimensions of the making of rubbish as political. The next chapter (Chapter 3) focuses on the different ways that rubbish became political, through the articulation of rubbish as an issue which created a public around it. Chapter 4 describes and analyses the everyday governing of rubbish practices in four different sites: city government offices, waste collection companies, the landfill sites, and a separation plant managed by *cartoneros*. The last empirical chapter (Chapter 5) deals with how everyday practices around rubbish, such as those of the environmental development project called 'Focus Cities', enact democracy in particular ways.

Chapter 3: On becoming political. The making of the rubbish issue in Buenos Aires

'Waste is provocative, as much as we might like to think that it is just the redundant and rejected context of our lives, it can catch us in networks of obligation that reverberate across our bodies and invite us to live with it differently' (Hawkins 2006: x)

In the city centre of Buenos Aires, waste collection trucks go by every evening, except Saturdays, and take away the rubbish bags people leave out. The collection system, in the richer parts of the autonomous city of Buenos Aires (CABA), mostly works. It works to take the rubbish away, out of sight, out of reach, out of smelling distance, to the landfill site. A lot of people do not know where the rubbish goes, and do not ask themselves this question. As Hawkins points out, commodity relations and technologies of efficiency and concealment have created a distanced relationship with what we waste, even if the volume of waste has augmented in a dramatic way (Hawkins 2006: 16). This is exacerbated by the invisibility of the spaces chosen for disposal, usually in the margins or interstices of cities (*Ibid*).

The emergence of *cartoneros* served to disrupt this particular way of relating to rubbish for middle class urban dwellers. At the height of the political, social and financial crisis of Argentina (see Introduction), everyday life had changed in the CABA. When the night set in, thousands of people took to the streets in the city centre and ripped open rubbish bags to take out materials that could later be sold: cardboard, paper, plastic, different types of metal and glass. The people who did this work are

called '*cartoneros*', which means literally 'cardboard people', though their load does not consist only of cardboard. *Cartoneros* carry these materials by foot, supermarket trolleys, by horse or hand-driven carts and by trucks. They do not live in the areas where they collect, but come from marginalised areas of the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region (RMBA) to the richer parts of the CABA to gather materials from what people discard there. Although people have been collecting and recycling cardboard and other products for a long time, it was not until the crisis that their numbers multiplied, and it was not until then that they became more organised, and started going into richer parts of the CABA to do their collecting. In this way, *cartoneros* became more visible to middle class urban inhabitants, the media, and politicians started to take notice.

Cartoneros became one of the symbols of the crisis. The main issues related to this sudden multiplication were high unemployment levels and lack of other sources of income, and the parallel increase in the prices of these products due to the devaluation of the Argentine Peso, making it cheaper for corporations to produce these products domestically and thus making recycling more profitable (Chronopoulos 2006: 168). Many ascribe the origin of *cartoneros* and the crisis to what are called neoliberal reforms of the 1990s, which included a Peso-Dollar fixed exchange rate, liberalization of markets, a proliferation of market-based policies, dismantling protectionist barriers and business regulations as well as implementing a privatisation programme (Chronopoulos 2006, Gorelik 2006). During the second half of 2001, events on different aspects of informal recycling by different entities such as the World Bank, *Fundación Conciencia*, *Fundación Ciudad*, University of Buenos Aires, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, to name a few, highlighted the importance that this

phenomenon had acquired (Schamber 2007b). Another sign of the high profile of *cartoneros* could be seen in the explosion in the number of articles featuring *cartoneros* in the main newspapers (Schamber 2006). The multiplication and visibility of *cartoneros* was further highlighted by giving a figure to this phenomenon. In July 2001, Francisco Suárez, an anthropologist from *Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento* was interviewed for *La Nación*, a national newspaper, which pointed to the existence of 100,000 people living from the recycling of rubbish in the metropolitan area³⁰ (Schamber 2007b: 75). This figure made the case for public intervention.

The disruption that *cartoneros* and rubbish provoked managed to bring the existing orderings of rubbish into question. Rubbish turned into an issue. As the quote that opens this chapter suggests, the provocation of rubbish being out of place opened up a space and time to think of other ways of living with it. It showed the capacity of rubbish for material disturbance (Bennett 2004). The visibility of *cartoneros* and rubbish sparked off a debate, a controversy, around rubbish in Buenos Aires that was fuelled by the mayoral elections in 2003, as I describe further in the next section. The different material qualities and associations of rubbish were brought into play in different ways, and were articulated in particular ways, which shaped the rubbish issue during the controversy and beyond. The controversy put into question not only what rubbish was, but also what we do with it, through questions around those who went through the rubbish, those who had contracts to collect it, the government who had to give these contracts, as well as the way rubbish was created, disposed of and treated. In this chapter, I will explore some of the ways in which rubbish became political in

³⁰ Himittian, E., 1.07.2001, El cirujeo se convierte en trabajo informal, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires. In this case, becoming political was about how rubbish became an issue. Rubbish became an issue as an affected public was created around it (Marres 2007).

This chapter will tell the story of how rubbish became political in two different sites. These two sites are not set up to be comparative, but to suggest different ways in which an issue becomes political. In the case of the CABA, this public was created through a controversy. This had an effect on how this issue was addressed, how it was organised, and the associations it created. But there were other ways in which rubbish became political, perhaps less dramatic than controversies, that had the effect of bringing new associations and, for instance, creating deliberative assemblies around it. This was the case of Moreno, a municipality that is part of the RMBA.

The way this unfolded in the different sites challenged some of the ways in which the political has been theorised, for instance, by radical democracy. Radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Mouffe 1999) was a useful starting point as it focuses on how things and issues become political. I was drawn to radical democracy as it would fit the way in which rubbish became an issue in Buenos Aires, through a controversy, through conflict. However, while on fieldwork and writing, what seemed like a good fit began to feel less comfortable. Even though conflict and opposition were very much part of controversies, what made rubbish the issue it became included other associations and forms of relations that radical democracy seem to exclude. This is where I found Marres' (2005, 2007, 2010) work on the creation of issues through controversies very helpful, as it brings to the fore the importance of issue creation to politics, and pays attention to the different socio-material associations that make it such in each case. Furthermore, the work of different scholars in Geography that bring to the fore the analysis of different types of relations, such as friendship, hospitality,

accommodation and negotiation, contributed to understanding the ways that these constitute social and political relations (Barnett 2004, Bingham 2006, Clark 2007, Hinchliffe 2007, Hinchliffe et al. 2005).

The unfolding of the issue in Buenos Aires also showed the limits of the division between the political and politics that radical democracy authors maintain, as in this case, the different practices and relations that configure each other were intermingled and hard to differentiate (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Mouffe 1999, Swyngedouw 2009). The case of Moreno further challenged these assumptions of the political and of issue making processes in that rubbish became political without any controversy, but rather through a programme for participatory planning of environmental issues propelled by an NGO, called the International Institute for Environment and Development Latin America (IIED-LA). It also showed how rubbish was constructed in a different way, as different socio-material practices were stitched around it. I argue here that understanding how the materiality of rubbish provoked and generated particular types of relations and associations that made up the distinctiveness of the rubbish issue, serves to make room and open up the space of the political rather than placing firm boundaries around what and where politics and becoming political is.

This chapter will chart the story of how rubbish became political in Buenos Aires, by discussing and analysing throughout what becoming political meant and involved in two different sites in Buenos Aires. In the first section, I describe what sparked off the controversy around rubbish, focusing on the controversy around the ownership and responsibility of rubbish in the CABA. In the second section, I unravel some of the issues raised in the first section in terms of theoretical debates around politics and the political. In the third section, I show the different ways in which this controversy

affected the way rubbish was done in the CABA, focusing mostly on the work of the government. In the fourth section, I show how rubbish became political in Moreno, where some of these concerns got translated in different ways, and which further questioned the limits imposed by different theoretical traditions on what becoming political might mean.

Controversies: who does rubbish belong to?

Figure 8: A *cartonero* looking through the rubbish³¹



As *cartoneros* became visible for middle class urban dwellers, rubbish became visible too. Rubbish started to matter in a different way because it was suddenly out of place, but also because alternative material orderings were linked with it through the work of *cartoneros*, which pointed to other possible ways of being-with-rubbish (Bingham

³¹ Photo taken from www.worldpress.org/photo_essaycartoneros/1html

2006). In this section I describe the different issues that built this controversy, by focusing on the dispute on the ownership and responsibility of rubbish.

The controversy was fuelled by the elections for CABA government mayor of 2003. In the build up to the election, one of the elements that fired up the issue was the quote below from one of the candidates for mayor, Mauricio Macri, in an interview to the national newspaper *La Nación*, on 27 August 2002.

'Cartoneros act in a delinquent way by stealing the rubbish'³²

The controversy around ownership of rubbish exploded when Mauricio Macri stated that *cartoneros* were stealing the rubbish, as the quote above shows. His proposed plan was to take *cartoneros* off the streets by placing their work in formal separation plants fit for purpose. For the ones that would remain in the streets, Macri proposed putting them in jail, as what they did was a crime. He compared the activity of *cartoneros* to that of stealing from a person on the street. This was because rubbish was by contract to be handled exclusively by waste collection companies. This generated a lot of debate. Macri, along with his father, had been part owner of a rubbish removal company in the 1990s. He was accused, among other things, of not understanding the plight of *cartoneros*, of putting business interests first, of trying to deal with poverty by shoving it out of sight, just like we do with rubbish³³.

This intervention came at the time of elections for city mayor. Election year is a very special one in Argentina. Most political activities and budgets are oriented towards this

³²Rey, A. and Lladós, J. I., 27.08.2002, Reportaje a Mauricio Macri: 'A los recolectores informales de basura los vamos a sacar de la calle', *La Nación*, Buenos Aires

³³ For an example of the responses to this statement see 28.08.2002, Todos Apuntan contra Macri, *Página 12*, Buenos Aires

event. For instance, the number of roads being paved and works being inaugurated rise exponentially³⁴, and many times budgets are in the red because of the frantic activity generated in the run up to elections³⁵. There is a lot of positioning work being done by politicians: any event and issue is used to position themselves with/against one another. *Cartoneros* and rubbish were part of these issues.

Macri's claim was not totally unfounded as it was backed by a law put in place by the mayor during the last dictatorship, which gave exclusive rights of collection to rubbish collection companies, and made rubbish pickers illegal. This policy was undertaken at the same time as the landfill sites were created and as other controversial policies such as the removal of all the slums out of the city, in an attempt to rid the city of 'bad elements' and convert it into a grand residential city surrounded by green spaces (Oszlak 1991). However, this law did not make a criminal offence out of picking the rubbish, so jail would not be the punishment. At most, it would be an offence that could be redeemed by payment. To compare rubbish pickers to criminals positioned Macri in the political spectrum, at a time when people were concerned and moved by the *cartoneros* issue. He tapped into fears and repulsion that many have aired, such as neighbours, opposition politicians, rubbish collection businesses, and some journalists, that linked *cartoneros* with danger, illegality and criminal activities³⁶. The marginality of working with rubbish was linked to illegal activities and danger. These comments were also made in the midst of the elections, and of a crisis, at the time when the city government ruling party announced a plan for separating rubbish in different coloured bags, in order to avoid *cartoneros* opening bags and sorting the rubbish in the streets.

³⁴ Crettaz, J., 23.6.2009, Inaugurar obras, una obsesión de campaña, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires

³⁵ Interview with Villalba, E., 9.10.2007, Environment officer (ex-Chief Cabinet of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene), Buenos Aires

³⁶ For an example see Editorial, 7.8.2002, La ciudad sin control, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires

By saying this, Macri further built his opposition to the government and provided an alternative way, a repressive one at that, in which to act towards *cartoneros*. As we are starting to see, these were not all about debates, rational arguments being put by one side and another. It was a building of different coalitions, between discourses, media frenzies, fears and emotional reactions, compounded by the materialities of rubbish, and the work of *cartoneros*. This unstable attempt at creating a network was countered by other coalitions and connections.

There were other networks at work that made this issue something different, and that also claimed ownership of rubbish. The CABA government position, as I mentioned above, was to try and manage this problem, not by a politics of repression, but by enabling a fast solution to the problem of rubbish being scattered around. The CABA government positioned itself in terms of trying to include *cartoneros* in the process, in the midst of a crisis which had left more than half the population of Argentina under the poverty line (INDEC 2010a), and which by May 2002 had 21,5% unemployment, something unprecedented in the history of the country (INDEC 2010b). The plan was to create a campaign where people would use differentiated bags, green bags, to put recyclables in, so as to avoid *cartoneros* ripping bags open in the street (Koehs 2004, Schamber 2007b). At the same time, other measures were being taken that would prove more long lived than this project. In the third section, I will describe in more detail these changes. The CABA government was obviously aware of the legislation that made rubbish picking illegal, but at the time of crisis decided to turn a blind eye and handle the issue in a different way. The CABA government could also propose a change in the legislation, though this required a long process as it had to go through the city parliament. The longer temporality of democratic workings had to work

alongside quicker responses to urgent demands. Even though the legislation proposed that waste removal companies were exclusively responsible for picking up the rubbish, it was ultimately the government who was responsible for keeping the city clean and collection companies were subcontracted to do this work for them. This meant that rubbish was ultimately the property and responsibility of the government. This was, however, a matter in dispute.

For *cartoneros*, picking rubbish was the opposite of what Macri claimed they were doing. It was a way of earning a living when they had run out of alternatives and did not want to turn to crime. Many of the people that turn to work as *cartoneros* did not have a history of working in rubbish picking, but were people who had small jobs, worked in construction, in factories that had been closed, or as cleaners, and that have been out of a job for years (Anguita 2003, Schamber 2007b, Suárez 2001). I found the quote below was representative of what other *cartoneros* said to me and what other researchers found (Ageitos et al. 2006, Anguita 2003, Perelman 2007, Schamber 2007b, Suárez 2001), that being a *cartonero* was seen as an alternative to crime:

‘It is better to be a *cartonero* than to go out to steal’³⁷

The lyrics of the song ‘*cartoneros*’, from *Attaque 77*, an Argentine punk-rock band, capture this neatly [my translation]:

‘What a paradox that having plenty of reasons to steal

I avoid this by inventing work where there is none

³⁷ Interview with Monzón, F., 18.12.2006, President of CERBaF (Cooperativa Ecológica de Recicladores del Bajo Flores), Buenos Aires

And on top of this I end up being the ecological alternative

By recycling everything that people throw, what society disposes of³⁸

According to *cartoneros*, their work was about creating value out of something that was free and that had no value to its previous owners. Being a *cartonero* was appealing in that it is not a job that requires many skills or capital to start with. Going around the different neighbourhoods looking for rubbish required mainly being able to walk, and having some form of transport. However, it was not an easy option, as they had to overcome the stigma that this job had attached to it (see also Anguita 2003). During fieldwork, I worked with a cooperative of *cartoneros*. I interviewed its members on different occasions, especially their leader, Francisco Monzón and his daughter, Lorena Monzón. This is the reason for their heavy presence in the quotes that populate this and other chapters. The quotes below show the shame attached to doing this job:

'I wanted to hide at first'³⁹

'I used to avoid telling my classmates what my dad did. If somebody asked me I would deny he was a *cartonero*'⁴⁰

Picking up rubbish seemed to 'contaminate' people who did this job, in the sense that it was considered something shameful, something that stained the person. However, studies show that over time, those who had been *cartoneros* for a while did improve the way they did the job, and established routes, routines and clients, got sturdier carts, as well as got more comfortable with the job at hand and felt less ashamed

³⁸ Attaque 77, 2007, *Cartoneros*, Karmagedon, Sony

³⁹ Interview with Monzón, F., 18.12.2006, President of CERBaF, Buenos Aires

⁴⁰ Interview with Monzón, L., 12.11.07, new President of CERBaF, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

(Ageitos et al. 2006, Anguita 2003, Schamber 2007b). And in time, some even started to link their work with contributing to improving environmental problems, as the quote below suggests:

'After a while, I started to get used to it, I found my feet. And gradually started thinking about it as just a job [...] Later on, I realised that what we were doing when grabbing the cart and separating rubbish, was doing ecology'⁴¹

Before the crisis of 2001, *cartoneros*, despite their number and bad working and living conditions, were not involved in social protest or in dialogue with the government (Koehs 2004). *Cartoneros* did not have a sort of collective identity, nor were they a corporate actor, at least not a very successful one. Some propose a difference between *cartoneros* and *cirujas*⁴². It is hard to draw a strict line between these two categories, but generally speaking *cirujas* see picking rubbish as their main activity and come from families of *cirujas*, as well as see themselves working with rubbish in the long term (Perelman 2007). *Cartoneros*, on the other hand, are 'newcomers' to the job and had probably been employed in other jobs such as in factories, as lorry/bus drivers, cleaners or doing odd jobs and start out viewing rubbish picking as a temporary survival strategy (Perelman 2007, Schamber 2007b, Suárez 2001). Their multiplication, combined with media attention and a at first hostile but then sympathetic public, made some people get together, cluster around something that became a '*cartonero* identity' (though this was far from being a single thing), and started making claims to the government for the legalisation of their work (Koehs 2004: 33). One organization

⁴¹ Interview with Monzón, F., 18.12.2006, President of CERBaF, Buenos Aires

⁴² *Cirujas* is a term that comes from *lunfardo* (local slang) and is said to be derived from *cirujanos* – surgeons. The parallel was done since rubbish pickers traditionally looked for bones, and worked with their hands (Prignano 1998, Suárez 2001).

of *cartoneros*, *Cooperativa El Ceibo*, also worked to make an arrangement with neighbours in certain areas to go and pick up the separated materials from their homes, thus avoiding the issue of ownership of the rubbish by the companies, as it was the owners/makers of rubbish themselves who handed the bag to them. This mode of working was developed along with other NGOs, and in a temporary partnership with Greenpeace, an international NGO that works on environmental issues⁴³. *Cartoneros*, then, also found ways of organising themselves in cooperatives creating services run by them such as crèches, fighting for better prices, and generating new things, such as furniture, out of their collection (Paiva 2007). As I mentioned above, the majority of *cartoneros* remained individual workers and also had strategies to make their work more productive, such as by being respectful and regular, by creating 'clients', such as small or big businesses, concierges of blocks of flats, and particular neighbours (Anguita 2003, Schamber 2007b, Suárez 2001). The issue of the property of rubbish was resolved here at times by arranging to pick it up directly from its owners, or with their consent and at other times with their lack of opposition. Through this crisis a loose sense of coalition and identity was created. And different relationships, that range from more hospitable and generous, business-like, to avoidance, non-interference and rejection, were built between *cartoneros* and those who put rubbish out or were gatekeepers of the disposal of others.

Waste collection companies were not happy with this turn of events. Rubbish to them was business and it paid well. Rubbish was very valuable and it was paid by weight. It was also in their contract that it was their exclusive job to clean the city, to pick up the rubbish, and *cartoneros* were interfering in both these things: by making the city

⁴³Interview with Schiffman, N. 17.10.2006, Greenpeace officer, Buenos Aires; interview with F., 23.10.2006, member of the cooperative *El Ceibo*, Buenos Aires

dirtier, and by taking weight off them, which meant less money. Talking to people who worked at waste collection companies at different levels gave me the impression that it was more than money that made them so against *cartoneros*. A sense of disgust was felt at their presence. There is a sense that *cartoneros* were doing something degrading, that they were an uncivil version of their work, which for some reason made them contemptible (Martin et al. 2007). My fieldwork notes below reflect on an encounter with these sentiments:

As part of my fieldwork I went in one of the rounds that the supervisor of one of the waste collection companies did regularly. At one point we encountered a cartonero with his cart, and he remarked something along the lines of 'look at that guy, it is a disgrace'. I used this to ask a bit more about cartoneros. I could not make notes at the time, so I don't remember his exact words, but he was very dismissive of cartoneros. After a while, I said something about them trying to make a living and having not many alternatives. He showed some pity for them and reflected on how we had lost the knowledge/work/learning of particular trades, such as carpenter, plumber, mechanic, which forced people to do this kind of job. He then told me that he came from a family of 'cirujas', that is of people who lived from the dumps, and that he was taught the job when he was a boy. He became part of the official waste collection company when it started up in the 1980s. I felt he was proud of this. Was he disdainful of cartoneros because they were new arrivals and did not know how to do the job properly? Or because now that he was a formal worker, he felt he needed to separate himself from them? Was it too close for comfort? My impression, which was confirmed in different

*interviews and conversations, is that people from the 'industry' were much harder than others on cartoneros.*⁴⁴

My fieldwork experience, as the fieldwork extract shows above, interviews and readings suggest that people involved with waste in different ways had less respect for the work of *cartoneros* (Martin et al. 2007). However, I also found that the attitude of waste collection workers changed when they were in closer contact with the cooperative of Bajo Flores. Talking to them in interviews for the participatory video shows more understanding for their plight and their efforts. However, the 'bottom line' for waste collection companies was that rubbish was their jurisdiction and *cartoneros* were interfering (Martin et al. 2007).

For people living in the CABA, the ones that created the rubbish, *cartoneros* provoked them in different ways (Carlino 2007, Martin et al. 2007). The reactions varied and were not necessarily coherent. People were horrified at having to face up to the rubbish again as they found their rubbish scattered all over the pavement. *Cartoneros'* practice made them reflect on their habits: on what they threw out, and how it could be valuable and recycled. But it also made them face again the things they had separated from, the everyday practice that put a particular order in their world. This is a complaint I encountered often as I talked to people during my fieldwork, even in random encounters. For instance, whilst I was waiting for a friend to come down from her flat, one of her neighbours was trying to tie down the bags that had been ripped apart. She expressed her anger and disgust in the following way:

⁴⁴ Fieldwork Notes, November 2007, Waste collection company tour, Buenos Aires

‘Look at this, they [*cartoneros*] are so dirty, they don’t care. I put some effort in properly putting my rubbish in bags, but they just rip the bags and leave. Then I have to pick up all the scattered rubbish and bag it up again. This is not right’⁴⁵

As the quote above suggests, the issue was also about civility, in the sense that people were responsible for putting out the rubbish in the proper way: in bags. If this was not done, the waste collection trucks did not take it away and it was their job to pick it up and bag it again and clean the street. It was the perceived lack of civility and a lack of respect from *cartoneros* to do this, to ruin the work they had put into being proper citizens, messing up the places where they lived and meddling with their private property.

Other fears were tied in: fear of diseases, of rubbish attracting rats and cockroaches that are carriers of disease (and not very pleasant to encounter either). The materiality of rubbish, its decomposing material, brought these other connections (Carlino 2007). The quote below reflects some of these links between rubbish, smells, uncleanliness and feelings of rejection. When discussing what I was researching with a woman that lives near one of the train stations, where *cartoneros* frequently gather, she wrinkled her nose and said:

‘I have changed my route home. I now avoid the streets where *cartoneros* sort the rubbish. It is disgusting. Some of them seem to live there. It is all dirty, and it stinks’⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Fieldwork Notes, October 2006, Belgrano, Buenos Aires

⁴⁶ Fieldwork Notes, December 2006, Buenos Aires

In a context of insecurity, another fear that rode along with the others was a fear of *cartoneros* themselves, as some found their presence threatening. Many have commented on being afraid of walking back home at night because of the groups of *cartoneros* roaming and lingering on the streets, for fear of assault or of robberies. Going back from a night out with one of my friends, she asked me to wait until she got in when I dropped her because she was afraid. Being quite a confident person and living in a relatively secure neighbourhood, Barrio Norte, I asked her why, and she confessed that it was the presence of *cartoneros* that made her wary. This concern was echoed in other encounters. She expressed it in the following way:

'I am afraid of walking back home at night these days. There are always all these guys, all these *cartoneros* around, and a truck parks just outside my house. It makes me feel really insecure'⁴⁷

The most prevalent reaction, however, seemed to be one of solidarity and pity. In October 2002, *Página 12*, a national newspaper in Argentina, published a survey done by a consultancy on people's reactions to *cartoneros*⁴⁸. In this survey of 502 people, 65% of them said they felt solidarity towards *cartoneros*, while 32% felt pity, and the rest divided between fear, contempt, indifference and other reactions. This survey shows that the majority of people, at that time, felt empathy towards *cartoneros* (Carlino 2007). In my interviews and conversations around this issue, people expressed mixed emotions, so probably this survey reflects the one that prevailed or the one they felt more comfortable expressing in a survey. As the crisis unfolded, *cartoneros* became the visible effect of the crisis: a very visible sign of how things have

⁴⁷ Fieldwork Notes, November 2007, Barrio Norte, Buenos Aires

⁴⁸ Kollman, R. 23.10.2002, La batalla que ganaron los cartoneros, *Página 12*, Buenos Aires

deteriorated in order to push people to do this kind of job. People, especially those in the emergent neighbourhood assemblies, linked this marginality to extreme need, and thus generated solidarity links and tolerance, which generated a willingness to make adjustments to improve their condition that made it possible to create changes in the rubbish process and in their condition (Anguita 2003, Calello 2007). This worked in different ways, for instance by organising vaccinations and soup kitchens for *cartoneros*, protesting alongside them for their right to use train stations or voting for the city government as they showed a politics of inclusion rather than one of repression (Calello 2007). Again we witness how different ways of relating, such as friendship, hospitality, generosity, accommodation, fear, hostility, indifference, negotiation co-exist side by side, in opposition, and in cooperation (Mol 2005b, Strathern 2004).

A different set of relations also emerged out of the work of *cartoneros* that were tied into the controversy. One of them was a private initiative born out of the practicalities of *cartoneros* going in and out of the city. In 2001, the numbers of *cartoneros* taking the train to and from the city and the outskirts multiplied. And so did the complaints of other users of the train about the amount of space they took and about unhygienic conditions of travel. The privatized train company, *Trenes de Buenos Aires* (Trains of Buenos Aires- TBA) asked to negotiate a solution with a representative of the *cartoneros*. For this, *cartoneros* had to organize themselves and choose representatives. TBA offered them a special service exclusively for *cartoneros*. They negotiated a fare for their travel, a travel card for 15 or 30 days. This started off in one of the train routes, but multiplied in time to other routes. This train was called 'the white train', or the 'ghost train', as it was literally an old train in disuse which had been

painted white and was stripped of seats or windows, which made more carts fit in, and which left at 5.30 pm from José León Suarez to Colegiales station, and back from Carranza station at 11pm (Anguita 2003: 106-7). This negotiation was an example of a different set of relations built around rubbish and *cartoneros*. It was about conflict, but also about negotiation, finding ways of self-organisation and accommodation.

There were many different ways of constructing relations around rubbish issues. These new associations made during the controversy brought into relief the configurations that we live with in terms of rubbish. As I described above, the controversy included challenging what rubbish was, as the work of *cartoneros* showed that many materials were valuable, as well as disputed how rubbish was managed and who should be involved. Furthermore, the presence of rubbish, its being out of place, served to show the symbolic constructions around rubbish, which relate to its particular material recalcitrance and its capacity for material disturbance (Bennett 2004). As I have discussed in Chapter 1, Douglas's work (1969) shows how the symbolic charge of rubbish is given by the context of relations, and I have further argued that the materiality of rubbish matters for building this relational symbolic construction. The excess and the indifference with which non-human actors create separate associations from humans are disturbing (Lulka 2009), as I have shown through the strong reactions that the presence of *cartoneros* and of rubbish evoked. These associations are kept at a distance, but become articulated as an issue when this distance is disturbed and when these associations have problematic effects for humans. For instance, the micro-organisms from the materials of rubbish interact with each other and with rain, heat and wind to generate gases and leachates, contaminating water, air and soil for human (and non-human) use, as well as associations with rats, flies, mosquitoes, dogs and

cockroaches, which become 'vectors of disease'. There have been different ways of managing these associations over time, and in different sites, but there is always an excess. For instance, Suárez (1998) and Prignano (1998) describe different models that were used in the city of Buenos Aires, that went from different forms of re-using and living in close proximity to rubbish, to distancing, concentration and burning, incineration and burial in landfill sites. These different forms were introduced successively, though the different ways of dealing with rubbish persisted in different ways and particular places, and lack of 'control' over rubbish was always an issue. What Suárez (1998) shows is that these different forms were introduced at different times in reaction to issues that rubbish raised for city inhabitants. Rubbish had its part in creating the issue. These attempts at control have been constructed as progress and as a form of superiority over matter. The effect that the work of *cartoneros* had was to reduce the distanced relationship with rubbish that had been laboriously created in the CABA, and thus it was seen as a fall from grace, of *cartoneros*, but also of the city and the country.

This excess of rubbish is always emergent and it is brought in through different associations and articulations. As I said above, *cartoneros* became the symbol of how low Argentina had fallen. The fact that people had to resort to rummaging through the rubbish for a living was a grievance (Gorelik 2004). Furthermore, from rubbish seemed to hinge many other issues. The crisis in 2001 moved Argentines to revisit their imaginary of Argentina as 'the exception' - as nearer the 'first-world', as superior and more influential for other Latin American countries - and *porteños*⁴⁹ had to revisit their notion of the CABA as the 'Paris' of the developing world (Fiorucci 2004, Gorelik 2004,

⁴⁹ *Porteños* is the name given to those who are born and live in the CABA, literally people of the port.

Klein 2004). The issue of *cartoneros* and of rubbish was a slight to the construction of the image of the city, and carried connotations and questions of the role of Buenos Aires and Argentina in the world. This further dis-ordering of rubbish, the visibility, emergence and proximity of rubbish was one of the issues in which hinged the belonging to an organised progressive, developed, modern country, or to a developing, Latin, third world one.

This is a sample of the way this issue was constructed, which implied a mobilisation and chains of associations that generated debates, claims and changes in the way rubbish was thought of and managed, and making it political in particular ways. The spark for making rubbish an issue were new associations generated by the multiplication of *cartoneros* in richer parts of the capital city that put rubbish out of place. The spark that the presence of *cartoneros* and of rubbish brought about would have gone out without the multiple associations and issues that also tied up around this activity and the materiality of rubbish. In this way rubbish started to be visible, it started to be noticed in a different way. As Hawkins points out, the materiality of rubbish had to be recognised before alternative material orderings could be thought of, such as its links with the environment or with different economies (Hawkins 2006: 80). The work of *cartoneros*, the material practice of looking through and separating the rubbish, helped rubbish to be seen less as an undifferentiated mass and instead something that could be valuable. *Cartoneros* did not go out sorting the rubbish in an attempt to create a new phenomenology of rubbish, to create another relationship with the things we throw, or to be good to the environment. Their initiative was mainly out of need, a way of resolving a pressing issue: getting money to get by. However, their activity served to challenge the way we relate to rubbish. It served to

contemplate rubbish as things, that can be transformed and used in other ways, and that can enter and create other cycles of value. This attentiveness to rubbish, to objects, was also mutually transformative, of people and things. A worker of one of the cooperatives told me 'by recycling rubbish, we recycle people too. We bring them back to life, to a job, to dignity'⁵⁰. Furthermore, this different way of paying attention to rubbish created associations and new forms of relating that shaped this controversy, which were not only conflictive. This first analysis of the way that rubbish become political points at a more complex understanding of the political by showing the different forms of relating and associations that a controversy such as this one brought about, which include antagonism and conflict, but also as I have shown, negotiation, accommodation and solidarity for instance. In the next section, I discuss further the theoretical implications and arguments that I have started to outline through this story.

Politics between controversies and deliberation

Many different political theories have discussed and challenged the practices and spaces of what is politics and what is political. Literature on new social movements, participation, governance and science and technology studies, to name a few, have expanded the activities and spaces of politics to more than the institutional formats of liberal and representative democracy (see for instance Alvarez, E. and Escobar 1998, Barry 2001, Gaventa 2006, Laclau 2005, Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Latour 2007, Mol

⁵⁰ Interview with a member of *El Ceibo*, 23.10.06, cooperative of *cartoneros*, Buenos Aires

2005b, Painter 2006b). I will discuss here the work on radical democracy as this approach focuses on the ways in which issues become political in terms of opposition and conflict, which is relevant here as rubbish became political in the CABA as a result of a controversy, as I have shown in the section above. In addition, radical democracy has been influential in shaping the discussions around politics and democracy in Geography (Barnett and Low 2004). I will argue here that radical democracy is important in bringing issues to the fore that had been previously set aside in debates around politics and democracy, but that their analytical framework confines our understanding of political practices, including those of democratic politics. The limitations this framework imposes are threefold: it restricts the kind of relations that are considered relevant for politics; it narrows the practices and actors that are considered relevant for the work of articulation, and undermines the importance of the everyday work of politics. In this sense, I argue that to understand what is at stake in the construction of an issue, it is important to acknowledge the contribution of radical democracy, but at the same time find other ways to deal with some of the limitations that this approach brings in understanding what becoming political might be about.

Radical democracy authors highlight ways in which issues become political, by focusing on understanding the ways identities and coalitions are constituted through particular events that challenge the boundaries of politics. To do this, radical democracy authors such as Laclau and Mouffe (1985) make a distinction between 'politics' and the 'political'. As I have described in Chapter 1, Mouffe (1999) describes 'the political' as the antagonistic dimension intrinsic in human society present in diverse social relations, and 'politics', as an ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that

seek to establish a certain order, to organise and pacify social life. This notion of the political and politics is used as a critique of deliberative, representative and liberal approaches to democracy, which highlight consensus, negotiation, accommodation and rational deliberation as core practices of a democratic politics. In underscoring conflict, opposition and hostility as core elements of the political, these authors attempt to bring difference and other forms of relations as crucial to the arena of politics. In addition, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) challenge the assumption of liberal and representative approaches to democracy by paying attention to how issues are defined. These authors use the concept of articulation to counteract the notion that identity and interests are formed and present before representation takes place. Articulation is understood as a 'practice that is able to achieve political alignment between diverse interests, but only ever according to a contingent set of identifications that remain open to contestation' (Barnett 2004: 507). This has focused attention on the different ways in which there has been contestation of the boundaries of 'the political' (see for instance Alvarez et al. 1998, Barry 2001, Heynen et al. 2006, Swyngedouw 2009).

The issues that radical democracy brings to the fore are crucial for this research. In the section above, I have shown how conflict and hostility played a role in making rubbish controversial and political. Rubbish was articulated as an issue through different associations, coalitions, through opposition and conflict. In terms of democratic politics, it could be said that this controversy expanded the parameters of what is to be included in a political discussion, so in this way it has been important in terms of constructing a democratic politics. However, to narrate the story in this way would mean leaving out important elements that this controversy can bring to understanding

politics and democracy. Some things do not quite fit this assemblage of concepts around politics and the political.

As Barnett (2004) points out, radical democracy authors ontologise the politics/political distinction and determine the content of the political in terms of antagonism, hostility and conflict (*Ibid*: 205). These moves are questionable in that by ontologising this inherent hostility, these modes of relating exhaust the possible relationships with otherness; they close down other ways of relating that are not those of conflict. To focus only on conflict and hostility would mean bypassing many practices described above such as the building of solidarity, negotiations and seduction processes that are also part and parcel of politics. I have shown how indifference, creativity, rejection, solidarity, hospitality, fear, opposition and friendliness were present in relations built between *cartoneros*, rubbish, concierges, neighbourhood assemblies, individual neighbours at different times and in particular spaces. Furthermore, negotiation, accommodation and opposition were for instance part of the relations built between *cartoneros*, rubbish, the government, and the railway company.

The ontologisation of the difference between politics and the political, and the characterisation of the political as that which revolves around conflict and violence, which is a particular way of relating to the other, does not let us see other relations, other ways of managing difference, which are also political. The different ways in which we construct our world together, and the different ways we are-with-others are not contemplated (Bingham 2006, Hinchliffe 2007, Latour 2004). This critique also points at the different actors that are left unaddressed in this way of contemplating the becoming political of an issue.

Radical democracy serves us well in directing our attention to the importance of understanding how an issue can become political in ways that overflow formal political institutions, and to show how these issues and identities are formed and articulated in the process, and are not ready-made in advance. However, the focus on contingent alliances and coalitions and the importance given to the role of words in this work of connection, overestimates the role of humans and downplays the importance of other actors, and of things that make these associations stable and that construct the way politics and the political are done in everyday practices (Braun and Disch 2002).

To expand the ways we can understand the articulation of issues, I followed Marres' notion of issue articulation (2005, 2007, 2010), which I described in Chapter 1. Marres' work is useful here as she looks at how political issues arise when a public is created around it. For this, she not only looks at the contingent discourses and coalitions built around an issue, but forces us to attend to the mobilisation of socio-ontological associations that mediate actors' involvement in the issues at stake (Marres 2007: 776).

In the case of rubbish, we have seen different things that mediated actors' attachments to the issue at stake. This included: fear for their livelihoods, struggles for inclusion and dignity, profit-making, the desire for clean and safe streets, the search for votes. The different attachments people brought, formulated and articulated around this issue, worked alongside the materiality of rubbish to construct the particular issue and shape it in particular ways. Understanding the building of issues in terms of their socio-material practices goes further to demonstrate the importance of this moment to democratic practice, than an approach that focuses on discursive analysis or on contingent alliances. This is because, understood in this way, the

moment of issue articulation shapes what counts, and this shape affects and intervenes in the lives of different actors (human and non-humans) (Marres 2007, 2010).

The notion of 'the political' in radical democracy accounts is also used to make 'politics' something secondary, as the core of politics is reserved for the activity of constituting and contesting the dimension of the political (Barnett 2004: 508). However, in this controversy it was hard to see a great divide between a political dimension of inherent conflict and a politics of ordering. 'Politics' was not just a form of appeasing and ordering conflict. The controversy itself was already about the building of politics, of different associations that would become part of how rubbish was done. For instance, if we study the launching of the green bag campaign by the government, which would fit more in the 'politics' dimension posited by radical democracy, we find that this is very much part of the way conflict and opposition was built between political parties, which in turn fuelled this controversy. In the next section, I will describe other ways in which these two dimensions are intermingled.

In leaving out different ways of relating, prioritising the domain of conflict, and focusing on discursive and contingent alliances and oppositions, this approach misses material practices and actors that are important to understanding how issues become articulated and become political. In this section I have shown some of the positions, connections and attachments that were at play in this controversy and that shaped the issue in particular ways. In the midst of a financial, political and social crisis, there was an opportunity for things to change. This change was not straightforward, and was by no means radical, but different practices were transformed, added, moved and

subtracted from old ones to create a different way of doing rubbish. This is what I will analyse in the next section.

Rubbish work in the CABA

The way politics was done around rubbish changed with this controversy. The generalised crisis in Argentina had mobilised people to overthrow the government, and had grown into a full distrust of political leadership in general (Fiorucci and Klein 2004, Rodgers 2005b, Tedesco 2002). The crisis and the controversy described above created opportunities that did not exist before. This crisis situation, and the relative autonomy of the city (see Introduction), meant that there was more room for people's demands and for experimentation with different forms of governing (Koebs 2004). Different initiatives were created at this time, such as an experiment with participatory budgeting (see for instance Rodgers 2005a). As I described in the first section, the CABA was in the midst of electoral campaigning where *cartoneros* became one of the most contentious issues. From efforts to change conceptions about work, to the creation of laws and new government programmes around rubbish and separation, there were many different ways in which the rubbish issue took shape. Practices of rubbish picking by *cartoneros* were translated by the city government into a strategy of collection of separate materials and recycling, more in tune with 'developed' countries. These would situate Buenos Aires within processes that take place in the developed world, rather than the third-world status that rubbish pickers imply. The changes in the

way that the CABA government dealt with rubbish and *cartoneros* are what I describe in this section.

Before the multiplication and visibility of *cartoneros*, and the connections forged between rubbish and environmentalism and social inclusion, rubbish was mainly a technical and administrative issue. It was a question of managing the removal and disposal of rubbish as best as possible. It was a question of burying the rubbish, and mastering it through technical processes. Rubbish collection was a service provided by the city, through contracting mainly private waste collection companies, which had to be controlled and administered.

Rubbish became a metropolitan issue in 1977. At this time, a state company was created, called CEAMSE (*Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado* – Ecological Coordinator for the Metropolitan Area of the State). This enterprise was owned equally by the province of Buenos Aires and the CABA. This entity was to be in charge of the disposal of the waste of the RMBA. This new waste management system involved the disposal of waste in landfill sites, and ruled out by law any possibility of recycling (Schamber 2007b, Suárez 2001). Each municipality was now in charge of the collection and transport of rubbish to the landfill site. This new system of waste management replaced the incineration of waste in situ, thus reducing carbon dioxide emissions (for a history of waste management in Buenos Aires see Prignano 1998, Suárez 1998). As Suárez points out, this waste management system was planned in a technocratic and centralized way, and was sustained by authoritarian rule (2001: 17). After the return to democracy, this system continued.

This way of doing rubbish interacted with other established, but less official ways of doing rubbish. For instance, the prohibition of rubbish picking was not enforced rigidly and the number of people picking rubbish increased depending on the situation of the economy, especially on prices for recyclable materials and the rate of unemployment (Koebs 2004: 19). There were also some initiatives to recycle, especially those of scrap metal and newspaper and magazine publishers. Rubbish has always been big business in terms of the large budgets managed, so corruption has always been present in the way it was organised (for an example of corruption in handling contracts see O'Donnell 2005: 34-37). The contracts for waste collection were sought after because they involved huge amounts of money, and were given in return for contributions towards politician's pockets or political campaigns⁵¹. In addition, as the then Director of the landfill site pointed out, 'half of the rubbish is still thrown in illegal open dumping grounds'⁵². Illegal dumping had diverse sources: from private trucks that diverted their cargo to waste collection companies and municipalities wishing to avoid paying for burying the rubbish; or informal carts that dumped rubbish as the official rubbish collection did not work. These other ways of doing rubbish were intertwined with the official way, and worked at the interstices of the law, the contracts, landfill sites and offices of Urban Hygiene that the city government had set up over the years for dealing with rubbish.

These ways of doing rubbish were altered by the controversy. The controversy created other associations and networks that had to be taken into account. Rubbish became a political issue as what to do with rubbish could not anymore be resolved by technical expertise alone, or by some external decision that people could not oppose – as it

⁵¹ Di Marco, L., 27.01.2008, Un negocio millonario y poco transparente, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires

⁵² Interview with Hurst, C., 23.10.2007, CEAMSE Director, Buenos Aires

could be argued was the case during the military dictatorship. This controversy was formed by the emergence of different actors and new associations made with environmental and ethical concerns.

Different efforts to create new associations and shape this controversy around rubbish could be found in the corridors of the CABA legislature. In many of them figured the efforts of an MP of the CABA, Eduardo Valdéz, and his group of collaborators, as they formed and took part in activities that had a high profile in this controversy. He first got published several readers' letters in a national newspaper, *La Nación*, as well as organised a series of public debates in the legislature where *cartoneros* themselves could have a say and influence the design of the management of waste in the CABA (Schamber 2007b:76). The title of the two debates that followed, one in October 2001 and another one in April 2002, was 'work is not rubbish'. The aim of this was to change the perception of the work of *cartoneros* from an illegal, shameful activity to a dignified one, deserving to be called 'work'.

The dispute about *cartoneros* doing work was very interesting because it challenged the existing associations around working with rubbish. In November 2002, Valdéz requested in court to declare unconstitutional Article 6 of Ordinance 33581 that prohibited rubbish picking (Perelman 2007). For this, there was a Public Audit in the Supreme Justice Court of the CABA. This drew a lot of media attention to the issue, partly what this MP was hoping for (Schamber 2007b). The discussion was around *cartoneros'* activity, specifically if it could be considered work or not. The many arguments for considering their activity as work all linked this to the benefits to the environment, while *cartoneros* themselves pointed out their need to make a living while performing a useful activity for society, in a dignified way. The public prosecutor

of the CABA argued that as it was illegal it could not be considered work. In terms of law, what counted was that it was illegal, other considerations were not relevant (Perelman 2007: 255). For the work of *cartoneros* to be recognised in terms of law, it first had to be legalised. Valdés used the Public Audit as a way of raising the profile of the law he was trying to pass, which was being delayed in the Legislature. It worked. A month later, Law 992 was passed, which made *cartoneros* work legal. This shows the multiple activities and the effort involved in making new associations, in this case in attempting to make the work of *cartoneros* legal, accepted as a dignified activity and as a public service due to its environmental contribution.

Within the same government, different attitudes and forms of relating to *cartoneros* and rubbish issues co-existed. Different sections of government, different procedures, offices, secretaries and individuals made conflictive articulations around the issue of what to do with the work of *cartoneros*. While the police harassed them, and the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene stated in May 2002 that they were devising ways to avoid *cartoneros* in the streets (though this meant that a few days later the director resigned and a more 'pro-*cartoneros*' person was brought in), and Macri's comments later on supported this repressive view of how to handle the work of *cartoneros*, the legislature was working on ways to include them. And the mayor and environment minister were working on ways to make their work more dignified, and trying to devise ways of making their work be less messy for the city. The work of rubbish, and the rubbish issue was being articulated and shaped in different ways, at different sites, and was not necessarily coherent.

One significant trajectory of this issue that I mentioned above, was when in December 2002, the CABA Legislature passed a law (Law 992⁵³), which legalised *cartoneros*' activities and incorporated them into the management of waste disposal. It was first regimented by Decree No. 622 in May 2003. This law referred to *cartoneros* as 'urban recuperators' and defined their work as a public service. The change of name from *cartoneros* to urban recuperators was significant. This was the legal name that *cartoneros* got when their activity became officially recognised as work, as doing a public service. This was a dramatic change from the way that they were conceived pre-crisis. From an activity considered marginal, undignified and something to get rid of, the change of name signalled new, positive, associations with their activity: recognising it as a job, with an official 'important sounding' name, and as contributing to the environment and the health of the city. This law set the base for incorporating urban recuperators in a new waste management system. The guidelines included the creation, within the Secretary of Environment and Planning, of a Programme of Urban Recuperators (*Programa de Recuperadores Urbanos - PRU*) that would regulate the activity of *cartoneros* as well as improve their working conditions (Koehs 2004: 23). In this way, the issue got shaped through a process of deliberation that also set the scene for other ways of doing rubbish as the PRU comprised of rounds of dialogue, a registration process, a programme for the development of small enterprises and a training programme.

The dramatic changes and practices that this law gave space for were less impressive in terms of everyday practices, as the inclusion of *cartoneros* in the management of

⁵³ Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Ley 992:
http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/leg_tecnica/sin/norma_pop.php?id=31157&qu=h&rl=1&rf=0&pelikan=1&sezion=796791&mots1=residuos

the city's waste disposal was not as forthcoming. Law 992 legitimated the registration process. The registration process had started before *cartoneros* work was made legal, but many *cartoneros*, for instance those of the *Tren Blanco*, decided at first not to register as their work was still not legal and they did not trust the government not to use it for identifying and repressing them (Koebs 2004: 198). The register was, in the end, one of the only concrete ways in which *cartoneros* were incorporated into the service of urban hygiene (Schamber 2007b: 271). Those registered were supposed to receive credentials, work clothes, gloves and vaccines for themselves and their families and health training (Chronopoulos 2006: 180). The credentials entitled *cartoneros* to work in the city. This was a successful scheme in that in a short period of time 9,000 *cartoneros* got registered. It helped that local government workers went out in the streets to the spots where *cartoneros* were seen, in order to reach them⁵⁴.

The registration was also a way of learning more about *cartoneros'* activity. The form that *cartoneros* needed to fill out to register included 52 questions, from personal details to specific information regarding their work. These questions ranged from areas of work, people who they worked with, what materials were collected, where they sold them, as well as their views on forming a cooperative⁵⁵. The registration process included a 'Plan for Basic Information and Health'. This plan aimed at informing the people who registered of the different health plans available, as well as penalties for wrong doings in the public sphere, personal health and hygiene, as well as the correct utilisation of work clothes and rubbish bags (Decree 662 Annex to Law 992). The plan

⁵⁴ Interview with Cariboni, F., 12.02.2007, City government officer, DGPRU, Buenos Aires

⁵⁵ Taken from the webpage of the government of the CABA: <http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/>, last accessed: 1.06.2010

would be dictated in different local government offices, called Centres of management and participation (Centros de gestión y participación -CGP), in rotation.

In addition, urban recuperators could participate in the different capacity-building seminars on recyclable materials and their commercialization. Health and safety information and the vaccination programme were the ways in which their work was made less hazardous. However, work clothes, because of the protracted administration times of the city government, were slow to come even months after people had registered (Schamber 2007b: 271). By 2007, there were 15,526 urban recuperators registered⁵⁶. The registration process involved different ways of making rubbish: by legitimating and 'counting' their work, and by providing, albeit in a very limited way, some elements to improve their working conditions.

The dialogue round table involved the government, *cartoneros*, academics, neighbours, NGOs and private sector representatives. The table had a consultative role, rather than a decision-making one, and was centred on consultations for creating policies on waste and on the work of *cartoneros*. Many of the initiatives and suggestions from this table were taken into account by the PRU. This dialogue roundtable fed into several programmes: the green bag campaign, the project of Law 992, as well as its regimentation. At the same time, this became a space where *cartoneros* made important contacts and networks, and learnt about decision-making, deliberation, and law-making in the public sphere. Koehs (2004) points out that the dialogue table was the initiative that gave most opportunities for participation and deliberation, and that this was a process of empowerment for *cartoneros*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The programme for small enterprises and the training programme worked for cooperatives or small organisations of *cartoneros*. The register of cooperatives and training was not such an active component of the PRU, probably because of the small number of cooperative organisations. However, different members of the cooperative of Bajo Flores where I worked mentioned the different training and workshops as important and useful.

The creation of a law and the ways that this worked in practice, through the work of the PRU, changed some of the ways in which rubbish was done. It now included spaces for deliberation, different administrative forms, such as those involved in the registering process, and attempts at shaping the way the *cartoneros* worked, through laws, giving information, training, and clothes. It had less impact in the effective inclusion of *cartoneros* in the waste management system.

As I have shown in the section above, in terms of radical democracy, these activities would be classified as 'ordering', and could be said to be part of what 'politics', as opposed to the moment of the 'political' (Swyngedouw 2009). However, it is hard to say this was a moment where just ordering took place, and conflict was appeased. Conflict was present all through this process: when spaces of participation were disrupted by public protests and street blockades⁵⁷, when physical fights erupted as a result of conflicts around new legislation around waste collection bidding contracts in a public audience⁵⁸, when the registering process was halted for a dispute on child workers which forced changes in the process (Schamber 2007a), by scandals and

⁵⁷ Interview with Villalba, E., 20.10.2006, Chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

⁵⁸ See Newspaper article, 2.10.2008, Basura en la ciudad: a las trompadas en audiencia pública, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires

blockades at landfill sites, and conflicts between the city government and the cooperatives to name a few. Ordering and disordering went hand in hand even before the controversy, and during the controversy, as I have described in the first section. I found little point in persisting with this division, as it did not help me unravel the politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires. Understanding that politics includes different forms of relating, and different socio-material practices, whether controversy or non-controversy mediating, allowed me more space to understand what was being done.

Different practices of politics also interfered, cooperated and ignored each other at different times. This can be seen for instance, in the changes which the PRU faced since its beginnings in April 2003. The minute comings and goings of secretaries and politicians were hard to follow, as they changed with the political conjuncture of the times. These alterations in the way the programme worked were tied to national and city elections as well as struggles between different factions of the city government.

The city mayor was suspended from office in November 2005 and later removed, after being held responsible for failures in inspections after a fire broke out in a nightclub, called Crogmanon, in December 2004, killing 194 people and injuring more than 700 others⁵⁹. Internal struggles in the city government over who would lead and which positions could be appointed by whom, became fierce. These struggles shaped changing alliances, budgets and priorities, which affected the work of the PRU, and also that of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene. This is because different governmental positions and ministries became part of the struggle. Who 'had' what was a way of showing who had more power. What mattered was who had the biggest budget. As

⁵⁹ See Helfgot, M., 8.3.2006, La Legislatura porteña destituyó a Ibarra en el juicio político por Cromañón, con los votos justos, *Clarín*, Buenos Aires

waste management is one of the biggest slices of the budget in the city, whoever controlled that budget, expressed its place in the power struggle within the city government⁶⁰. For instance, in 2007, the management of waste was moved between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Public Space, in order to settle a struggle between different factions within the city government. Other struggles were over priorities and meanings of policies on rubbish. For instance, some framed rubbish as an urban service, thus placing the Direction in the Ministry of Urban Public Works, while others framed it as an environmental problem, which placed it under the Environment Secretary (which became later a Ministry).

In the meantime, the role of the PRU changed from the peak of the crisis until 2007. From a Programme, it was upgraded to a General Direction of the Programme of Urban Recuperators (DGPRU), which meant that they now could administer a small budget and have access to the press, which gave it more independence⁶¹. They hired more people, and included a programme of research. If at the height of the crisis the emphasis was more on incentives for *cartoneros* and had a more 'welfare' outlook, this, as the crisis receded, turned into an emphasis on more punitive measures when offenses took place, as well as to a more 'enabling role', which encouraged co-responsibility, rather than reliance on aid from the government. This is expressed in the quote below:

'Our role has been changing; it is not the same 2001 and 2006. There is no crisis now. There is a step towards the formalisation of the activity. We are more

⁶⁰ Interview with Cariboni, F., 16.10.2007, DGPRU government officer, Buenos Aires

⁶¹ Interview with Cariboni, F., 12.01.2007, DGPRU government officer, Buenos Aires

punitive now. If you think about it in terms of carrots and sticks, we used to have more carrots, now we have more sticks'⁶²

As the quote above suggests, if at the beginning they tolerated different infringements of city regulations, and they offered help and support with different aspects of their work, with time fewer of those infractions were tolerated, and *cartoneros* were expected to comply with new regulations. The DGRPU became part of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, at the same level as the more established Direction of Cleanliness, which is in charge of the formal waste management, highlighting its growing importance, although one of my interviewees said to me that: 'It really is more like the Direction of Cleanliness's 'little sister', as they [the Direction of Cleanliness] have most of the budget'⁶³. After these internal political struggles, the city government lost the elections in 2007 to the right wing opposition candidate, Mauricio Macri. The role of the DGPRU in the future administration was uncertain at the time my fieldwork came to an end. Following the issue through the news, I learnt that the new government merged the Ministry of Environment into the Ministry for Public Space and the Environment, and the DGPRU became the Direction of Recycling⁶⁴. The latest plan, in July 2010, was to incorporate *cartoneros* in the waste management strategy by working with cooperatives that would manage separation plants⁶⁵.

The description of the changes so far have shown how politics involves many activities such as negotiation, accommodation, lobbying, that are intertwined with conflict, struggles, opposition, but also solidarity. The politics around *cartoneros* involved

⁶² Interview with Cariboni, F., 12.01.2007, DGPRU government officer, Buenos Aires

⁶³ Interview with Cariboni, F., 16.10.2007, DGPRU government officer, Buenos Aires

⁶⁴ Taken from the webpage of the government of the City of Buenos Aires:

<http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/>, last accessed: 1.06.2010

⁶⁵ Videla, E., 11.04.2010, Hacia la separación domiciliaria, *Página 12*, Buenos Aires; Gutman, D., 28.07.2010, Confirman que los cartoneros levantarán la basura reciclable, *Clarín*, Buenos Aires

experimentation, and was criss-crossed by many different ways of doing politics, around rubbish, but beyond it too.

Another way in which the city government slowly changed the way it organised rubbish was by passing another law, Law 1854, called *Basura Cero* (Zero Rubbish), in January 2006. This was the product of an alliance between city MP Valdés and the work of environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace, which campaigned in different ways to make the link between *cartoneros'* work, rubbish and the environment. This was reinforced when different studies showed that *cartoneros*, by simply going about their business of separating, collecting and selling, without much support from the government, managed to avoid around 12% of the rubbish reaching the landfill site⁶⁶. This alliance proposed to set a progressive time frame to reduce the amount of rubbish that was buried in the landfill sites. The refusal of several municipalities to be the bearers of yet another landfill site in 2004, also helped push this initiative forward. The proposal was to force a 50% reduction of rubbish by 2010, a 75% reduction by 2015 and a 100% reduction of recyclable materials buried in landfill sites by 2020. This law proposal, which had no takers at the beginning of the process, ended up being unanimously accepted⁶⁷.

The Zero Rubbish law was passed by the legislative of the CABA in January 2006⁶⁸. As the law proposed that producers be responsible for the rubbish they create, its

⁶⁶ PRU, Circuito del reciclado en la Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires: Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires; Young, G., 6.05.2007, Los porteños tiran más papeles, pero menos comida, *Clarín*, Buenos Aires

⁶⁷ Interview with Schiffman, N., 17.10.2006, Greenpeace officer, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

⁶⁸ Gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Ley Basura Cero, http://www.buenosaires.gov.ar/areas/med_ambiente/higiene_urbana/ley_basura_cero.php?menu_id=19186, accessed 15.09.2006

regulation encountered many powerful vested interests that slowed this process⁶⁹. In May 2007, it was partly regulated by Decree 639, with further regulation formulated in June 2008 by Decree 760. Novel alliances, such as between Greenpeace, MPs, academic research, as well as practices of lobbying, seduction, convincing, negotiating, deliberating were part of the creation of this controversial law.

The changes described show some of the effects of the new associations and attachments created around rubbish through this controversy. Rubbish expanded its associations. It remained a technical and administrative issue, with its correlative corruption, informal and illegal sites, but slowly made place for environmental concerns and for *cartoneros*. The disturbance that rubbish brought about had to be managed. As I described in the first section, the way rubbish was 'managed' (or not) had implications for the construction of the role of Buenos Aires and Argentina. I have shown here how efforts were made to translate the practice of rubbish picking into a more 'acceptable' version, which took the form of separation and recycling. Different government Programmes, Directions, offices, teams, forms, administrative and legal processes were created to make place for this. The dialogue round table, the passing of laws that acknowledged their work and made their work legal, the registration process, and the different experiments in working together with some cooperatives were small ways in which *cartoneros* were included, and that proposed a change in how rubbish was done. The Zero Rubbish law, even if it has not been applied, signals a change in the way rubbish could be done, and how it is conceived. This, however, as I have shown, was still far from incorporating *cartoneros* or separation and recycling in

⁶⁹ Interview with Cariboni, F., 12.01.2007, DGPRU officer, Buenos Aires

the formal waste management system of the city, and from practically transforming the ways that rubbish was done in the manner that the new laws demanded.

The different activities mentioned here, were at the same time, part of the controversy and also of its effects. It is hard thus to draw a definite line between becoming 'political' and the building of the 'politics' of rubbish. Even if one could argue that politics would be the place where things started to take a more stable shape, the different dimensions present at the moment of the controversy, such as conflict, negotiation, accommodation, hostility, solidarity, and partnerships, were also present in the relations that constructed the changes in the politics of rubbish. Furthermore, the initial controversy around rubbish was re-fuelled at different times through the different ways in which rubbish was being shaped, and thus the controversy was not just one outburst, but a series of moments where this issue formed publics around them. These moments had different sites and forms of expression, from different media, deliberation in the legislature, street assemblies, protests, work in cooperatives, government administration systems and campaigns, public offices, and so on. As much as the controversy in the CABA highlighted and mobilised change in how rubbish is done, keeping the focus on its conflictive/controversial dimensions obscures the intricate and interesting ways in which different associations, and different ways of relating, are created in this process, which are political, and ways of doing politics.

In the next section, I will further challenge this approach, and show a different way in which rubbish comes to be political in a different part of the RMBA: Moreno. Rubbish becomes political here not through controversies, but through different deliberative

groups born out of an initiative of an NGO working with the municipality and neighbours of Moreno. To this I now turn.

Moreno: a case with a difference

'We need to make the invisible, visible'⁷⁰

'The problem of rubbish is that it is all out there in the streets. It is that we have to live alongside it'⁷¹

The changes and controversies on rubbish that took place in the CABA translated to other parts of the RMBA. However, how, when and what was translated from the changes taking place in the city of Buenos Aires varied greatly. As I described in Chapter 2, the municipalities surrounding the CABA, which comprise the RMBA, face very different problems and have very different resources to those of the CABA.

Moreno is a municipality within the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Region, located in the province of Buenos Aires, 37 km to the west of the CABA. Moreno is one of the poorest municipalities in Greater Buenos Aires. I have described the situation of Moreno in Chapter 2. To summarise, half of Moreno's population is below the poverty line, it has high unemployment levels, and one of the lowest values in the Human Development Index in Buenos Aires (Ageitos et al. 2006, Auyero 2006: 256, IIED-LA 2005a). Moreno

⁷⁰ Fieldwork notes from Focus Cities workshop I, quote by Urquiza, G., 16.11.2006, Focus Cities research manager, IIED-LA, , Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁷¹ Interview with Zapata, M., 18.10.2007, representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

has witnessed high population growth, and this, combined with the inability of the municipality to provide for public infrastructure, has meant that Moreno has one of the higher deficits in terms of the provision of public services. The political profile of Moreno is also very different from the CABA. As I described in Chapter 2, in the CABA, there are usually several small political blocs and the Peronist party has not governed in many years. In Moreno, a deep-rooted Peronist party dominates the political forces. Since the end of the last military dictatorship in 1983, the Justicialist party has dominated and governed in Moreno, with the exception of 1991-1995. The work of this party is known for mixing more formal forms of representation with more informal political forms such as clientelism.

In 2001-2, at the height of the crisis, Moreno was facing other more pressing problems than rubbish: food riots, lootings of supermarkets, violence, unemployment, hunger, discontent. The municipality approached this by dedicating most of its scarce resources to welfare. There was no time or resources for anything else. As the crisis slowly started to recede, other problems could be thought about. One of these was rubbish. But it was not out of an explosion or controversy, or out of the translation of the municipality of the new concerns on waste in the CABA. The municipality of Moreno was ruled by other laws than those of the city, as it was under the laws of the province of Buenos Aires. Some initiatives of the city were slowly taken up by the province of Buenos Aires, as can be seen with the Provincial Law No. 13,592, promulgated in December of 2006, which emulated the Zero Rubbish law. However, what prompted a different way of thinking about the rubbish issue in Moreno was the work of a non-governmental organisation (NGO), the International Institute for Environment and Development Latin America (IIED-LA).

IIED-AL is an NGO that has been working in Latin America since 1979. It was established in Argentina in 1979 as the Latin American office of the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), but became independent and registered as an Argentine NGO in 1988. It has 14 members of staff, and its work is divided in three programmes: sustainable development; urban management; and local development and institutional capacity-building. IIED-LA publishes the twice yearly journal, *Medio Ambiente y Urbanización*⁷². IIED-AL aims at improving the living conditions and decision-making power of vulnerable people. It aims to influence economic, social and environmental policy in the countries of the region.

This environmental NGO proposed working with the municipality and neighbours on participatory planning of environmental issues. IIED-LA had been working in Moreno, earning trust with the municipality and neighbours on other projects though organising the administration of social plans, as well as through creating public-private partnerships for programmes on water. In this case, rubbish became political through other means and in other ways. It was the work of an NGO that wanted to help, to contribute to lessening the environmental burden of poorer people in Moreno and not through a controversy or conflict. And it was through a participatory planning project that proposed working together with the municipality and the inhabitants of Moreno, with the mediation of IIED-LA. This project was something in between official and non-official politics, as it was a project with the municipality, but geared and funded by 'outsiders'.

⁷² See <http://www.iied-al.org.ar/home.html> for more information.

The programme on participatory environmental planning was called 'Focus Cities'. In this section, I will analyse how rubbish became an issue through the development of this participatory environmental project. In this way, I show another way in which rubbish became political, which was not through a controversy, but through a process of participation and deliberation. The creation of an issue is an important moment of democratic practice (Marres 2007). I show here how the materiality of rubbish was important in terms of the making of the issue in Moreno, which differs from the way rubbish was construed as an issue in the CABA. Thus, it shows there are other ways in which the issue gets constructed, at parallel times, in different sites of the same metropolis. In Moreno, rubbish is encountered and lived with in different ways. Thus, the issue is enacted in different ways. In Chapter 5, I will specify in another way the links between the development of this project and normative democratic practices. This will be done through studying the material practices involved in this project in terms of the interplay of principles, devices, and staging of these devices, which enact democracy in particular ways.

The aim of the 'Focus cities' project was to improve the quality of life for people in Moreno; to have more equitable access to services and to alleviate the weight of environmental problems through the implementation of a participatory model of planning and management. This project involved four workshops in four areas of Moreno, in which these problems were discussed. I was part of the workshops in one area, which included South and Central Moreno, Francisco Álvarez, La Reja and Paso del Rey. My discussions of the project stem mainly from my observations during workshops and meetings as well as interviews with IIED-LA members, municipality workers and participants. The quotes that are deployed in this section are taken from

the participants' discussions at the workshops, from interviews to municipal workers in Moreno and from the members of IIED-LA most involved in the project, principally Ana Hardoy (IIED-LA Director), Gastón Urquiza (Research Project Manager and Researcher), Jorgelina Hardoy (Researcher) and Gustavo Pandiella (Research Assistant).

In the participatory workshops, which involved people from the different areas of Moreno and from the municipality, as well as IIED-LA members, people worked together to identify the environmental problems in their area, and to put them on the map. The mapping of these problems was very important. One of the issues with Moreno is that the municipality maps do not represent the municipality in an accurate way: whole neighbourhoods and settlements are missing as well as different infrastructural changes and problems⁷³. The aim of these workshops was to start to construct a space where the different maps of the issues of Moreno started to align. For this, participants worked at building maps of issues, and updating the maps the municipality provided. The municipality, on the other hand, had the job of integrating the information that was fragmented throughout the different areas of the municipality. The workshops served to construct a space where the maps that people living in Moreno built would work with the maps the municipality had, in order to get a more accurate idea of the problems facing the municipality, in this case, of environmental problems⁷⁴. The idea was to make the invisible, visible, as the quote that opens this section points out. If this was meant as a way of extending the representative base in a liberal sense, in practice it was more a process of creation of environmental issues through the workshops. This process is what gave texture to the rubbish issue.

⁷³ Fieldwork notes, 16.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop I, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁷⁴ Interview with Urquiza, G., 1.12.2006, Focus cities research manager, IIED-LA, Moreno, Buenos Aires

One of the participatory exercises that aimed at this fuller representation and visibility of problems consisted of marking a map of the territory with the environmental problems that were present in their areas. In the discussions that framed the exercise of filling the map, many environmental problems were raised, such as flooding, sanitation, lack of drinking water, contamination due to industries and rubbish. However, the way these issues were shaped was constructed through the process. For instance, some people were uncertain about what environmental problems meant, but by asking questions, and looking at their neighbourhood in a different way, they started to see what could be thought of as environmental problems. The following quote resonated also with other participants:

‘I did not realise the different things that were happening in my neighbourhood. After the first workshop, I walked around, and talked to other people. Then, I had the idea of using a map, and asking other neighbours, and also of taking photos. I then made it into this report to bring it here’⁷⁵

This process then helped construct the issues, and also nudged some participants to be affected in different ways, as the quote above shows. It was also in these discussions that the impact of the controversies on *cartoneros* and rubbish could be seen. One of the things that got translated from the rubbish crisis in the city of Buenos Aires was the link between *cartoneros*, rubbish and the environment. This controversy connected rubbish with environmental problems, instead of it only being a question of service provision, which was also present. However, the connections were different. It was, in a way, the other side of the coin from the CABA. It was not so much that they ripped open bags in the area, as was the case in the city centre of the CABA. A few *cartoneros*

⁷⁵ Fieldwork Notes, 22.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop II, Moreno, Buenos Aires

worked in the centre of Moreno, but most went to the CABA to do their collecting. The problem here was more about their social inclusion, their working conditions and the associated health problems being a *cartonero* brought about – increased need for vaccinations, cuts, infections, back problems amongst others that add to an already overloaded public health system. And also, as the quotes below show, since *cartoneros* lived and accumulated their stuff in these areas, this meant that they brought other environmental problems, especially rats and diseases.

‘Many turn to being *cartoneros* because they do not find work. The rubbish, the cardboard, attracts rats where people and children live. And this brings diseases’⁷⁶

‘There is also an area of *cartoneros*, there is a deposit here that accumulates all sorts. The smallest rat can eat a cat’⁷⁷

The problems of rats and diseases did not precede a solution where *cartoneros* were punished or marginalised, but proposed ways of making their work and lives better, such as raising awareness of hygiene and having better working conditions, and of including them in the waste collection system⁷⁸. In the last of these initial workshops, the group worked towards a first attempt to systematise the problems, causes and solutions. The first stab at solutions around rubbish included: raising awareness through environmental campaigns, education of children and parents through schools, as well as formalising the work of *cartoneros*, providing education on hygiene and

⁷⁶ Fieldwork Notes, 22.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop II, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁷⁷ Fieldwork Notes, 22.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop II, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁷⁸ Fieldwork Notes, 6.12.2006, Focus Cities workshop IV, Moreno, Buenos Aires

health, and more frequent and better reach of waste collection companies⁷⁹. The discussions all mentioned the need to manage things differently by raising awareness and by paying attention to social inclusion. This could be seen in how people talked about the way rubbish had become an environmental problem, one in which *cartoneros* could work towards making it better. Solidarity and accommodation were prominent in this debate, which led to finding ways of first understanding what the issues were, to be able to start thinking of ways around it that would also involve *cartoneros*.

After discussing and mapping the various environmental problems people faced, the second stage of the planning consisted of proposing projects and then prioritising and deciding on one project to go for. Among the many ills people faced, the chosen problem to tackle was that of rubbish.

The encounters and problems with rubbish issue here were different than in the CABA, and thus rubbish, as an issue, was constructed differently. As already mentioned, lack of resources paired with many other more urgent problems, made rubbish less pressing an issue. Rubbish removal services supposedly covered 80% of the municipality⁸⁰. However, as was shown in the workshops, the maps the municipality handled did not acknowledge the presence of settlements and entire neighbourhoods⁸¹. Only 30% of Moreno had paved streets, and the ones that were paved were often in bad conditions (Urquiza 2009). This meant that the heavy and large collection trucks could not make it to many routes, especially if it rained. In

⁷⁹ Fieldwork Notes, 6.12.2006, Focus Cities workshop IV, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁸⁰ Interview with Cuaderno, S., 23.1.2007, Moreno municipal officer, Secretary of Public Works, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁸¹ Fieldwork notes, 16.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop I, Moreno, Buenos Aires

certain areas of Moreno, collection was less frequent too. As one of my interviewees explained:

‘When many days pass without rubbish being collected, as happens when it rains and, since trucks can’t get in because of the mud, people pay a few Pesos to guys that pass with a cart offering to take the rubbish away, which are later dumped in open grounds a bit further away’⁸²

When rubbish collection trucks did not collect for many days, people resorted to different strategies to get rid of their rubbish. These strategies often led to more environmental problems. The participants mentioned problems with the waste collection companies, but they also started to look at their everyday practices involving rubbish, as the quote below shows:

‘The ones that throw the rubbish are not from another planet, they are our neighbours’⁸³

The different practices that became problematic around rubbish were pointed out by participants throughout the participatory planning workshops. Some of these can be seen in the following quotes:

‘The problem is our lack of awareness. Many people burn their rubbish. They don’t know how toxic it is to do that’⁸⁴

⁸² Interview with Bel, C., 4.1.2008, Focus Cities representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁸³ Fieldwork notes, 16.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop I, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁸⁴ Fieldwork notes, 16.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop I, Moreno, Buenos Aires

'Here the collection comes three times a week. But people don't want to bother putting rubbish into bags; they just throw the rubbish as it is. This is important because it blocks the drainage to the dam and it generates floods'⁸⁵

'If you look around there are new rubbish bins, but rubbish is scattered all around'⁸⁶

'They put new rubbish bins, but they were gone within three days. Somebody stole them'⁸⁷

'There are people that take their green waste and put it in the corner to be collected. But on top of that people start throwing rubbish. The waste collection truck comes every day but Saturdays, what need is there to throw the rubbish with the green waste? We have to start to educate people. We have to tell them that by throwing rubbish, and sewage, we are screwing our lives. That is the only way they are going to understand'⁸⁸

From these quotes we can see a variety of practices that make this problem worse and that shaped the issue in Moreno. By burning rubbish, mixing it with green waste, not bagging it properly and throwing it in places where it accumulated and generated floods, by ignoring rubbish bins, or because they get stolen, rubbish generates many problems, different from the ones brought up in the controversies around rubbish in the CABA. These problematic individual strategies that I described above, coupled with the municipality's lack of resources, maps that did not represent the problems and

⁸⁵ Fieldwork notes, 29.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop III, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁸⁶ Fieldwork notes, 16.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop I, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁸⁷ Fieldwork notes, 29.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop III, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁸⁸ Fieldwork notes, 29.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop III, Moreno, Buenos Aires

settlements, lack of vehicles that could more easily transit small, unpaved and muddy streets, and other problems played against creating a clean place to live in. The effects of living in such near proximity to accumulating rubbish were many. For instance, some of the effects described in the workshops included children getting parasites or cuts as they played where rubbish is scattered; the attraction and multiplication of rats, mosquitoes, flies and cockroaches that acted as carriers of disease. These meant that there were increased health problems in the area. This is pointed out by one of the doctors of a Primary Health Unit of the municipality of Moreno:

‘It is hard to say there are direct causal links between diseases and rubbish as there have not been scientific studies on this, and many other environmental issues play a part such as lack of potable water or sanitation, precarious housing and other hygiene issues. There have only been a few clear cases of death, but based on my experience, rubbish does bring up the load of cases, mainly of cuts, infections and parasites’⁸⁹

The health problem was raised during the controversy in the CABA, but it was much more acute and everyday in this municipality. The more everyday material encounters with rubbish, as rubbish spread over the streets, and impromptu and more established dumping grounds, were much more quotidian experiences in Moreno than in the CABA. The materiality of rubbish was more present and thus, the ways of living with rubbish were different in Moreno. The rubbish added to spaces of neglect, especially those of empty and abandoned lots, with overgrown grass and lack of lighting, which are also the ground of spaces of crime and illegality⁹⁰. These problems overlap with

⁸⁹ Interview with Gayoso, A., 17.1.2007, Doctor in Primary Health Unit, Moreno, Buenos Aires

⁹⁰ Fieldwork notes, 29.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop III, Moreno, Buenos Aires

many other environmental problems and lack of services and infrastructure that are not seen in CABA city centre (except maybe in the slums). These different material encounters and forms of living with rubbish, were made into an issue through the Focus Cities project.

The problems were very different indeed, but at the moment of prioritising a project, the participants in the 'Focus Cities' programme chose to first tackle the problem of rubbish, through an environmental awareness campaign and through a programme of separation and recycling, where *cartoneros* could be included. In trying to understand why people chose rubbish over other problems, I looked at the socio-material attachments that people brought to this issue in the Focus Cities workshops and my interviews. For instance, when the different organisations that wanted to conduct the environmental awareness campaign in Moreno presented their projects, the questions that were raised each time were about the space for their participation. Participants wanted to know how long the campaign would last, who could participate and how, how would they be trained, if it would involve payment, and so on. An IIED-LA member added the following insight:

'What mobilises most about rubbish has to do with its capacity to be participatory. People see it as easier to get involved with than for example constructing water pipes'⁹¹

The accessibility of rubbish is related here to the practices that do and undo rubbish. In both these practices, participants felt they could play a part. People felt that they were implicated with rubbish, and also that they could more easily help become a part of

⁹¹ Interview with Hardoy, J., 7.1.2008, Focus cities researcher, IIED-LA, Moreno, Buenos Aires

another way of relating to rubbish. It was easier for them to imagine different ways of handling rubbish: separating rubbish, raising awareness about the problems of not disposing of it correctly, engaging with the municipality and the collection companies to find solutions to some of the issues they face, were some of the ideas brought forward. This seemed more accessible than, for instance, the creation of sewage plants or pipes for potable water, which would leave them out of the loop as these activities require much more technical expertise. In this sense, people felt that they could also monitor and be part of the projects of rubbish, and thus keep the project within the range of practices that they could more easily control.

The choice of rubbish had to do with the links that were established between rubbish, the environment and social inclusion, through the controversy of *cartoneros*. The choice of a separating plant meant that *cartoneros'* work would be included and that they would have better working conditions. This tackled at the same time an environmental problem and a problem of social inclusion. As the separation of rubbish did not require so many technical skills, participants envisaged the ways in which more people could be included in this project. This extended to their participation too, as they saw ways in which they could be included in the process. For instance, they could be trained to become environmental campaigners. These were important issues in an area where unemployment was a major problem, especially for people without many skills or education.

Others have pointed to the visibility, closeness and everyday interaction with rubbish, which prompted them to want to do something about it, as the quote that starts this chapter poignantly shows. The way people in Moreno currently lived with rubbish was one in which rubbish was spread and ever-present in their daily lives in less 'contained

ways', and the effects of this were also more visible and quotidian. The visibility and materiality of rubbish were important. Rubbish was a daily struggle; it is something that did not go away, that stuck around. The consequences of not having a good way of managing waste were evident in their everyday life activities as well as in the way their areas looked. Rubbish provoked by sticking around for longer, and by its networks of associations.

However, there were other reasons for choosing rubbish over other projects that relate to the practices of this project. As the quotes show below, the presence and openness and engagement that the Secretary of Public Works produced in the process made people more inclined to choose this project over another, where the person in charge seemed more authoritarian. Learning and understanding more about the issue, and a seemingly inviting municipal interlocutor made the project more appealing too, as the quotes below show:

'When we were presented with the project of Los Robles, we were not convinced. The guy seemed very authoritarian. Then came the presentation on the project on rubbish. The Secretary came to the meetings and explained things clearly. I learnt a lot about rubbish, and learning was one of the things I enjoyed most about the Focus Cities project'⁹²

'What this Secretary has is that he shows himself more. He went to all the meetings, he carries it differently than the Secretary that proposed the Los

⁹² Interview with Bel, C., 4.1.2008, Focus Cities representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

Robles project. However, he does not delegate much, so that makes everything slow down. But he created a better impression'⁹³

The participatory space created by the 'Focus Cities' project allowed for different attachments to rubbish to be made, and the rubbish issue was shaped in a way that was more than a problem of service provision. Rubbish, as in the CABA, had become also an environmental and ethical problem. The controversy in the CABA probably influenced these connections, but without this space it is hard to see how they would have taken shape. In this way, rubbish became an important item on the municipality's agenda. The role of IIED-LA here was crucial for this, in their articulation of this dialogue and in mediating between the municipality and the participants.

To analyse the way rubbish became an issue in Moreno, I use Marres' understanding of the making of an issue. In this way, I showed how socio-material attachments were brought into the making of the rubbish issue in Moreno. This approach challenges accounts of deliberative processes by showing how these spaces were about more than ready-made, rational arguments and identities negotiated and deliberated in a participatory arena. But also challenges radical democracy approaches, as it shows that neither conflict nor a controversy needed to be the main ways that extend the parameters of what can be discussed, and thus, the parameters of democracy in Moreno. This description also extends the analyses proposed by Marres (2005, 2007) by showing how it can be useful to understand not only how issues are articulated in controversies, but also in small planned participatory and deliberative spaces such as those of the Focus Cities project in Moreno.

⁹³ Interview with Hardoy, J., 7.1.2008, Focus cities researcher, IIED-LA, Moreno, Buenos Aires

Understanding the socio-ontological attachments that mobilise participant's involvement, which highlights the ways that the material qualities of rubbish were important and how these were enacted through the process, started to show too, how this moment of the creation of an issue is important to the democratic process. This is because the way rubbish was made into an issue, would intervene in participants' livelihoods, as well as the livelihoods of many others, included non-humans. At the same time, it is important to look at how these more situated attachments are mediated into the making of the issue and how the way this is done through this process starts to engage with collective ways of making decisions about issues that cannot be resolved by individual solutions (Marres 2010).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how rubbish became political, by showing how rubbish became an issue in two different sites of the RMBA. In the CABA, what rubbish was, who was responsible for it and what to do about it was questioned with the emergence of *cartoneros*. Furthermore, I have shown how this controversy challenged established configurations of how we live with rubbish, and how the particular materiality of rubbish played a role in the creation of the issues around it.

As we have seen in the analysis of how this controversy played out in the CABA, and how the politics of rubbish seem to be slowly changing in Moreno, this process by which rubbish became political was not only a discursive matter. Different socio-material associations between humans and non-humans made rubbish into a

particular issue in the different sites. Some of the connections between these different actors were contingent, some involved conflict. But some were made stable through things, such as maps, laws, gloves, administration procedures, credentials, and involved many other ways of relating than those of conflict. These different ways of relating were not necessarily coherent, connected or built up to radical change, but modified the ways rubbish was done in the minutiae of everyday life, as well as in more eventful ways (Mol 2005b, Strathern 2004). This meant that the line drawn by radical democracy theorists between the political and politics blurred in practice as it became hard to keep the particular forms of relation and practices ascribed to each dimension separate in describing what took place in this controversy.

As useful as controversies can be in terms of highlighting the effort it takes to undermine the self-evidence of the configurations that we live with (Barry 2001), the case of Moreno showed that there are other ways in which issues can become political. In Moreno, there was no controversy around rubbish. Rubbish became political because an NGO created a space to discuss environmental problems. Because they wanted to help. This is far from the idea that the political is the inherent conflictive dimension of humans. How, who and the where, or what the public is, and how this comes to be does not need to be essentially fixed.

I argue, following Latour (2007), that there are many ways in which issues become political, but also different spaces and sites in which an issue gets done that are political. In this chapter, I have shown some of these spaces. The controversy highlighted the streets as sites of contention, as these were the spaces where *cartoneros* worked, where rubbish was made present, where neighbourhood assemblies met and associated with *cartoneros*, and where protests were done, as well

as other spaces such as trains and train stations. Other sites were those of more formal governmental spaces, such as the CABA legislature and CABA government programmes. The project in Moreno involved mainly the spaces of the participatory workshops, but also those of the municipality and NGO offices. In this way, I have shown an expanded set of the spaces, practices, things and relations that make up the ways the rubbish became political. These different ways in which rubbish became political challenged the prevalent ways of being-with-rubbish (Bingham 2006, Hawkins 2006). The analysis of the controversy and the planned deliberative spaces in terms of the making of the rubbish issue expanded the things, relations and ways in which we can think about the political.

In the next chapter, I will examine further the moments and sites of the trajectory of rubbish as an issue, through its itinerary in four different sites: its administration by the city government, its collection and transport by waste collection companies, its burial in the landfill sites, and its separation by a cooperative of *cartoneros*, which map an expanded sense of what may be considered political.

Chapter 4: Material politics. Doing rubbish in Buenos Aires

X: We had a discussion with other cooperatives which ended badly. Why? Because they have other politics. There are differences and we cannot align them. There are other ideologies.

Outsider: what type of ideologies?

Y: We don't cut bridges [a reference to a cartonero group who blockaded a bridge – a common strategy used by social movements to make demands]

Z: That's it, we don't do politics, we work.

X: In reality, we do politics, just differently. We work to grow as a cooperative, we consult each other and work together⁹⁴

There are many different ways to do politics, and proliferating meanings of the political. I have spent many months seeing how rubbish was done in different ways, in different sites and at different times in the RMBA. Spending time understanding this process led me to engage with different ways of understanding politics. In the quote above, the person working at the cooperative framed the everyday activities of the cooperative as building a different kind of political relations. This is placed in opposition and in parallel to other ways of doing politics, such as confrontation and going out to the public sphere to protest, to make an issue public. Of course, there are

⁹⁴ Fieldwork Notes, 9.12.2006, CERBaF, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

many other ways of doing politics too, such as the more formal decision-making processes of deliberation in parliament and elections, and social policy making processes and administration by the government. In Chapter 3, I have shown two different ways in which rubbish became political. I analysed the material disturbance rubbish generated in the autonomous city of Buenos Aires (CABA), and how rubbish became articulated through a controversy. I also followed another trajectory in Moreno, where rubbish was articulated as an issue through participatory and deliberative spaces. In this chapter, I will describe and analyse yet other trajectories of rubbish that I argue are also political, and that create a particular material politics.

These trajectories include the daily itinerary of rubbish that forms part of the waste management system, which could be thought of as part of the ways in which rubbish is governed (Bulkeley et al. 2007). I add to the more established forms of administration, collection and burial, a new association between the government and *cartoneros*, in the shape of a cooperative of *cartoneros* managing a government-owned separation plant. These different ways of articulating rubbish are connected as they are somehow stitched together to 'make up' the official attempts at governing rubbish. I use stitch instead of weaved, because I do not want to convey a sense of a harmonious, orderly, coherent process, but one which works together but in a not so consistent and sound way.

Through looking at these different daily itineraries of rubbish, I aim at describing and diagramming a material politics of rubbish. Hinchliffe, Kearnes and Whatmore use the term diagramming, following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), instead of representing to give a different sense of the complex activities and interactions involved in doing research with water voles (Hinchliffe et al. 2005). In this way, they aim at finding ways

of engaging and enacting worlds in a different way, and model a way of weaving together science and politics (Hinchliffe et al. 2005: 648). This chapter is an experiment at formulating a material politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires. For this, I follow and pay attention to the particular political protocols that rubbish creates around it, in its different trajectories and itinerary. At each stop in the itinerary, these protocols articulate and coordinate different practices in particular ways to create the material politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires. This chapter shows the complexity and difficulties that I faced trying to do this too.

In the first section, I situate the analysis of these practices as political. For this, I develop the work of Latour (2007) on the different possible meanings of the political as different moments in the trajectories of an issue. In order to find ways of describing not only the different moments of the trajectories of rubbish, but how these often take place in different sites, through different assemblages of actors, at the same time, and are coordinated in particular ways, I also discuss Mol's (2005a) work on multiplicity and coordination. I show how I articulate these elements to formulate a particular notion of material politics.

In the next two sections I analyse and describe how rubbish was enacted in four different sites: city government offices, waste collection companies, the landfill sites and a cooperative of *cartoneros*. Each of these sites takes on a prominent way of articulating rubbish, as alternatively, an administrative, business and technical issue, as well as one which combines these through a particular organisational attachment, that of a cooperative. Rubbish is addressed and articulated at each site in particular ways, creating different senses of the political. City government administration, waste collection companies and the landfill sites are grouped together in the second section,

as they form part of what could be described as different forms of governing rubbish. In the third section, I analyse what a new articulation of rubbish practices, in the form of a cooperative of *cartoneros* co-managing a separating plant with the city government.

Meanings of the political: time and space in the trajectory of issues

Rubbish is done in different ways through the articulation of different practices. In this section, I will describe, adopt and adapt tools from the work of Latour (2007), Mol (2005a), Law and Mol (2008) and Hawkins (2009) that allow me to construct a notion of politics, a material politics, that works for me to describe the everyday politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires.

Latour's (2007) work on the way politics turn around issues was important in terms of constructing an order in the array of meanings and uses of the political. As I described in Chapter 1, Latour (*ibid.*) points out the importance of the proliferation of the uses of the political in allowing us to count different sites, actors, instruments, means and materials in the practices that count as politics, and which play a part in constructing everyday relations that build our common world. He acknowledges, however, that this extension loses some of its effectiveness if the ways in which these relate to more normative political practices such as democracy. Latour (*ibid.*) proposes that politics should not be considered an adjective that describes a procedure, an activity, a profession, but following Marres (2007), as a type of situation in which an issue creates

a public around it, which produces instruments and procedures that are particular to the questions that arise from the issue at stake (Latour 2007: 813).

I have described in detail in Chapter 1 the five moments in the trajectories of issues, each of which carries a particular sense of the political. These moments in the trajectories of issues range from the creation of new associations between humans and non-humans, to controversies, questions on sovereignty, deliberation and governmentality (*Ibid.*: 816-8). Latour stresses that not all issues go, nor should go, through all these different phases. Each articulation of an issue forms its particular protocols and does not need to fit into all of them, or any particular one. Latour (*Ibid.*) encompasses these different moments of the trajectory of issues in the concept of 'cosmopolitics' (see Stengers 2010), which is used to convey politics in terms of how 'the progressive composition of the common world' is done, while at the same time specifying this term through the description of his five possible meanings of the political (Latour 2007: 818).

The work of Latour (*Ibid.*) is important in that it starts to map the different way issues are political by following the particular moments in the trajectory of an issue and reminding us to look out for the particular protocols that each issue brings at each moment. However, his emphasis on the temporal paths that an issue might traverse, does not help me understand how an issue might be different things, at different sites, at the same time, such as rubbish was. For this, I turned to the work of Mol (2005a), which through the study of the coordination of multiple practices at different sites that make an object, or I would add here an issue, what it is, allowed me to start to understand how this multiplicity of rubbish could hang together. I have described further her theoretical approach in Chapter 1, but I will highlight here the most helpful

elements of her approach for this chapter. For Mol (*Ibid.*), when we look at practices, we find that practices enact objects in particular ways. She finds that as practices differ between different sites, things are not a singular object, but 'more than one - and less than many' (*Ibid.*: 55). So, as enactments are multiple, so are objects; thus reality multiplies. This multiplicity does not imply fragmentation; as the object somehow hangs together due to different forms of coordination (*Ibid.*: 55). Mol states that by stressing multiplicity, she shows the permanent possibility of different configurations (*Ibid.*: 164). This is what she calls ontological politics. Mol, following Law (1994), shows us that instead of a single order, we need to think of different co-existing forms of ordering that interact in particular ways, compete, change, or die out (Mol 2005a: 69-71).

Her spatial understanding of politics is helpful in that it allows me to understand how everyday practices can be included, and how this makes more complex the different ways of doing politics, of being political. This understanding of how everyday practices enact rubbish in different sites could contribute to specifying further different senses of the political. For instance, when analysing rubbish, I found that everyday politics of rubbish at different sites had their own sense, and their particular protocol around rubbish. Within one moment in the trajectory of the issue, as governing rubbish is, I found different ways of enacting rubbish that added to the description of particular ways of being political, as well as gave me tools to understand how these related to other trajectories of rubbish and of the political, thus showing how different moments in the trajectory of an issue, can be at play at the same time, in different sites, or even in the same one.

I have described the use of different concepts for the study of issue-politics such as cosmopolitics and ontological politics. I found that the concept of ontological politics focuses its politics on the way things are done, coordinated, ordered and managed, while cosmopolitics seems to focus more on different ways of being political rather than in their coordination. Furthermore, as I mentioned above, one is more concerned with spatial dimensions of doing politics, while the other one could be said to be more interested in its temporal dimensions. In addition, both terms are concerned mainly with knowledge practices, and more specifically with science and technology issues.

In this chapter, I describe the politics around rubbish, which relates more frequently to more banal practices than those of knowledge practices. Because I am interested in seeing how rubbish is enacted in different ways, at different sites, at a particular time, but not focus solely on the making of associations, or in the forms of their coordination, I bring another term to work with, that of material politics. This term also comes from the same field of studies, but I found it more appropriate to what I am trying to achieve here: to analyse how politics shift according to the different ways in which rubbish is enrolled and enacted in particular situations (Hawkins 2009: 183).

Law and Mol (2008) define material politics as 'a material ordering of the world in a way that contrasts with alternative and equally possible modes of ordering' and that 'while material politics may well involve words, it is not discursive in kind' (*Ibid.*: 141). I found that, to start with, this definition encompassed the importance of the materiality of practices and of things, and of words, as well as prompted me to pay attention to the associations that built particular political relations. The practice of stopping to unfold and describe the different forms of ordering - and not a single order - at work, and their relations also gave me scope to think about the normative

meanings of particular associations and practices. This is the definition from which I started to engage with a material politics. However, my encounters and materials generated during fieldwork and different theoretical concerns that became especially poignant during the writing process changed this definition in different ways. I turn next to the analysis of the different itineraries of rubbish, within the moment of its governing.

Rubbish trajectories

The controversy around rubbish in Buenos Aires allowed me to first understand the creation of rubbish as an issue, as I describe in the previous chapter. The controversy put into relief and questioned the whole construction of the rubbish process, that is, the different means, sites and actors where rubbish was done. Many of these sites were part of what Latour (2007) describes as the fifth moment in the trajectory of an issue: the governmentality of rubbish. Except that the controversy had the effect of altering the articulations needed to be done at each of the sites. This moment of in-betweenness of rubbish – when it is at times and sites controversial, deliberated, done in everyday practices that produce new associations – not scientific ones, but lay ones like the work of cartoneros - and at the same time continue being governed, challenges Latour's too linear definition, as rubbish does not fit one particular trajectory. I will show this further in the particular sites, but for ease of categorisation (and division of this chapter in useful sections) I grouped these three sites together, as they did still constitute – before and after the controversy – the way rubbish was governed daily.

The materiality of rubbish is political in different ways. I have shown in Chapter 3 the power of rubbish to disturb, to interfere, to mobilise people around it through the controversy, and through deliberative spaces that prompted different articulations that addressed its materiality in particular ways. I described then how the controversy mobilised and produced different changes in the way rubbish was done: through the creation of new laws, Programmes and Directions in the city government, dialogue round tables, and administration processes, such as the register of *cartoneros*, health plans, and giving out of reflective clothes and gloves. This shook the ways rubbish was governed, to include other institutions, procedures, analyses, calculations, tactics, sites and actors in the process. In this section, I will focus not so much on the capacity of rubbish to disturb, but on the way it is addressed, enrolled and enacted in different sites and practices, each providing a different sense of the political. I start then with the city government.

Administration of rubbish in the City government: more than a well-oiled bureaucratic machine

The building of the city government offices of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene and its organization (and/or lack of it) seemed to me to talk about the way the government worked around rubbish. The way the floor was laid out and the way people interacted seemed very informal and not very organized. It was open in some ways, and had secret recesses. Having lived in Argentina for most of my life, and having encountered in many ways public bureaucracy, I was not entirely surprised to find a level of disorganisation, as these encounters would be better conveyed through Kafkaesque narrative than through the workings of a well-oiled Weberian machine. However,

somehow I had envisaged (or hoped for) a more organised and 'professional' environment in terms of learning how public policy was organised and practised.⁹⁵

One thing that was clear to me throughout fieldwork was that rubbish doings are messy. As I describe in my fieldwork notes above, the different offices, the different buildings I visited talked about this too. Everyday activities in the city government are already counted in the practices of politics. However, I wanted to include this itinerary of rubbish for two reasons. First, foregrounding the materiality of practices and hard work involved in this process contributes to a better understanding of the formal political process. Second, the different ways in which rubbish is done here, has effects on most other ways in which rubbish is done. The work of the government affects, through its presence and/or absence, and mediates most other sites where rubbish gets done. As I have described the process of the passing of two laws around rubbish in the previous chapter, I will concentrate here on the less studied itinerary of rubbish in the city government, that of administration. I will describe the difficulties involved in this mediating activity, which troubles more linear and dismissive accounts of this type of work.

In the previous chapter, I described numerous changes in the way the government worked with and around rubbish. These changes were done, in many cases, in a hurry. For instance, when I asked the chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, in charge of the waste management process, about where he worked beforehand, the following dialogue ensued:

⁹⁵ Fieldwork Notes, October 2006, Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

'V: I came from security, 80% of the staff working on rubbish came from the area of security, where we all worked together until a few months ago. We had to start from scratch on this new area.

Me: How did this happen?

V: It is one of the miracles of politics (half-laughing). Well, in reality, what matters is having a vocation towards public policy. It does not matter much what it is about, for that you hire specialists, and you learn on the job'⁹⁶

The changes in laws that I described in Chapter 3 needed translation into the everyday work of city government administration. The quote above points at some of the ways this was done. It meant creating new areas of work, which were done through quick shifts of civil service personnel. When he states that this seemingly random assignment of people from security to waste is a miracle of politics, he is alluding to the ways in which political decisions, especially in moments of change, are sometimes hastily applied. Finally, his description also does something else: he divides between politicians, as those interested in public policy and specialists, that is, professionals, or technicians, that are experts in particular issues.

The division here is similar to the one Latour (2004) describes as the modern division between Science and Politics. I encountered this distinction many times during fieldwork. In this case, the chief of staff situated himself as a person with a vocation towards public policy, one that could adapt to the circumstances. Most of the times this separation is done in a different, more pejorative way, where people would

⁹⁶ Interview with Villalba, E., 20.10.2006, Chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

position themselves as professionals, and in this way, distance themselves from politics, as the site of passion and interests - not for the public good, but for private interests. Weaving together expertise and politics goes against the grain, against the ways people I interviewed placed and described themselves. The descriptions of everyday activities, however, seem to challenge these purified accounts.

The laws and their regimentations described certain objectives to achieve and certain instruments to do so, but the way this was to be carried out was up to the creativity and resourcefulness of those in office, and those with whom they had to engage. The everyday work of rubbish politics included that of translating, negotiating, putting into practice these expanded legal obligations. The chief of staff highlighted his role as a politician, as I quoted above, but also as manager and administrator. Here is a description he gave of his everyday activities:

‘The chief of staff has to order the administrative side of things: the files, human resources, and special teamwork. There is also the need to create a team that manages things. The different specialized teams are in charge of dealing with technical issues regarding legal norms, communication, specific projects. The chief of government has to articulate and find whatever is needed. And he goes with the Subsecretary to meetings, and the follow-on meetings of the Subsecretary with NGOs. I am also leading different projects, which is why I don’t get home until 8 or 9 at night. Articulation has to be done, and translated into work groups. Apart

from that I deal with emails, information requests, consultancy and I go out with the teams too'⁹⁷

Administration involved, in his own words, a lot of articulating and translating: translating the law's requirements into projects, and projects into work groups. For this, articulation also needed to be done. Articulation is about engaging people and things: creating teams, looking for and negotiating for resources needed, bringing in people, talking, deliberating and negotiating with NGOs, finding ways around technical issues, creating forms of communication such as campaigns, administrative procedures, and so on.

The use the chief of staff gives to the term articulation and translation is described very much like the activity of enrolling, representing, constructing assemblages of people and things that ANT describes as non-modern politics, one that does not purify, that does not make a stark division between Politics and Science, and that foregrounds the heterogeneous associations involved. As Callon (1986: 224) points out, translation is the mechanism by which the social and natural progressively take form. We see how in practice, the division between Science and Politics seems less defined. The task of representation could be seen here to be about, not a transparent form of carrying out pre-existing interests and identities, but as an effect of particular articulations and assemblages. Representation then is a crucial form of mediation, if we understand mediation as transforming, translating and modifying the meaning and or elements that they are meant to be carrying (Latour 2005: 39). Another way of linking this to democratic politics is to understand, as O'Donnell (1999) point outs, that democratic

⁹⁷ Interview with Villalba, E., 20.10.2006, Chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

political institutions are forms of mediation and aggregation that that are crucial in that they are what give texture to policy making (*Ibid.*: 168).

This description gives us an overview of the type of work involved, but it is not so clear about the specificity of working with/around rubbish. I have described in Chapter 3 some of the ways the controversy around rubbish provoked changes in the ways that the government managed rubbish. Here, I will show another moment in the trajectory of rubbish, and a particular way in which politics turned around rubbish, by focusing on the everyday political administration involved in managing the contracts with waste collection companies.

The inclusion of *cartoneros* in the proposed separate collection of recyclables in the service of Urban Hygiene was not yet translated into the practice and policy of the official waste management system in 2008, even though the conditions for contracts, and the statements for the conditions for waste collection were revised at different points and *cartoneros* were by law, since 2002, supposed to be included in the waste management process. For instance, the revisions done to the contracts with waste collection companies that took place in 2002-2003 did not include *cartoneros* or the issue of separation. However, after the Zero Rubbish law was sanctioned in 2005, the contracts were modified in 2005 to include a new service of collection of recyclable materials for what were called 'great generators': four and five star hotels, buildings higher than 19 floors, public buildings of the CABA and the Puerto Madero corporation. This service was supposed to go to 'green centres' where *cartoneros* would work, but the legal opening of these centres was not yet established in 2005. By mid 2006, one of the centres, run by the cooperative of *cartoneros* of Bajo Flores, was

open. *Cartoneros* were still left out of the formal waste management strategy and the revised contracts, but there were some attempts at working together.

However, very small amounts of materials were separated. The compliance and enforcement of this resolution was almost negligible, as the following quote from the chief of staff describes:

'Who complies with this? Not even 10% [of the great generators] separated materials, not even public buildings, or if they were separated, the collection companies would mix them up in the trucks with everything else. The waste collection companies do not do the separate collections, and the generators don't separate, so green centres do not have material'⁹⁸

To start changing this lack of compliance, the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene created a campaign to enforce this collection of recyclable materials at the end of 2006. The programme involved enrolling and identifying more generators that were willing to participate in this scheme apart from those included in the resolution. For this, they organised one-to-one meetings with big businesses. These meetings brought up different issues that were not expected, as the quote below describes:

'There are surprises, for instance the distance between big business and waste collection companies. They do not communicate with each other. A lot of them were surprised and said they were not aware of this resolution'⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Interview with Villalba, E., 20.10.2006, Chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

⁹⁹ Interview with Villalba, E., 20.10.2006, Chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

To increase the separation they were going to do follow-up meetings, organise training for businesses, open consultation lines, and provide containers for separate materials. As an incentive, a new certification process was established that would measure the volume, the service and note the adjustments needed in the separation process. This certification would be done by 75 environmental promoters contracted for this purpose. In turn, these environmental promoters had to be selected and trained, which was done in partnership with the University of Litoral. However, the campaign stumbled upon another circuit of rubbish that was in friction with this initiative: the illegal selling of these materials collected before they arrived to their appointed destination. Cutting out this other way of doing rubbish was not easy, as the quote below points out:

‘It is hard for the material to reach the green centres. There was a good response from the generators, but it was much harder with waste collection companies. This was for different reasons: trucks that did not do the rounds as frequently as they were supposed to, or would not even do the rounds, or they did not send special trucks, or because they would never reach their destiny... we realised we were cutting a business chain that received this material illegally’¹⁰⁰

The legal circuit of rubbish crossed other circuits that worked, even if illegally, seemingly in cooperation, though started to create friction once things started to change.

This campaign lasted only for a few months. When I returned for fieldwork in October 2007, I was told the campaign that had started in October 2006 was stopped in

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Villalba, E., 20.10.2006, Chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

February 2007, due to internal political shuffles. This shows how political practices in this site, were affected by other political events and procedures such as elections. As the ex-chief of staff now in charge of environmental awareness, due to political shuffles, commented, 'everything is cut through by the elections'¹⁰¹. By this, he was referring to the internal struggles and, to, at the time, forthcoming city government elections in May 2007 as well as the national ones later in the same year. These events urged different alliances within the city government and forced many shuffles of personnel, with their concomitant changes of plans, stalling of others and changes of gear in different planned activities. This did not stop the separate collections for 'great generators' but the people involved changed, the budget was redistributed and the drive to make this an important part of the collection was gone.

In 2007, there were further changes in the specificities for contracts with waste collection companies that also failed to incorporate *cartoneros* effectively. However, they changed the way rubbish was valuable to the companies: instead of being paid by weight, they were to be paid by clean area. As *cartoneros* took away weight, and made the city dirtier, this meant more work for companies and reduced pay. How much to pay for clean areas was a very complex calculation involving different usage levels and the number of services required for these areas to be clean. These calculations included the increased workload of collection companies. This type of calculation would determine how much the different companies were paid. There was some scepticism in this move, as a government worker that wanted to remain anonymous pointed out:

¹⁰¹ Interview with Villalba, E. 9.10.2007, City environment officer, ex-chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

'It was a way to appease waste collection companies. The changes are supposedly based in complicated calculations, but what it ended up being was just a way of paying them the same, or even more'¹⁰²

As the quote above points out, to pay by clean area meant that it did not matter how much companies collected, as they would still be paid the same. The influence waste collection had in the government was the focus of corruption scandals in the giving of contracts at different times, throughout Buenos Aires (O'Donnell 2005)¹⁰³. In my interviews there were hints of these corruption practices, as well as of the lobbying power of waste collection companies, as when one interviewee, a government officer, pointed out:

'The appointment for the Direction of Cleanliness, who is in charge of the contracts for waste collection, is heavily influenced by the waste collection companies, in other words, he is one of them'¹⁰⁴

These corruption and lobbying practices show another way in which rubbish was found valuable.

The change of contracts, from weight to clean area, shows an attempt to alter the articulations around rubbish to accommodate, negotiate, and enrol new actors, without disturbing too much the existing practices around rubbish. By making present and highlighting other material qualities of rubbish, such as its visibility, odour, and its dangerous companions (that spread diseases) that make the city dirty, the focus on its

¹⁰² Interview with city government officer, December 2007, Buenos Aires

¹⁰³ For a more recent newspaper article on this, see for instance Di Marco, L., 27.01.2008, Un negocio millonario y poco transparente, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires

¹⁰⁴ Interview with city government officer, December 2007, Buenos Aires

weight recedes, at least in terms of the amount paid to companies. The way that the government found to deal with the conflict with waste collection companies and *cartoneros* interests, was to distribute the problem. The problem of weight and the amount of space needed was still important in terms of paying the landfill site, but it was not an issue now for waste collection companies, and *cartoneros* could do their work without posing a threat to the companies' profits.

In the end, the budget indicates that payments were increased to the companies. This was justified with the need to include a new object: containers for rubbish, and also, in some places, for separate recyclable materials. The city government official explained it to me in these terms:

'This will avoid people putting out the rubbish at the wrong time. The established time is between 7 and 9 pm, but many people do not do this and contribute to the city being dirty. This avoids all the excuses. And it puts rubbish out of sight more effectively'¹⁰⁵

The spread of containers was, as their name implies, a strategy to contain rubbish, to limit its associations, and it was a way of making it invisible. However, this was potentially a problem in terms of future campaigns to reduce the amount of rubbish people threw out. The Zero Rubbish law also contemplated the need for waste reduction strategies, and containers could potentially make it harder to control how much and who was throwing rubbish. When I asked about this potential conflict, the answer was that there was no such conflict, as there were no plans for reduction of rubbish, as the quote below shows:

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Villalba, E. 9.10.2007, City environment officer, ex-chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

'It's true, we never discuss the issue of reducing rubbish, maybe we do theoretically, but never as a policy. CEAMSE [Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado - name for the landfill site] is always saying: we have to reduce, and is always raising the alarm, but we don't'¹⁰⁶

This quote points that at different sites, the issues around rubbish were different, and to how, again, there was not a tightly controlled and coherent way of dealing with rubbish, but multiple ways of attending and working with rubbish through the city government.

The aim of this section was to show how accounts of administration and procedure, everyday practices of formal political work, can trouble simplified and dismissive views of what such political work involves. The politics around rubbish here was about changing some of the ways it was addressed and enrolled, by changing the emphasis of the material qualities of rubbish that mattered in particular sites: from weight to dirt, from an identified problematic lump, to a more differentiated treatment. In the next subsection, I will show a different set of practices around rubbish, which focuses on the work of waste collection companies, and points to a different way of creating associations that matter around rubbish.

Waste collection companies: business, corruption and informal politics

Waste collection companies specialise in the management of the collection and transport of rubbish. This side of the waste management system is assigned to private waste collection companies, as it is argued that as they are organised as specialised

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Villalba, E. 9.10.2007, City environment officer, ex-chief of staff of the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene, Buenos Aires

businesses that worked for profits, these would be more efficient at collecting and transporting the rubbish than the government. The waste collection system is organised in a particular way in the city of Buenos Aires. The contract with waste collection companies is one of service, as opposed to one of concession. Waste collection is not like water, trains, and other services in which a state company was privatised, that is, which was handed over to a private company in a contract of concession. Concessions imply that the private company manages the services and charges the users. Waste collection is a service that is still managed by the city government, which contracts a third party to provide the service.

For this, the government of the CABA, divided the city, at the time, into 6 areas, 5 of which were administered through subcontracting the service to private companies and one of them is serviced by the government. The *Ente de Higiene Urbana* (Urban Hygiene Entity) is the entity in charge of this latter area, supposedly used as a point of contrast, but which also happened to be the poorest and less profitable one. Waste collection then is one of the sites in which rubbish is done and addressed in particular ways: mainly in attendance to the problems in its circulation and transport, and through a business model of relationships that has to show efficiency in this task. In this subsection, I will describe some of the practices that this 'site' of rubbish involves, that show that this is not such a simple and straightforward achievement.

The first ordeal that waste collection companies face is the process of bidding for the contract. To get the contract they have to comply with a long list of conditions and participate in the bidding for the contract, a process which takes around a year. The management of transporting the rubbish implies something more than just picking rubbish up and taking it by truck to the landfill site. This also changed, since the

alteration of the contracts to their payments that I described in the subsection above, which establishes payment by clean area instead of by weight. This turned the emphasis to keeping the city clean. Cleaning, sweeping, waste collection of different materials and forms - from rubbish bags, to street posters, voluminous and green waste - were part of their activities. The responsibility to collect rubbish in different forms implies a successful articulation of different actors, and thus, the building of relationships between rubbish, neighbours, communal and city government and the company. Again, administration is an important element here, and as I describe below, there is much more involved than form filling. The justification to give this contract to a business that specialises in the matter at hand is that the incentive of profit is supposed to make their enterprise more efficient, and thus, provide a better service. This is however, a more complicated process than it might appear.

The prominent activity of waste collection companies is collecting and transporting rubbish, so I will start with a description of the logistics of actually collecting the rubbish. This was described as follows:

‘Rubbish collections are done between 9 pm to 1 am. An hour earlier workers arrive and get assigned a route, and a truck. They change into their uniforms, a suit and a support belt that gives support to their back for the weight lifting. Each truck carries a driver and two workers. They are given a map with the exact route they have to follow, and a mobile phone. They are monitored by GPS, which can also be accessed by government officers. Every 20th of the month, the route is rethought in case they encounter problems such as routes that could be done more efficiently if they were done in a different order, or in case some streets needed more frequent collections. In the rounds, the two workers that collect the bags

go standing on the back of the truck and the driver stops at regular intervals so that workers can hop on and off to pick up the different bags. After the truck has completed its route and filled the truck, they go to a transfer station, either in Flores or Colegiales, where they queue to have the truck weighed, to then unload the truck and come back to the base. Once in the base, they sign their way out, give back papers and the mobile phone and can then go¹⁰⁷

This seems like a well organised system, as a studied association of people and things work together in an efficient way: people, trucks, files and folders, uniforms, GPS, maps, routes, computers, mobile phones, phone lines all line up. The importance of this becomes clear when things are less stable and organized, as was the state-run waste collection entity, called *Ente de Higiene Urbana* (Entity for Urban Hygiene), as the quote below shows:

'We have less than half the budget than a private company. It is not supposed to be like that according to the specificities statement, but it is. We do other more challenging tasks too, like the cleaning of *villas* [slums]. We don't have the same working conditions. Private companies have 50/60 trucks, we have, pushing it, around 18. They don't stop: they come in, they come out. If they break down, there is no replacement. We now have a few new trucks. [..]

The level of activity was really low, now it is much better. He [the Director] got concrete things: he fought for the budget and got trucks, offices, clothes, bags, brooms. The management is not only about coordination and tidying, but getting resources. For instance, they were all standing up, there was no space. We

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Torres, D., 12.11.2007, Quality control manager, URBASUR, Buenos Aires

needed office space. I also asked for a fax, a computer, a printer. There was nothing here. It is impossible to work like that. A private company has statistics for everything, we don't have anything. Each achievement showed that we cared and worked, and it was valued. We did not have maps of the areas, which is basic. I put in place a computer system and access to the internet. A lot of things were done. This desk, the air conditioner, the computer, is the result of all our efforts',¹⁰⁸

Here the work of rubbish is also about administration and management. It is about trying to establish, maintain and improve a system to do what needs to be done, in this case, collect and transport the rubbish in the most efficient possible way. For this, forms, plans, maps, statistics needed to be brought in and created, and a group of people that works well together towards this aim. How things matter is more evident; without a particular association of things rubbish cannot be organised, the city cannot be cleaned. And management cannot be done.

As the quote above describes, management is also about getting resources. The way to get resources was not straightforward; it implied building contacts and networks within the different government offices responsible for the budgets. But we start to see what other things management implies, especially in the state run waste collection companies, as highlighted by the quote above. In the case of private companies, this is done through the contractual payments, which was a great part of the work involved for waste collections companies, as the quote below shows:

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Finelli, C., 26.12.2007, *Ente de Higiene Urbana* manager, Buenos Aires

'The specificities statement described conditions that the city government lays out for waste collection companies. The contract is the actual agreement. In this case, the contract is for 4 years. We have to send three copies of the proposal. The proposal is not a small pile of documents but something that occupies almost a room full of documents. There are both technical and administrative requirements. The process of selection has two steps. First, the city government inspects the technical requirements, to see if you can comply with the specificities statement. They check that you can comply with the work, with the people and the equipment you have. The contract is very detailed; you need to show even which type of brush you will be using for sweeping. Then they open the economic proposal. The whole process takes a year, from the specificities statement to the giving of contracts. And it takes around three months of my full-time work'¹⁰⁹

This lengthy and complicated process is the way private companies mainly work for resources. However, as I described above in the city government subsection, corruption in order to get contracts, as well as lobbying to a level that meant that the government officer in charge of contracts acted as their representative, also infiltrate these practices. The manager at the *Ente de Higiene Urbana* was open about the importance of building personal relations to get resources, as the quote below shows:

'When I arrived there wasn't even an address book. There was nothing, I had to 'knit' my way within the city government'¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Torres, D., 12.11.2007, Quality control manager, URBASUR, Buenos Aires

¹¹⁰ Interview with Finelli, C., 26.12.2007, *Ente de Higiene Urbana* manager, Buenos Aires

The description the *Ente de Higiene Urbana* officer uses of building personal relations as knitting within the government points to the slow work of creating a network of contacts that can be counted on for different needs. The additional problems faced by this public entity were also derived from the marginal role it played in terms of budget, and in terms of the marginal and neglected area of the city, as one government officer described it as 'the south [of the city] is the forgotten land'¹¹¹. The work of this entity was also cut through other practices that made the work at hand more difficult. The relative unimportance and neglect of this entity meant that it was a place that was used a lot to 'situate' people, what are called *ñoquis*¹¹², that is, to give people a salary in exchange for other political favours. This is a practice that is common in public service jobs, as will be seen in the next subsection, but that was enhanced here by the relative unimportance and lack of scrutiny this entity was given.

'The *Ente* was abandoned. It was a cave for refugees; it was never exposed to anything. We had to get people to respect us. There were drunk people, with guns, working here. If they did not like it, they could fire three shots and that was that'¹¹³

This dynamic of favours, networks and added time, effort, money into generating a particular form of management, was not reduced to the dealings with the city government, but also with neighbours and local government. The quote below describes this dynamic:

¹¹¹ Interview with Cariboni, F., 12.01.2007, DGPRU officer, Buenos Aires

¹¹² *Ñoquis* is the name given to people who are placed in public service jobs, for which they get paid, but that do not actually work. *Ñoquis*, the pasta, is traditionally eaten on the 29th of each month in Argentina. These people are called *ñoquis* because they just appear at the end of the month to get paid.

¹¹³ Interview with Finelli, C., 26.12.2007, *Ente de Higiene Urbana* manager, Buenos Aires

'When I first went to a meeting, the neighbours wanted to lynch you. Now, with the neighbours and with the CGP [Centro de Gestión y Participación -name of local government centres] I talk on the phone. They call me to my mobile. When I help out, then I am owed a favour. When I need something, I remember, so and so owes me one. It is not about the *Ente* but about people. It depends on you. I give more, I give myself. The extra effort pays off. I use my car, use my petrol. I meet with people after work hours. It all adds up'¹¹⁴

This way of forming relationships is crucial in their management 'strategy'. These informal and personal networks work well and are effective in getting resources and changing things, but are harder to fit in with the call for transparency, accountability and for the continuity that state policies are supposed to have, and with more formal accounts of government work.

From these narratives of the work of waste collection companies, we start to see how the management of the collection of rubbish was done. This included work around getting contracts and resources, as well as more administrative tasks of aligning and enrolling different actors for a smoother working system of collection and transport. In addition to the different relations that had to be built with the city and local government, and the neighbours, the relations with the truck driver trade union, one of the most powerful trade unions in the country, were also a great part of the way that the business was shaped. Their power to negotiate, in this case, was amplified by some of the material qualities of rubbish - as its materials rapidly decompose, creating smells, contamination, and attracting rats, cockroaches, dogs - which meant that the city government and waste collection companies needed to act quickly to avoid a

¹¹⁴ Interview with Finelli, C., 26.12.2007, *Ente de Higiene Urbana* manager, Buenos Aires

public outcry. The power of rubbish as material disturbance, as I described in the previous chapter, was enrolled by the trade unions for more leverage in their negotiations.

Rubbish, of course, was the matter of this business, so the business was inevitably shaped around it: from finding adequate brushes, bags and trucks, to the best routes, to getting contracts and funding, which had their particular protocol and involved also more informal use of personal relations, negotiations, and exchanges of favours. In addition, the weight of rubbish and the space needed for it were also important in terms of payment - though this was later changed - and also in terms of the particular trucks needed, the fuel, and the creation of transfer stations.

The next formal stop for rubbish, and where rubbish was enacted in a more technical way, was the landfill sites which were administered by CEAMSE (*Coordinación Ecológica Área Metropolitana Sociedad del Estado* – Ecological Coordination of the Metropolitan Area of the State).

The landfill site: the technical controversy

CEAMSE is the name for the state enterprise composed of the government of the Province of Buenos Aires and the government of the CABA. This enterprise is in charge of receiving, transporting, treating and disposing household waste from the CABA and 34 municipalities from around the GBA. The treatment of rubbish was mainly done by its burial in landfill sites. The city and different municipalities generate everyday around 15,000,000 kilos of waste, which makes approximately 5,475,000 tonnes of waste a year (CEAMSE 2007). The aim of CEAMSE, as their website proclaims, was:

'To bring to the community a modern and environmentally appropriate solution in the treatment and disposal of Urban Solid Waste of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires by articulating resources, knowledge, accumulated professional experience and especially, responsibility in the compliance with norms on treatment and disposal of waste, to guarantee the sanitation and the continuous improvement in environmental quality'¹¹⁵

CEAMSE's objective, as the quote above proclaims, is to dispose of rubbish properly, according to professional and technical expertise, abiding by the norms, to ensure and improve upon the environmental quality of the RMBA. In this subsection, I will describe how articulation is done, which implies more than just applying experience, resources, scientific knowledge, and norms to rubbish.

In this site, the materiality of rubbish is supposed to be managed technically, according to technical and scientific knowledge on the treatment and disposal of waste. This is apparent in the tour of the landfill site. Rubbish is dealt with in different ways, according to the different material qualities that arise in the attempt to treat and dispose of it in a proper way, that is, in a way that does not contribute to environmental degradation. For this, the work is divided and managed in different elements and stages, as well as sites where rubbish gets done. The first site and stage involve three transfer stations in the CABA where waste collection trucks are weighed, to then dispose of rubbish. This rubbish is later compacted and transferred into bigger CEAMSE trucks to be transported to the final disposal complex. This is done in order to reduce traffic to and from the landfill site and the CABA. Waste from the municipalities goes straight to CEAMSE. CEAMSE had, when I started fieldwork in 2006, three places

¹¹⁵ Taken from CEAMSE website: www.ceamse.gov.ar, last accessed 13.10.2010

of final disposal of waste (another one was in process of closing) called Environmental Complexes. By the time of writing, only one landfill site was supposed to remain open. Upon arrival at the landfill site, waste collection companies trucks were weighed, which was important as the landfill site charged by weight - and then entered and dumped the rubbish in the allocated landfill site.

The burying of rubbish itself was not simple. The tour guide described in detail the different processes involved in preparing the site, and the everyday practices around the burial of rubbish. For instance, before any rubbish is dumped, they have to prepare the site. This involves carving a space by digging a hole, then covering the bottom with a geological barrier, i.e. a particular type of soil, as well as adding a thick black impermeable membrane, which in turn is covered by a 30cm barrier of soil to protect it. Certain drainage materials are added to the bottom to help capture leachate - the liquid generated as acids from decaying waste react with other rubbish - that can be toxic and contaminate water sources and the soil. Tubes and a pump are also in place to get this liquid to a treatment plant. Tubes are also installed for the capturing of biogas - principally methane and carbon dioxide - released from the interactions of the materials of rubbish, water and heat. In this case, if left unchecked, gases can create spontaneous fires. This gas used to be burnt off in this landfill site, though more recently it has been used to generate energy, a process funded by international companies in search of carbon credits, through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

When rubbish is tipped onto the site, vehicles are driven over the rubbish several times to compact and flatten the rubbish (see Figure 9). Twice a day, a layer of soil

covers the rubbish so as to stop the rubbish from smelling too much, and from flying away.

Figure 9: Landfill site vehicles



The complex also hosted a treatment plant where the leachate liquid was treated with physiochemical and biological processes. Once treated, and when the testing results reached the admissible levels of contamination, the liquid could be thrown into the local water sources. Another section of the complex was dedicated to creating compost from green waste. The extraction and treatment of the gases generated also had its space in the complex. We can see here that rubbish is done in a different way. Its weight is important, as is the space it occupies, but also the materiality of rubbish, the associations created between organic and inorganic matter made particular claims for its handling. The aim of burying meant that more attention was paid to its materiality and to the products of its relations: gases, liquids, smells. Environmental monitoring was done through measuring contamination in water sources. The samples

were sent to external laboratories, public and private, to be examined so as to ensure an external control. The same was done for monitoring gas emissions.

A new development includes the *Recipark*, an area of separating plants, some run by private businesses and others by civil organisations of 'cirujas' who lived nearby. This is a development that started in 2005, as a creative way of dealing with people who entered illegally to the site. This new development shows how there were other associations and relations that needed to be acknowledged and articulated, apart from those of the materiality of rubbish. Landfill sites were surrounded by precarious informal settlements. Many of its inhabitants lived from the rubbish site. They entered illegally and took things, either to eat, use or sell along. Or, more accurately, they unofficially entered at set times, from 5 to 7 Monday to Saturday¹¹⁶. The associations rubbish created here, with marginalised people that lived on it, was a constant sore point for CEAMSE. The ways these were managed varied, and changed in time, from trying to increase security, to repression or arranged times for entering. A new way of managing this association was to include these people through providing job opportunities at separating plants.

CEAMSE was a site where different trajectories of rubbish intersected. First, as the Director of CEAMSE at the time put it below, CEAMSE was an instrument of public policy:

'The directory of CEAMSE is made up of both the government of the CABA and of the province of Buenos Aires. It is an instrument of public policy. It is a difficult issue, as it involves two governments and 32 municipalities [now 34]. It is an

¹¹⁶ Interview with Pozzuoli, M., 16.01.2007, In charge of the Department for separation, classification and recycling plants, CEAMSE, Buenos Aires

issue that crosses many jurisdictions. There is a need to create a dialogue around it, a way of generating consensus in a frame of respect and dialogue'¹¹⁷

The way rubbish was disposed of was political as it was a public problem, and ways of reaching agreements about how to do it were necessary. CEAMSE was also political in the ways in which everyday work was done, as for instance, in the new associations generated as they included people that were previously working illegally and in dangerous conditions, in a more formal work environment, in the separating plants. In addition, rubbish at the CEAMSE site became political in yet another way, not as a scientific and technical haven, or for being linked to different forms of social inclusion.

News of CEAMSE in the newspapers multiplied at different points mostly for being involved in contamination and corruption scandals, court cases, for the protests organised by neighbours and organisations around established landfill sites, and to stop prospective new sites. One of the sites, Villa Domínico was closed down due to contamination. At the time of doing fieldwork, CEAMSE figured prominently in the news, especially around protests surrounding the Gonzales Catán and Ensenada sites¹¹⁸. The claims against CEAMSE were of environmental contamination - of water, air and soil - that produced large numbers of cases of relatively strange diseases in the surrounding areas such as leukaemia, lupus, skin cancer, respiratory illnesses and rashes. In both sites, as in Villa Domínico, different court cases, which ordered lab tests, found that water was not fit for human consumption as there was a high presence of metals such as lead, arsenic and cadmium in water sources. Court

¹¹⁷ Interview with Hurst, C., 23.10.2007, Director of CEAMSE (landfill site), Buenos Aires

¹¹⁸ See for instance newspaper article, 3.11.2006, *Tras los incidentes, exigen el cierre del Ceamse*, *La Nación*, Buenos Aires and 2.10.2006, *CEAMSE contamina el suelo, el aire, el agua y la moral*, *Página 12*, Buenos Aires

resolutions ordered the closure of these sites, but these were not respected due to court appeals and lack of new spaces to dump rubbish.

Neighbours and environmental nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) mobilised to demand that these resolutions be respected. Protesters were regularly repressed by the police. The controversy around bad science, or the corruption of controls and management, were used to rethink and to discuss the amount of rubbish we throw and the different disposal possibilities. I described in Chapter 3 how scandals, closures and the opposition to the siting of new landfill sites was one of the issues that Greenpeace articulated in their push for the proposal, along with different city MPs, on a new law around waste, called Zero Rubbish.

CEAMSE had a weak line of defence in terms of these scandals. For instance, when I tried to discuss these scandals with my guide on the site, he was upset. His argument was that people were not knowledgeable about the science behind the landfill site and that it was used as a convenient political ploy, as he describes below:

‘People who know our work, who bothered to come and do tours of the site realised how professional our work is. The ones who continue protesting do not understand. It is hard to pin the contamination to the landfill site, as the conditions of those living nearby are not good. For instance, people live in precarious housing; have no drinking water or sanitation. We always monitor the contamination levels to make sure they don’t go over the allowed levels. We are

an easy political target. Any politician or organisation in want of some attention can use a campaign against us to win popularity'¹¹⁹

The landfill sites were all surrounded by precarious settlements. And these settlements had bad environmental conditions, as he describes. He plays here with the difficulty of proving where contamination comes from, in terms of strict scientific test that can give evidence of causality. These claims clash with the knowledge and experience of people living next to the landfill site. However, as he claims, for politics, no such scientific evidence is needed. If the landfill site was an easy political target, as he claims, this probably was because of its particular associations between science and politics – or the corruption of science by politics in the first place. Even the Director of CEAMSE at the time admitted in the interview that 'the fact that people live opposite the site is a mistake, a consequence of previous bad management decisions'¹²⁰. However, he was reluctant to admit that contamination would be CEAMSE's fault. In this way, once again politics is separated from science. This, as I described above, is a clear way of positioning behind Science, in a safe and protected sphere, against Politics, which only involves passions and interests.

Controls were in place, and laboratory testing was supposedly independent. This was also challenged by other accounts. For instance, a researcher working on waste told me the following story that came out of his interviews and research:

'I know that those tests from the labs, even though they are from external and renowned labs, are not accurate. I found it hard to believe that professional scientists of such good labs would do something like this, but one of them

¹¹⁹ Interview with CEAMSE guide, 16.1.2007, Buenos Aires, Argentina

¹²⁰ Interview with Hurst, C., 23.10.2007, Director of CEAMSE (landfill site), Buenos Aires

explained that some get bribed, not to invent figures, but to erase the possible problematic ones, that is, to avoid highlighting anything that looks too bad'¹²¹

This story resonates with the different findings in laboratories when these were required by court resolutions. Science was not immune to corrupt practices. Technical makings of rubbish were political here in different ways: in its everyday different constructions of rubbish, but also for corrupt practices and bad management. Furthermore, this led to questioning the whole model of waste management and to changes in the laws regulating it. There were still other relations that worked alongside these practices at the landfill site. The giving of public jobs as an exchange of favours between politicians was a practice present in the administration of the sites, as the quote by an officer of CEAMSE describes below:

'Many people here work well and know what they are doing. But of course we have our share of *ñoquis*, who are given their job because they know someone, and there are many other ways in which this place is used as an interchange of favours'¹²²

So doing rubbish is here about burying it, about managing its associations, about controlling its consequences, which is done by constantly creating a net of associations between trucks, earth, birds, machines that disperse, break and compact rubbish, film, pipes, draining agents, bacteria, worms, heat. But that is not all. The public and technical management of rubbish also implied, as in the other sites, dealing, creating, maintaining other associations with rubbish. One of them was, for instance, through generating agreements with people who come into the landfill site informally/illegally

¹²¹ Informal conversation, 10.12.2007, Social science researcher, Buenos Aires

¹²² Interview with CEAMSE officer, 21.12.07, CEAMSE, Buenos Aires

that lived on what they found at the site. Unofficial visiting hours were established, as well as a new form of association, between these people and the different materials of rubbish through the creation of new work spaces in separating plants.

In all these sites, there were different meanings of the political at play at the same time. For instance, in CEAMSE, there seemed to be three different moments of the trajectory of rubbish as described by Latour (2007) at the same time: the creation of new associations in the experiment with separation plants, everyday governing, deliberation through its board of directors, and controversies. Furthermore, within the moment of governing, each site had different forms of politics at play, and was criss-crossed by other events and issues. Studying different sites was also important to understand how the materiality of rubbish is enrolled and enacted in particular ways, and thus, plays different roles in the making of political processes. This different ways of doing rubbish, further specified the moment of governing rubbish, but also gave a more complex understanding by showing how these moments are not pure, but can be more mixed up and also influenced by other forms of politics.

All these different entangled moments and sites of the trajectories of rubbish somehow worked together. This, however, does not imply coherent process, but rather one that found different ways of relating and distributing differences and conflict in different sites and through different devices, such as the contracts of rubbish, managed to work without much daily friction. These three sites were closely interlinked as they are supposed to follow the everyday itinerary of rubbish in different sites, but were also deeply entangled and affected each other in unexpected and expected ways, at different times and spaces.

Studying the different practices around rubbish, which include different circuits, conflicts, practices, actors, sites, means, and the different relations, coordination, negotiations, accommodations, distributions, showed me some of the complexity of governing, in this case, rubbish. Furthermore, it confirmed for me the importance of the move by Latour, Law and Mol (Latour 1993, Law 1994, Mol 2005a), amongst others, who questioned the force and extent of one dominant discourse as proposed by Foucault. The multiplication of ways of doing rubbish, apparent in the different practices described above, and the way these were non-coherent but somehow and probably because of this non-coherence, seem to work together, and the way these were also affected by other relations and events, were vivid enough, and made me understand better the usefulness of ANT in the study of politics.

However, I also started doubting the need to think about politics as a coordination of modes of ordering. The issue here is that to understand the non-coherence as ordering seem to be distracting from the work of politics here, and that these studies also emphasise, that politics is about the ways we build our common world. The question of how or if this is done well, is how politics can be linked to a more normative oriented concerns such as those of democracy. What this work showed was that these normative task is not simple, as these different sites and ways of doing politics also multiplied the notion of what it would be 'good'. This emphasis on ordering, which comes from an engagement with the literature on the construction of social order might not be the most productive engagement if we are trying to understand what governing is about. In this way, the notion of material politics started to change from what I started with.

In the next section, I examine a different moment of the trajectory for rubbish, one in which rubbish was done in a different way, and that formed new associations between humans, and between humans and non humans. This is the experimental association between rubbish, *cartoneros* and the city government through the co-management of a separation plant in Bajo Flores.

New associations: the experience of a cooperative of cartoneros

‘What we did in the end was much more than just obtaining legal status. We started talking about the transformation of things, the recovery of work, about dignity, which was our drive to do the work we did, and what we did...’¹²³

The majority of *cartoneros* worked on their own, and preferred it this way. *Cartoneros* experienced and encountered rubbish, and enrolled rubbish in a different way from the way it was done in the sites I described in the previous section. Their work was an individual enterprise, their body the main tool they used in the undoing and remaking of rubbish. They took what is considered rubbish to others, to give it value again, maybe not in its original form, but at least taking care of the materials of which they were made of. They chose materials, compacted them, ordered them, cleaned them, and later sold them. The materials re-entered a productive circuit, a value circuit. Being a *cartonero* was very hard on the body; it relied on walking, carrying heavy loads, bending down, using hands to feel, touch, grab, fold, compact materials. It meant exposing the body to the risk of cuts, of poisoning, of touching hazardous substances.

¹²³ Interview with Monzón, F., 18.12.2006, President of CERBaF (Cooperativa Ecológica de Recicladores del Bajo Flores), Buenos Aires

They were at the forefront of the re-creation of value by using mainly their bodies, and what they managed to create for a cart, in order to rescue materials out of their dumped destiny. It was a very different way of doing rubbish than what I described above, which required machines, bags, trucks, forms, meetings, mobiles, fans, desks, management systems, political favours, and so on. So *cartoneros* could be said to re-materialise and re-value rubbish, though this would probably not be the way they would have described their work. When asked, most of them would say they were just trying to make a living (Perelman 2007, Schamber 2007b, Suárez 2001). However, as the quote above points out, some *cartoneros* started to describe their work differently, as the president of this cooperative did; especially those who attempted to work collectively in cooperatives.

Initiatives to work collectively started to change the individual nature and the mediations involved in their work with rubbish. Most of these initiatives have been in the form of cooperatives. In 2007, there were around 14 cooperatives of *cartoneros* in the RMBA (Paiva 2007: 153). *Cartonero* cooperatives were formed mainly as organisations that recover, collect, accumulate, store, and sell recyclable materials, mostly with the aim of eliminating 'intermediaries', in order to get a better deal (Paiva 2007: 153, Schamber and Suarez 2007a: 41). The activities, aims and membership of each cooperative vary from one organisation to the other. What makes cooperatives different from other commercial activities is that property is collectively owned; any profits have to be distributed proportionally amongst its members according to a consensual agreement and decisions concerning its organisation must be dealt with democratically (Schamber 2007c: 218).

The work of *cartoneros* in cooperatives was almost negligible in terms of the number of cooperatives and the number of people these involved, as opposed to the number of *cartoneros* that worked independently. However, cooperatives are important as they occupied a larger space in the collective imagination. Cooperatives have often been hailed in the media, political parties, and the government, as the way forward in terms of how to include *cartoneros* in public policy action (Schamber and Suarez 2007a). This romantic view of cooperatives is usually based on ideological or political positions that see in these type of organisations as, in one extreme, a counter-cultural, revolutionary way of organising the rubbish business, or on the other side of the spectrum, as the most digestible way of encountering *cartoneros*.

This is a dangerous proposal, as the few existing cooperatives face many problems and challenges and most have not found sustainable ways of working without external support. This view is supported without much thought on how this could work, and assuming that the conditions for this type of organisation to work are given rather than needed to be constructed (Schamber 2007c: 220). As I re-write this chapter in 2010, I read in the news that *cartoneros* will now be included in the formal waste collection company. Not as individual workers, but as part of cooperatives. The plan is that cooperatives of *cartoneros* would have to enter a bidding process, in which they have to present their work plans, their plans for environmental awareness campaigns, and their logistical needs, in order to aspire to be assigned an area for collection in the CABA. The government promised to 'invest at least 120 million pesos a year in formalising their work, which would include the payment of incentives, health plans and the provision of trucks to transport the merchandise and for other logistical

issues¹²⁴. This gives more urgency to finding ways of understanding how things work and what politics are involved in the making of rubbish in these type of organisations.

This discursive construction of cooperatives as the best possible trajectory for materials to be separated, sorted and sold stirred my interest in seeing how such a cooperative worked in practice. Furthermore, the different practices involved in the making of rubbish by *cartoneros*, through a cooperative, and in a separation plant owned by the government created a very particular way of doing rubbish where new and old trajectories of rubbish intersected in creative ways, which made it difficult to define, as the effect was a particular mixture of formal and informal work, technical and embodied knowledge, with influences of private, but also of cooperative, imperatives. The trajectory of rubbish here was an intersection of different ways of doing everyday practices around rubbish, which also related with other ways of doing rubbish: elections, public administration and bureaucracy, and 'informal' politics. The workings of this cooperative was a complex process in motion. I had the opportunity in my two different fieldwork experiences, for three months each, to work there in different ways, which allowed me the chance to understand how things worked, and how they changed. I will focus on two dimensions of the work of this cooperative that highlight the different challenges and different everyday political practices that were at play in this cooperative re-making of rubbish: decision-making in a cooperative; organisation, administration and transparency at work.

¹²⁴ Gutman, D., 8.7.2010, Confirman que los cartoneros levantarán la basura reciclable, *Clarín*, Buenos Aires

Learning skills in decision-making

Working individually for *cartoneros* meant relying on their own work. Individual *cartoneros* decided when, what and how to do their work, and got cash in hand once the materials were sold (Schamber 2007c). To work in the cooperative of Bajo Flores, meant a change to many of these ways of working. First, the cooperative received separate materials from waste collection companies, organised by the city government, which meant they no longer went out to collect. Second, they did not choose when and how to work, but were part of a collective organisation of their work, which in this case meant set times and days for working, and third, they did not get cash in hand at the end of the day, but at the end of the month. The way the work was to be organised, how profits were supposed to be divided, and how decisions were taken were all supposed to be cut through their chosen form of organisation, that is, a cooperative. As I described above, in cooperatives, property is collectively owned; profits need to be distributed proportionally amongst its members according to a consensual agreement and decisions concerning its organisation must be dealt with democratically (Schamber 2007c: 218). One of the bases of a cooperative is a democratic procedure for making decisions.

Learning the skills and what it takes to create a decision-making procedure was not easy. For this, the cooperative members needed to learn how to organise themselves, that is, create rules and procedures, as well as find ways of making decisions together. Once they had legal status – a bureaucratic seal of approval from the government that involved much paperwork- they also had to bind themselves to a statute which describes the way the cooperative is supposed to run. This is a kind of ‘contract’ that every cooperative has to do, which follows strict guidelines from the INAES (*Instituto*

Nacional de Asociativismo y Empresa Social – National Institute for Associations and Social Enterprise), the government agency that regulates social enterprises such as cooperatives. The cooperative statute describes the way it should be organized. This included an administrative council composed of a president, a secretary, a treasurer, and two reserve council members (*vocales*). The reserve council members would step up in case any of the others could not be there, or had to step down. This council is in charge of administrating and representing the cooperative. Two trustees (one holder and one reserve) would keep in check the work of the council. The administrative council could make punctual, very specific everyday decisions without calling for an assembly of all the members. However, assemblies were the supreme and sovereign organ of the cooperative, where all its members could express their will. All members here are equal and their voice counts as one vote for each person. The translation of these rules into practice was another matter.

Self-organisation was not easy and none of the founding members had experience doing this. They were used to organising their own individual work, but did not know how to make this transition from individual to collective cooperative work that involved deliberation, meetings and reaching agreements. These new practices had to be learnt, from the very basics, as the example recounted by the then president of the cooperative, Francisco Monzón, shows below:

‘Challenges, uff! We faced all kinds of challenges! One of the first ones was about meetings. We had to ban booze in meetings. Many times people were drunk in meetings, or if not, we opened some wine and got drunk during them. But at the end of the meeting we did not have any points to write down; decisions and discussions had gone astray. Nobody managed to remember if

any decisions were made. So we banned people from coming drunk and we banned drink in the meetings. If they came drunk, they were sent away. What people did at other times was their business. It made a big change, it changed the whole formation. We changed the way the meetings were perceived, and the way we perceived ourselves. It made it a more dignified thing, and it made us recover a culture of work that had been lost'¹²⁵

How to carry out meetings is not something that people just know how to do. Just getting together to talk is not enough. Some things need to be in place. A drinking ban marked a change in the dynamics of how the cooperative was run, and the way people perceived meetings and this new workspace. This formalisation of meetings was important for them to respect the space of deliberation. One could not just show up in whatever state, but had to be present in a proper way. The rules of the cooperative stated that decisions had to be made together democratically. This is one of the ways in which the cooperative translated its ideas into practice, its decision-making space into a more formal and respected space. But this was just the beginning.

The challenges changed over time. In my second visit, not many of its original members were members anymore, and I was told the changeover of people was very quick. The atmosphere seemed to have changed too. People seemed less hopeful than the first time round and they voiced their discontent in different ways. Some of this discontent had to do with how decisions were made'¹²⁶. One of the first insights into some of the problems involved in the administration and decision-making of the

¹²⁵ Interview with Monzón, F., 18.12.2006, President of CERBaF (Cooperativa Ecológica de Recicladores del Bajo Flores), Buenos Aires

¹²⁶ I will keep the identity of members anonymous, as many times these were informal conversations and because many asked to remain so.

cooperative was when I was asked, out of the blue, on my second day of working there, the following question:

‘Is there any way we could get rid of the president of the cooperative?’¹²⁷

This question about the way the cooperative worked surprised me in two ways. First, I was not expecting them to want to get rid of the president. Second, I had assumed that people knew the rules and although I did not know how decisions and information flowed as I was not allowed to go to the meetings, I guessed that people could have a say and knew their rights as members of the cooperative. Working there made me realise that this was not precisely the case. There were different complaints. For instance, the new president of the Cooperative, Lorena Monzón, the daughter of the earlier president, stated that the problem was that people did not show a sense of ownership of the cooperative, and did not participate in meetings, as below:

‘The problem is that people do not participate. They do not have a sense that the cooperative is theirs too. We present the issues in meetings and they are all silent’¹²⁸

We encounter here an effort in terms of involving different members, and an indifferent response. Others, members that worked separating materials at the back, pointed to other issues, from using meetings to state facts instead of spaces for dialogue, to the silencing of people through threat of losing their jobs, as for instance these quotes show:

¹²⁷ Informal conversation with N., 21.11.2007, CERBaF member, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

¹²⁸ Interview with Monzón, L., 12.11.07, New president of CERBaF, Buenos Aires

'When Lorena became president, it was a deal decided between Francisco and Lorena. They went into their office, talked and when they came out they told us, Lorena is the next president. Anybody has a problem with that?'¹²⁹

'Whenever anybody says anything the admin does not like in the meetings, they are just told 'the door is just there''¹³⁰

'Look, I worked before in a collective setting and meetings were done every week and we had a good discussion. Here meetings are few and far between and there is never a discussion, it is more to give us done deals. Maybe this works with people who have never worked before, but anybody who has any experience will not be happy with this'¹³¹

These different stories about what happened in meetings reflect how meetings and assemblies did not work as channels to solve problems or as participatory decision-making venues. On the one hand, the president complained that people did not participate, that they were lazy about coming to meetings and that they did not act as if the property of the cooperative was theirs too¹³². On the other hand, most of the members did not seem to know what working in a cooperative meant in terms of their right and responsibilities, though they complained that they did not really have a say in decision-making. There seemed to be growing distance, and discontent, between those working in administrative capacities, which were at the same time the ones making decisions and leading the work of the cooperative and those working separating the materials. This division often mapped onto the distance between family

¹²⁹ Informal conversation with X., 27.11.2007, CERBaF member, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

¹³⁰ Informal conversation with Y., 27.11.2007, CERBaF member, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

¹³¹ Interview with D., 11.12.2007, CERBaF member, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires

¹³² Interview with Monzón, L., 28.11.07, New president of CERBaF, Buenos Aires

relations - those more proximate to administration tasks, were also closer family members, while others were part of more distanced family circles or acquaintances. This division was also spatial, as offices were at the front, while the deposit where the separation was done was at the back. This distinction was used in everyday conversations to signal this division. The way the work was organised and divided is what I discuss next.

Issues of organisation, administration and transparency at work

The Cooperative was situated opposite the grounds of the San Lorenzo football team ground, and five minutes walking distance from one of the largest, poorest and more violent *villas* (slums) in the CABA. The buildings of the separation plant were isolated from its surroundings by a big fence wall, and were guarded by a policeman. Once inside, there was a first building that had a large meeting space, connected to the bathrooms, kitchen and office. This building connected to the back area where the actual separating plant was: a huge tin-roofed deposit where the machine with a line for separating materials was located, as well as the space for dumping the loads of the incoming trucks, for the compacting machines and for storing the materials. There was an area outside and behind this where the rubbish was stored and where the trucks came in and got weighed.

The cooperative had organised their work in a way that resembled that of a factory. They worked set hours, from 8 am until 5:30 pm, Mondays to Saturdays; had a lunch break and a salary at the end of the month. The cooperative had been given this space and materials to work with by the city government, in order to work in a healthier and safer way with rubbish. When they started working at the plant, they had uniforms,

shoes, masks and gloves. A certain division of labour started to creep in, that also resembled that of a private factory, a division between those working at the front, and those at the back, between administrative work and manual work, between management and sorting rubbish. These are all things that belonged to a more formal businesslike working environment, and that made it look more formal.

However, the difficulties in organising work in a way that aligned the particular organisational forms of a cooperative, the new technical organisation of rubbish work, plus the administrative requirements and expectations of formal work and the pressures in terms of becoming part of a public enterprise, made it hard for stable associations to be formed. As the statements from INAES describe, each cooperative is also an enterprise so it has to be organised in such a way that is 'efficient and effective'¹³³. As an organisation in the process of being formalised, and working in partnership with the government, they needed to embrace new practices of accounting, reporting and organising. If before they just counted their earnings in their heads, and learnt to calculate the amount of money the material collected in the day was probably worth; now, they were supposed to fill innumerable forms, with very particular requirements, keep records, order documents, get insurance, keep tabs of presences, absences (and their medical justification) and times worked, pay salaries, have bank accounts, do legal paperwork, negotiate with the government, control and weigh waste collection trucks, keep accounting books, write reports, be audited, and, more generally, be accountable for the work of the cooperative as well as separate, collect, clean, compact and sell materials with the mediation of different technologies and things. All these different jobs required learning new skills, and at the time of

¹³³ Instituto Nacional de Asociativismo y Economía Social (INAES), <http://www.inaes.gob.ar/es/articulo.asp?id=39>, last accessed 1.10.2010

doing fieldwork, these were not organised in a stable manner. For instance, below is an account of the problems faced during their first audit:

'The first audit we had, it all went wrong. They told us they were auditing us since we started working here, but no, they wanted to know everything from when we started being a cooperative. They wanted all these papers and documents that we had no idea we needed. The accountant we had, disappeared. He did not answer the phone, and he was never home. It seems that he had done it all wrong. I entered the numbers he told me in the books, but apparently I did not do it right. All the money we paid was for nothing. In the end we had to pay two accountants to do everything in a very short time, which was very expensive. The trustee, which had to write reports every three months, had not done so because he did not know how to read and write...'¹³⁴

The relationship with the government, and its concomitant new administrative demands required new skills, as well as new materials. To function in this way, the cooperative needed a lot of support. Even though some of the members had received training in the form of different workshops and courses, it seemed that it was not enough. Perhaps a more everyday care(ful) relationship was needed. The more regular support needed was not formalised, planned beforehand or expected, it was requested and sometimes given as things went along in this experiment and the different actors learnt about the needs of their association.

Issues relating to the sorting and separation of rubbish were also organised in ways closer to their previous experience than that resembling more formal factory work. For

¹³⁴ Interview with Monzón, L., 28.11.07, New president of CERBaF, Buenos Aires

instance, uniforms, gloves, masks and appropriate shoes were provided at the beginning, but they slowly disappeared, as members took this home, or stopped working and never returned them, and so on. The same happened with soap and towels, which meant that each person had to bring their own. With the exception of gloves, these items were not replaced. This meant that health and safety were not paramount considerations in terms of the organisation of the work. My experience working there, as I have described in Chapter 2, showed me how clearing the mound of rubbish that waste collection trucks dumped on the floor meant that we had to bend down constantly, step onto glass, and basically be in close proximity with very mixed waste which was many times hazardous. We also inhaled the persistent rubbish dust as we worked. The standards of health and safety were not great.

There were many other networks used in the building and running of the cooperative that relate more to informal ways of working, but also to the personal relations that cut through the way this cooperative worked. For instance, many times I went and there was a huge bag of bread and pastries that were given to them by a local bakery. Or food was sometimes given to them or bought at cheap prices from soup kitchens, when they had leftovers, or when these soup kitchens were not running as they should –i.e. they did not work as such but received the food and sold it. The leader of the cooperative, Francisco Monzón, had numerous contacts in the government and trade unions that helped him in different ways, such as having access to government subsidies that complemented salaries. These ways of getting by added to the more formal ways of keeping the cooperative going, and were linked to personal but also clientelistic relations with the government. These were effective in terms of enhancing

their work, but perhaps not in the more formal normative terms of democratic transparency and accountability.

There were also grey areas in terms of the formal status of members as workers. I assumed that workers were formal – that is, they had all the paperwork, and benefits associated with this (pensions, health insurance, and so on), as they were working with the government. This was not the case, as I learnt when a conflict exploded between some members of the cooperative and the administration. Cooperatives have different rules than other commercial enterprises. To be able to formalise workers and access the benefits this included, the cooperative needed to pay these with its profits. Until they reached a certain level of profit, they could not afford to do so. The president of the cooperative explained that they had to slowly discount different things, such as personal insurance, from the members' salaries to give them basic cover. However, they were not earning enough to afford other benefits, such as health insurance¹³⁵.

It seems I was not the only one assuming this formal status, as this was the core of the protests and dispute with some of the members of the cooperative who decided to block the entrance of the cooperative, and who filed a complaint in the Ministry of Labour. These members accused the administration of the cooperative of mismanagement and of keeping the money instead of giving them these benefits. Two issues raised my attention. One was where this complaint was filed. The members of the cooperative turned to the Ministry of Labour, but this Ministry does not work to resolve conflicts in cooperatives, only those of commercial enterprises. This action

¹³⁵ Interview with Monzón, L., 28.11.07, New president of CERBaF, Buenos Aires; Interview with Suárez, F., 3.12.2007, Anthropologist working on waste issues, Universidad Nacional General Sarmiento (UNGS), Instituto del Conurbano. UNGS, Buenos Aires

could be understood as members being unaware of the particularities involved in working in a cooperative.

The second issue here relates to this lack of awareness, as it implies that the knowledge and practise of members' rights in a cooperative, and the sense of ownership that is attached to this were absent. Obviously the routes of general meetings and assemblies did not work as a way of talking about and resolving the troubles that they faced, and for understanding the problems and issues facing the cooperative. As the conflict unfolded while I was working here, I had the opportunity to use this incident to gauge how much members understood about what working in a cooperative implied, and my conclusion was that most of the members I interviewed, especially those working 'at the back', did not know their rights and responsibilities as members of a cooperative. This relates to the issue of the need for communication and transparency in the work of cooperatives that was not handled very well. This was portrayed, depending on who I was talking to as a lack of desire to be responsible, and in others, as a lack of awareness that resulted from a deliberate strategy from the administration. The conversation below with some of the members of the cooperatives portrays this lack of information, and of clear and proportional distribution of profits.

We were near the end of a long and hot day. We were complaining about how tired we were.

Me: At least you know that the harder you work, the more money the cooperative makes, and thus you will be better off

M: hahaha (laughing)

M: (snorted)

S: if only it worked that way

L: what do you mean?

S: however much we work and however well we do, we always get the same¹³⁶

Different conversations I had with the supervisor of the plant, with the president, and different members, did not generate a sense that particular efforts and work would be rewarded in any way, as for instance getting a proportional amount of the profits they brought in, as the dialogue above suggests. The forms of organisation started to slowly resemble more congealed ways of working such as those that could be found in commercial enterprises or factories: divisions and conflict between the front and the back, or the admin vs. manual labour.

There was a lack of transparency, a lack of effort or skill in making things available and clear. The income of the cooperative came from two main sources: the building of houses and through the separation and selling of recyclable materials. The way these two incomes were distributed and re-used was not very clear. The administration staff told me it was a juggling act: some of the income from the building of houses was used to pay workers, both builders and 'separators', but while the builders did not get paid to do houses, they used the second income to buy materials and pay some salaries to continue working until they were paid. The separation and selling of materials depended a lot on the material brought by waste collection companies. In this case, the contract with the government, which made them stay in the separating plant,

¹³⁶ Fieldwork Notes, November 2007, Bajo Flores, Buenos Aires. I have used this quote in the methods section to show the strategy of eliciting issues I used as part of my fieldwork; I use it here for its content.

stifled some of their skills in that it prevented them for looking for their own materials, which was partly what they were good at doing and meant they had to rely on others for this to be done. The work was slow, and thus the income of the cooperative was not very high partly because the material was insufficient and very mixed. The reasons for this lack of material are described in the subsection on the administration of rubbish by the city government above.

These juggling acts were not justified and explained clearly, and it did not seem to be the result of a collective decision but was basically done by the few admin people in charge. If this was not fair, or was not done well, is hard to tell. However, the impression that many of the members had was that money was being taken away from them. This was not helped by the fact that people working in the separating plant did not have a clue how much material was coming in, or sold, and at what prices. During my fieldwork there, I found it hard to ask questions, and even harder to get answers, about the income they got, and the way it was distributed. I felt that it was both a matter that was meant to be none of my business, but at the same time I got the feeling that they did not have a very clear idea, or a coherent policy of doing this. When Lorena, the new president of the cooperative, was describing their juggling acts, their problems with keeping the books, and when I saw that the comings and goings were quickly jotted down in a notebook, I could not help but feel that they were just trying to get by and that they were probably not brilliant at keeping accounts. Nothing can be confirmed in terms of things being badly managed or accusations of keeping extra money, but there was a general lack of trust and discontent about money and administration that was not helped by the lack of transparency, or of clear incomes, targets and rewards, and by the lack of communication.

The work of the cooperative - decision-making, organisation and administration - implied the creation of an assemblage between people, new practices and materials around rubbish that brought together existing and new relations, administrative procedures, expectations and norms that were very hard to stabilise. People and things did not lend themselves to this particular form of organisation and articulation of everyday practises around rubbish well in this case. As one government officer commented on the aims of the city government towards *cartoneros*:

'It was a bit naive to want to change informal workers into fordist workers overnight'¹³⁷

Doing rubbish here was being transformed from an individual experience, one-to-one dealings with the materiality, and the materials of rubbish, using mainly their bodies and few other tools, to a collective enterprise that included many others in its doings: compacting machines, gloves, separating lines, forms, pay cheques, insurances, audits, accounting books, assemblies, offices, government officers, discourses on cooperativism and democracy, with its concomitant expectations, materials and instruments, amongst others. This moment in the trajectory of rubbish, where new relations between humans, and between humans and non-humans generated another way in which rubbish was made an issue was as complex, but not as stabilised, as the different sites I described in the section above.

Conclusion

¹³⁷ Interview with Cariboni, F., 16.10.2007, DGPRU officer, Buenos Aires

The aim of this chapter was to find a way to chart the material politics of rubbish. For this, I used the distinction Latour (2007) gives of the five meanings of the political, as different moments in the trajectories of issues, but worked this in conjunction with Mol's (2005a) notion of the multiple. This articulation allowed me to understand different forms of politics that go beyond the register of the political that Mol uses in this work, but that at the same time gives a more spatial and complex understanding of the material politics of rubbish.

The definition of material politics I started with was an interpretation of Law and Mol's definition of material politics as 'a material ordering of the world in a way that contrasts with alternative and equally possible modes of ordering' (Law and Mol 2008: 141). However, my encounters and materials generated during fieldwork made me question and find other ways of articulating what a material politics of rubbish involved. This is because understanding politics as ordering did not seem right for describing the politics of rubbish in Buenos Aires.

What the work of Mol (2005a) allowed me to understand was precisely that rubbish practices were not coherent. This non-coherence was not a problem, nor necessarily created many conflicts. Rather, it seemed that the ways that these practices were distributed in the particular trajectory of governing rubbish was what made it hang together. For instance, when the contracts for waste collection companies were changed by the city government, from paying by weight to paying by clean area, this change became a way of distributing the issue, and thus, of avoiding conflict. The value and material qualities that were highlighted at each site were different. This is also what she describes in her work. However, at the moment of defining politics, the focus

seems to shift, and order seems to be the concern. But for this research, to focus what politics does on ordering seemed restrictive and somehow forced.

Different practices around rubbish showed how what was valuable and what was 'good' differed, between and, sometimes within, sites. The particular practices at each site, which revolved around administration, the business of collection and transporting, the technicalities of burial, the cooperative separation of materials, which articulated and enhanced particular material qualities of rubbish, also showed how these were not 'pure' nor straightforward. These different ways of doing rubbish were not reducible to one another, and as such did not make up a single material order, but hung together around this particular material. The way these needed to be mediated and articulated in a more public way complicated the issue. Because of this, the complexity of governing does not easily fit into a notion of politics as ordering, and constrains the ways we can understand what politics does, and what it can be good for. Furthermore, to define material politics in terms of the ways this ordering contrasts with alternative and equally possible modes of ordering also became problematic, as it was difficult to see how other orderings present could be considered to be alternative of or equally possible.

The work of Latour (2007) can be used as a way to start engaging with politics in a different way, one that does not place so much emphasis on ordering. Latour (*ibid.*) shows how different practices carry different meanings of the political, all of which are part of the construction of the ways we live together. However, for this concept to be more useful for understanding the specificities of political practices, it has to look both at the moments of the trajectories of issues as well as the sites, and acknowledge how these different moments of the trajectory of an issue can be present at the same time,

at different sites, or even at the same site. The description of how rubbish was done at each site showed how I could further specify the meanings of the political, within one moment of the trajectory such as that of the governing of rubbish. But also by describing how these were not 'pure', but hosted different ways of doing, of relating and were crisscrossed with many other events, such as elections, that made these moments more complex in terms of the ways of the mixture of ways of being political. The difficulty in stabilising these forms of governing, and the way these mixed forms of being political interacted, was evident in the configuration of new assemblages, such as the one at play in the separating plant. I showed here how by changing the mediations and articulations around rubbish, without much care, a very unstable assemblage that was hard to define emerged, which did not, at the point of finishing fieldwork, manage to stabilise its practices, or match these to the normative goods that were attached to it.

Following the trajectory of rubbish, through its different moments, but also through its different sites, allowed me to see how these different relations, interactions and distributions, made more complex what Latour (2007) described as a moment in the trajectory of issues, and that these were made up of a mixture of these meanings of the political.

A more productive engagement with politics could be achieved, if the notion of material politics could move away from a focus on ordering to specifying the ways that these political relations build our common world in specific ways, and can also start to be linked to more normative orientations of politics, such as democracy. I have shown how at different sites, and within sites, there are different ways of enacting what is 'good'. This engagement with normative issues could start to link to the ways that

decisions are made, and to the ways that these relate to the dimension of rule in democracy.

In the next chapter, I will describe one way in which this could be done, by analysing the development of a participatory environmental project, driven by an NGO in Moreno, in terms of the staging of different devices that enacted and specified democratic principles in particular ways.

Chapter 5: Participating and deliberating on the rubbish issue: enacting democracy in Moreno

'the use of the word "democracy" occurs neither alone, nor steadily, nor completely; it is rather ethnographically emergent' (Paley 2002: 486)

Democracy has many meanings and is used in different ways to legitimate claims and actions. Part of what constitutes democracy is its openness to different meanings and practices. However, the proliferation of meanings and uses of democracy can suffer a similar fate to that of the political. This extension can be important in highlighting the many different meanings it might encompass as well as the different ways it might be done, but, as I have argued in the previous chapter, its extension to everything puts it in danger of becoming vacuous too. In this chapter, I will analyse one way in which the meanings and practices of democracy can be extended but at the same time remain meaningfully connected to its normative aspects.

Guided by the quote that opens this chapter, I aim to show how democracy can be said to be 'ethnographically emergent' (Paley 2002), that is, to understand how democracy is enacted through the study of everyday practices in particular sites. Furthermore, it implies paying attention to the way it is articulated with the principles and devices that accompany it in particular utterances and practices, and to its uncertainty and incompleteness.

Ethnographic accounts of democratic practices add different concerns to those of political theories on democracy that focus on formal political norms and devices, as they look at how these forms and precise demarcations done in theoretical accounts are entangled in practice. Furthermore, they do this by looking around these forms to, for instance, different constructions of power relations, contestations, struggles for meanings, as well as for different values, spaces, practices and imaginaries that can be associated with democracy (Paley 2002: 471). This chapter aims at contributing to closing the gap, identified in different calls in geography and beyond, for more ethnographic accounts of democracy that link issues of the complexity of space with questions and theories regarding the practices of democracy (Barnett and Low 2004, Stokke 2009). Furthermore, it attempts at articulating a post-colonial account of democratic practice, that challenges universalistic assumptions in democratic theory, avoids a teleology of institutionalisation and investigates alternative geographies of democracy (Corbridge et al. 2005, Hobson 2009, Jones 2004, O'Donnell 1999, Painter 2006a, Slater 2002, Stokke 2009).

To do this, this chapter focuses on a different dimension of the materiality of politics around rubbish. It analyses and describes the socio-technical arrangements and articulations of a participatory environmental project called 'Focus Cities' in Moreno, Buenos Aires, and makes explicit how these practices and articulations can be linked to the enactment of democracy in a particular site, in particular ways.

In Chapter 3, I analysed two moments in the trajectories of rubbish that made it political: a controversy and the deliberative spaces created by an NGO in Moreno. In this way, Chapter 3 showed one crucial aspect of democratic practice, which is that of shaping the issue at stake. Furthermore, it highlighted the ways that rubbish mattered

in the making of the issue, and how different socio-material attachments around rubbish articulated particular qualities of the materiality of rubbish. In Chapter 4, I have further specified how two moments in the trajectory of rubbish, that of governing rubbish and the moment of creating new associations through the work of a cooperative of *cartoneros* in association with the city government, were political in particular ways. These political practices related to particular forms of governing, which is a vital aspect of democratic practice. The focus of this chapter, Chapter 5, is on the ways in which the rubbish issue was made and worked through a participatory and deliberative process around environmental issues driven by an NGO. It will address more specifically how the materiality of this process is crucial in shaping the rubbish issue, more than the ways in which the materialities of rubbish affected the process, as that was described in more detail in Chapter 3. By paying attention to the materiality of socio-technical arrangements that facilitate public involvement around an issue (Marres 2007: 776), this chapter contributes to a more explicit and, at the same time, more complex understanding of the ways in which different practices enact democracy, and thus, of the particular spaces and shapes of democracy in practice.

In the first section, I describe the framework I built to understand my ethnographic work in terms of enactments of democracy. I argue that the work of Seward (2003) has an affinity with ANT, and show how combining these gives me theoretical tools to understand how everyday political practices relate to the construction of democratic practices. In the second section, I describe the proposal for this developmental project on participatory management of environmental problems in Moreno called 'Focus Cities', paying attention to the different principles this proposal implied in terms of democratic practice. The third section describes how this project was set up, the

devices that were used and the different actors that were pulled into the process. The fourth section analyses the different ways in which participatory and deliberative spaces worked to shape the issues at stake and its 'solutions', that is, it shapes the 'good', as well as the challenges and complications that arose during the process, which make more complex the ways in which democracy gets done in practice. Finally, the fifth section analyses a feature that figured throughout the process: the significance of the intermingling of the process and outcomes of this project. This chapter, through the description of the project in terms of its principles, devices and the complexities of its enactment, shows how the materiality of the process, that is, its socio-technical arrangements and articulations, shaped the rubbish issue, the 'good', in particular ways. And it explicitly links this particular process to the ways democracy is done in this site.

I turn now to how I found and combined theoretical tools for the translation of everyday practices into forms of democratic enactment.

Democracy in practice

'Democratic principles are primarily things that we do, rather than rights or statuses that are conferred' (Saward 2003: 164 - emphasis in original)

Different models of democracy such as liberal, representative, deliberative, participatory, radical provide different principles and devices of democracy that helped me identify key issues to look out for in democratic practices. All of these models

search for the best, most responsive, ways to arrive at the common good through the rule of the people. The issue at stake is *how* this is best achieved.

Finding ways of understanding democracy in practice meant I had to find a way of translating notions of democratic theory as tools that allowed me to grasp particular processes taking place in a particular site. This was not such an easy task as there were not many examples to follow in Geography. As I have shown in Chapter 1, different authors (Barnett and Low 2004, Stokke 2009) point out how more mainstream debates in Geography have not given detailed attention to issues of normative political theory. There are many literatures that address everyday life encounters and enactments of, for instance, the state (Corbridge et al. 2005, Painter 2007), development (Li 2007), or social movements (Alvarez et al. 1998), which are tangentially related, but that again do not always articulate these in terms of normative issues of democratic enactments. There is an important move, especially relevant for this research, to address this gap, in the form of postcolonial critiques of democracy, which start to look more carefully at the geographies of democracy (see Jones 2004, O'Donnell 1999, Slater 2002). These studies underline the importance of being attentive to the particularities of democracies, to broaden the places and spaces, issues and forms, in which democracy is done in different places, without being constrained by a particular teleology of democracy.

In order to find a way of addressing this gap and at the same time being careful about particular narratives and teleology of democracy, I needed to find a way of being aware of, but distancing myself from the different models of democracy. I needed to move away from particular models of democracy, as these different models are constraining in that each proposes a limited view of the principles, devices, sites,

institutions and procedures for democracy, which often are not articulated with the principles and devices of other models. The combination of the work of Saward (2003) and ANT authors gave me crucial theoretical tools for the much needed translation of these models into the study of everyday practices that construct democratic processes in a particular site such as Moreno, a municipality part of the RMBA.

Saward's approach to democratic practice, what he calls 'reflexive proceduralism' (2003), served me as a crucial step in the direction of bridging the gap between theoretical models of democracy and its practice. Saward describes his approach as proceduralist as 'it is focused on the shaping of binding collective decision-making procedures, and it accepts in principle that outcomes can be regarded as legitimate if they have been produced by a certain procedure' and it is reflexive 'in that it regards political principles, mechanisms and institutions as open to constant change and adjustment of their meaning and importance' (*Ibid*: 161). Saward's approach is antifoundationalist in the sense that he does not consider that there are fixed meanings and principles of democracy, or that there is some outside way of putting an end to arguments about what constitutes democracy (*Ibid*: 163).

For Saward, democratic principles gain their meaning and force through their enactment (*Ibid*: 163). Furthermore, principles and devices also work in a reflective way, as the value and usefulness of the principles will be seen by how devices work. For instance, some of the most important principles for representative liberal democracy are equality and inclusion as well as individual (negative) freedom. The meanings of these principles are specified by the use of devices such as voting, election of representatives, elected parliament, division of powers, majority rule, proportional representation and liberal constitutions. On the other hand, these principles are also

important for deliberative democracy models, but they take a different meaning through the devices that they propose. Participation in deliberation is governed by concerns with the principle of equality and inclusion (Fishkin and Lushkin 2000). Democratic legitimacy comes from public deliberation of free and equal citizens in the public sphere (Cohen 1997: 412-3) in which discussion, information and negotiation have a prominent place in identifying relevant problems (Barnett 2008:1638). Deliberative democracy approaches are not satisfied with forms of registering preferences, as are voting and other devices that are put forward in aggregative models of democracy, but looks at forms of shaping preferences to reach informed and thoughtful decisions through rational argumentation and deliberation. The devices proposed attempt to show this different take on the same principles. Some of the more formal devices include parliamentary debates, supreme courts, and state-sponsored deliberative polls. More informal devices include for example citizen's juries and internal workings of political parties. The more diffuse space of the 'public sphere' includes e-dialogues, deliberation generated by civil society and subaltern counterpublics as well as cross-border activist networks in transnational civil society (Dryzek 2005, Saward 2000: 71). Looking at how clusters of principles, devices and phases of democratic decision-making work in practice helps apprehend the complexity of democracy, and does so by not restricting itself to one model or another.

Different models and approaches to democracy gives us tools, narratives and ideas that can be used to understand how democracy is being done in particular places. Understanding democracy in this way allows me to see how the different ways in which politics are done, and which have been looked at throughout this thesis, can be

linked to a democratic politics by focusing on which values and devices are at play, as well as the different geographies and temporalities that they involve.

I argue here that Seward's notion of reflexive proceduralism can be enhanced by tools from ANT in the study of democratic practice. The examples that Seward uses of devices that enact democracy show a concern with more established devices such as elections, deliberation in the legislature, and so on, or those that require an extensive public around it. These types of devices are important but not enough to understand the composition of those small, banal, everyday practices, such as those I encountered through the project in Moreno, as devices which also make democracy what it is in this particular site.

There are many areas of affinity between Seward's notion of enacting democracy and the work of different ANT authors on everyday politics. For instance, Seward's anti-foundationalism can be linked to ANT's notion of translation and its performative notion of society (Callon 1986, Latour 1986), which I have described further in Chapter 1. ANT is interested in *how* things are done in practice, as it sees actors-in-relation as the ones that precisely make things happen (Latour 1986; 2005), and pays attention to the ways in which relations and associations become more stable through enlisting of an array of actors – human and non-human (Latour 1986: 275). This attention to how things are done, and to the materialities of the process is what I find useful from ANT in terms of looking at how democracy is done in everyday practices. Furthermore, Mol's (2005a) work on the multiple, which I describe in more detail in Chapter 1, can be translated here to provide an important theoretical tool to understand how different enactments of democracy do not necessarily need to be understood as

constructing a coherent 'whole', but instead to see democracy as an assemblage that is made up of complex relations (*Ibid*: 150).

For different ANT authors, political doings have other values, devices, sites and temporalities. As Latour points out (2007), and I argued in Chapter 1 and 4, the breakthrough of STS, and of ANT, is their focus on the way politics is done in everyday practices, in varied sites and in how politics works around different issues. The emphasis on the sites, practices, and the types of relation these studies emphasize vary depending on which strand of ANT and science studies we are talking about (Marres 2007). However, the links between the different types of political practices described in ANT studies and more normative engagements with democratic theory are many times less clear. Inclusion and equality seem to be the underlying principles in many studies, in terms of the emphasis on symmetry and their concern with creating a more inclusive world, in which we - humans - get to be more attentive to non-humans, and to our entanglements (see for instance Barry 2001, Bingham and Hinchliffe 2008, Callon et al. 2009, Davies 2006, Eckersley 2000, Hinchliffe et al. 2005, Latour 2004, Marres 2007, Whatmore 2006). Linking ANT tools with an approach such as Saward's, which makes more explicit the links between practice and normative processes of democracy is helpful then to make these links clearer.

A combination of ANT attentiveness to the everyday materiality of politics; ideas, principles, models from different democratic theories as well as insights from Saward's (2003) approach allowed me to become attuned to the different devices, the different staging and temporalities, as well as the different combination and associations of that which makes democracy what it is in a specific site.

I will describe next the ways in which different principles, devices, timings and sites get articulated in Moreno, Buenos Aires. By paying attention to the materiality of the unfolding process of a participatory management project around environmental issues in Moreno, the next sections will analyse how this process enacted democracy in particular ways.

The Focus cities project: its principles

Unravelling how democracy is enacted in practice is not so simple. Different practices are knitted together in particular places, in ways that do not always create clear forms of democratic practice or meaning. In this section, I will describe and analyse the proposal for the development of a project called 'Focus cities' in an attempt at seeing how this proposal articulates particular principles and devices that attempt to enact democratic practices in more specific ways. 'Focus Cities' is a project financed by an International NGO from Canada called International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and run by a local NGO, called the International Institute for Environment and Development Latin America (IIED-LA), in Moreno. This project took place in Moreno, and aimed at improving environmental problems that people living in Moreno faced in their everyday lives.

The normative principles underlying this project relate mainly to equality and inclusion. As stated in their proposal, the aim of the 'Focus cities' project was:

'To reduce the environmental burdens that affect the inhabitants of Moreno, and other similar municipalities, which affect more vulnerable groups and contribute to their poverty' (IIED-LA 2005b: 5)

As we see from this statement, it aims at equality and inclusion both in terms of equal access to services for everyone, but especially for poorer people who are worst affected by environmental burdens and mostly excluded from access to services. As Urquiza describes, only 40% of inhabitants of Moreno had access to drinking water, and 7% of those are provided by a range of heterogeneous independent systems; while only 16% is connected to the sewage system (Urquiza 2009: 53). Only 30% of streets of Moreno are paved, and of those that are paved, most are in bad condition (Urquiza 2009: 53). Waste collection was contracted out to a private collection company and it was supposed to reach 80% of the population¹³⁸. However, as my fieldwork notes on the workshop discussions show below, many settlements were not acknowledged in the official plans.

When they first handed the maps out, two people in the group I was in, started looking for the areas they lived in and found that their neighbourhood was not on the map. Many of the works that were done were not there either. This does not necessarily mean that the municipality did not know about the existence of these settlements or of these works, or problems. As one of the municipal officers explained, the information on these things was distributed in different areas of work of the municipality, and the

¹³⁸ Interview with Cuaderno, S., 23.1.2007, Moreno municipal officer, Secretary of Public Works, Moreno, Buenos Aires

*bureaucratic work involved in acknowledging and mapping this took time, resources, work force which in many cases they did not have.*¹³⁹

The fragmentation of information, lack of acknowledgment of existing settlements and works, was one of the obstacles to further inclusion that the Focus Cities project was trying to tackle with the creation of different maps: an updated and integrated municipal map and the participant's map, which would hopefully be put together through a computer programme called SIGA (*Sistema Integral de Gestión Ambiental - Integrated Environmental Management System*). These issues meant that the statistics the municipality held on their area of coverage for waste collection could have been overestimated. In addition, the lack of pavements meant most streets were hard to reach by waste collection trucks, especially when it rained, making rubbish a problematic presence as I will describe in the next sections.

As stated in their proposal, the objectives of the project were twofold (IIED-LA 2005b). One was to adapt and test an associative model of management used for water and sanitation, for other environmental issues. The second one was to share experiences, extract lessons and construct principles that could be useful to other similar initiatives in other municipalities.

This project builds on previous work IIED-LA has done in Moreno. The previous project aimed at creating partnerships between companies, the municipality and neighbours in Moreno for managing water provision, and was funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Due to the way this process was carried out, IDRC asked IIED-LA to make a proposal for the Focus Cities project. Moreno was chosen

¹³⁹ Fieldwork Notes, 22.11.2006, Focus Cities workshop II, Moreno, Buenos Aires

because this previous work had created the institutional conditions that were necessary for such a project to work. Previous experience in the development 'of a multi-actoral alliance-building project' (Urquiza 2009: 51) was one of the conditions that were put in place in order to obtain the project. In terms of democratic studies, this condition can be thought of as one of the ways in which the conditions for an exercise in participation and deliberation are prepared in a very basic sense: that of building trust, experience and institutional formats to work together with different actors. The objectives are partly devices designed to carry out this particular aim through creating associations and through sharing and disseminating its development, as a way of translating and constructing similar processes in other sites.

As I will describe in the next sections, this project aims at enacting these principles through a methodology that implies giving people the skills, through for instance capacity-building workshops and 'on the job' learning, as well as the space - workshops, dialogue roundtables - to decide what their priorities are and thus give people a more equal footing in terms of their demands being heard. It is also about reducing the environmental burdens through, for instance, creating projects that would help them lead a better life. Inclusion is understood as making people less marginal in terms of their poverty and access to services, but also in terms of their capacity for being heard and to influence decisions. Furthermore, inclusion here is about becoming co-responsible, about being part of the demands but also of the solutions. These different devices, and their staging, start forming a particular enactment of democratic principles, and one which adds yet another principle not so explicit in the aim of the project, that of accountability.

Accountability comes in clearly in their attempt to keep the participation and the process open to people's input and to their examination. This can be seen in devices such as involving people fully in diagnosing, proposing, prioritising and choosing projects, as well as in monitoring and evaluating. The mapping of problems and the different forms of deliberation are devices that are both about the flow of information - between people, the municipality and IIED-LA - as well as about making decisions together.

Thus, the aim of the project presents its own normative principles of inclusion, equality, and accountability, and the proposal describes the main devices to be used, as well as their staging, which specifies the meanings of these principles. The devices chosen to move towards these normative ideals are many, and they are staged in particular ways. Equality and inclusion are intimately linked and their meaning is specified in particular ways. For instance, this project is about people having access to services. Being left out of access to services marginalises people, and adds to their problems. Access is usually not present in poorer areas and settlements, while better off neighbourhoods normally have good access to all basic urban services. Making services available to more people includes them and starts to make more level their quality of life with others.

Members of IIED-LA had further insights on the proposal and the aims of the project.

Their comments below give us a different frame for thinking about the project.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ As I have described in Chapter 2, there were four IIED-LA members that were more prominently involved with this project: Ana Hardoy (IIED-LA Director), Gastón Urquiza (Research Project Manager and Researcher), Jorgelina Hardoy (Researcher) and Gustavo Pandiella (Researcher), which is why they figure prominently in the quotes.

‘The aim of this project is to create spaces so that participation can take place. The way the processes of governmental decision-making work are not explored much. They are not very open. To think that the government is homogenous is naïve. That is why we have to work with the municipality to see what the real situation is. But to open this up, you also need to work with people, to increase people’s capacity to engage in these processes. It is about levelling forces: information, technical capacities, levels of representativity...We have to do two things: to articulate, to generate dialogue – in order to reach agreements. This project is an instrument. People are always throwing the ball to the government. This project is a way of making people reach a process of co-responsibility’¹⁴¹

What this quote is describing here is that the Focus Cities project is an intervention in Moreno. This intervention is about creating a process, a slow gradual change in which people get involved in making decisions about things that matter to them. In a way, it is about learning about democracy: about creating participatory and deliberative procedures for decision-making so that people can have a say in what is important for them and that affects their life. The role of IIED-LA is seen, in their own words - that can be mapped into the way ANT authors use it - as that of an articulator, a mediator in helping create a dialogue and reach agreements. However, the difficulties with creating and maintaining this deliberative democracy device are highlighted. Building a space, creating a dialogue and reaching agreements require a lot of work, and an ability to bring together different things and people in particular ways. Their success as actors lies in being good at enabling these relations to take place.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Hardoy, A., 7. 1.2008, IIED-LA Director, Moreno, Buenos Aires

Different deliberative democracy approaches imply certain pre-requisites for deliberation to work. The legitimacy of deliberative models is based on finding forms of shaping preferences to reach informed and thoughtful decisions through rational argumentation and deliberation. As Gupte and Bartlett identified, this legitimacy implies some pre-requisites for deliberation. These pre-requisites vary within the debates but range from a need for socioeconomic and political equality, education or literacy; cultural homogeneity; a level of overall societal wealth, and some form of institutional fragmentation and pluralism (Gupte and Bartlett 2007: 97-8). It also implies individuals who are committed to leave their self-interest behind and commit to the search for the common good (Cohen 1997). In the case of the 'Focus Cities' project, most of these pre-requisites were not present.

Poverty, wealth inequalities, lack of education, lack of experience in being involved in 'dialogue' settings, should make this process unthinkable. However, these issues seem to be part of the drivers of the Focus Cities project in the sense that the process of participation and deliberation aim at making present some of these requisites. This is what can be understood when Hardoy says in this quote that the process is about levelling forces, by people learning and informing themselves on ways of doing and on issues on which they did not have much clue before entering the process, by adding other levels of representation to the existing ones, and also by opening entrenched ways of decision-making in the municipality.

From the quote above, we get a hint that this project aims too at changing the way people get involved in formal politics, from a demand-driven practice where the government is the one responsible for responding and giving what people ask for, to one that is demand-driven but also expects people to be able to be involved in the

process of finding ways to respond to these demands. One of the aims of this project is to change to a dynamic where people are co-responsible, and where the municipality has to be more open and attentive to their demands and participation. This is a staple of participatory democracy models. Participatory democracy values participation as a way of giving meaning to principles of inclusion and equality. It calls for more participation of citizens as a way for them to govern *with* the state – different from *against* the state as associational democracy proposes (Gaventa 2006: 17). It is a way of creating more accountable governments, but also more involved citizens. This is not an easy task for various reasons, some of them which were mentioned above – the complexity of the workings of a municipal government; the closed way decision-making processes work, the lack of practice of people of getting involved in this particular way, uneven forces, skills, and information, installed ways of doing politics such as vertical decision-making and being used to demand but not participate in the solution, are all issues that affect the creation of effective spaces for participation and deliberation.

An unspoken presence here is the existence of other ways people have of getting their demands fulfilled: clientelistic networks. This is quite widespread in poorer areas such as Moreno. It is a system in which everyday needs are covered through the relation with one '*puntero*'¹⁴², a political activist of one of the political parties, though generally they refer to members of the Partido Justicialista. The *puntero* solves problems in a one to one way, as if it was a personal favour but uses state resources to fulfil these demands. This daily interactions build into relationships that generally mean that those

¹⁴² *Punteros* are key actors in clientelist networks. In poor and worker's neighbourhoods, in slums and illegal settlements, many of the poor and unemployed solve their urgent everyday problems such as access to food, medicine, jobs through these networks, that is, through their everyday relations with *punteros*, which are mostly local mediators of the Justicialist Party (Auyero 2007: 86).

people are somehow obliged to support the party. This presence will figure and be talked about more openly in the development of the project.

Clientelist networks are hard to classify. In a way they fulfil needs that perhaps would not be met otherwise. This allows for people's inclusion and or equality. However, the way this gets done is by establishing an unequal and non-transparent relationship, especially considering that the goods that *punteros* give out do not belong to them, but to the state, that is, they are public (see Auyero 2000b). This project aims at changing some of the ways in which demands are fulfilled in Moreno, it aims at adding another way, and at the same time, displacing and intervening somehow, in these different dynamics. The aim is enabling other ways of working together.

Another IIED-LA member underlines some of these and other dimensions to the aims and issues of this project.

'This project is about generating a space where there can be a permanent dialogue between the municipality and the community, so that priorities can be defined through this dialogue. The role of IIED-LA is to facilitate this encounter, to analyze it, systematize it and to disseminate it. It is not an easy job. One has to take into account that all the different actors have different political interests. The social workers legitimate their work, as working with IIED-LA gives them some prestige, compared to other social workers. People participate because it might be a way of making their positions heard, and the things that they want done, done. For the municipality, this is another project; we are not the main priority. But we play an important role without realizing it.

To generate a space is an achievement in itself; a space to discuss and engage in dialogue. The aim is that in 15 years we would have contributed to a process in which people are getting involved in what matters to them. For the problems of the people to be recognized: that does not happen in any municipality. What projects are chosen now? That is a short term problem'¹⁴³

These quotes allude to the principles that this process implies, especially inclusion and equality, and the process by which they are to be done: participation and dialogue. Both of them bring up the difficulties and the things that need to be done for it to succeed. However, this last quote by Urquiza, also raised the issues of the different agendas that people bring to the project, and the effects such a project has: that of altering the order of things, of changing power relations due to this association.

Participating in the project has many different effects for different people. As Urquiza states above, social workers gain skills, experience and importance over others; people living in Moreno have a chance of having some of their needs covered and municipality officers add another way of resolving demands, but also another project to their overloaded agenda. These are both effects and things people bring into the process that need to be articulated. The different distribution of power relations due to the participation in this project have to be taken into account to figure out a way to make things work: to make people interested in participating, but at the same time, to make it fair, for instance. He also adds here other roles in terms of this process: that of analysing, systematising and disseminating how this project worked. These are roles

¹⁴³ Interview with Urquiza, G., 16.1.2007, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires

that are important for them in terms of their NGO status, and that also need to be articulated in the process for it to work.

In this way, Urquiza defines IIED-LA's role: to do a good job, different interests and attachments, the effects of relations created through the process need to be taken into account, need to be articulated. IIED-LA need to articulate different interests, issues and things, and the way this is done will have an impact on the materiality of people's everyday lives. This dialogue process is not just about a space where people leave their interests behind and make rational arguments, but one in which different attachments, as Marres (2007) describes them to highlight their materiality and importance in people's lives, are articulated in particular ways that make an issue what it is.

This quote also points to the importance of creating a space for dialogue and participation, which runs more frequently than elections and where things, demands, can be more specific and results also more tangible. This also relates to the temporalities and spaces invoked by both participatory and deliberative democracy models of democracy.

The 'good' of the Focus Cities project, this 'extension' of what democracy is, is about inclusion, equality and accountability. But this also is to be done in multiple ways: it is about generating new forms of citizenship, but also about getting a few of people's demands solved in a way that teaches everyone involved about participation, it is about generating different spaces and relations that create different political relations. It is about adding other ways of being legitimate and accountable. IIED-LA is interested in the process, in generating a new dynamic, a new way of relating between the

municipality and their constituency – the inhabitants of Moreno, especially those marginalised and burdened by environmental problems.

From these quotes by ILED-LA members, we can see that the results of the process planned by the Focus Cities project are obviously important, but the process itself seems to be more important overall. These members highlight the importance of what this process is about: engaging in dialogue, generating good communication, being able to articulate different issues, actors, and practices. This was just the beginning, a proposal. The way it was put into practice was complicated and involved interferences between different forms of doing things. I turn next to how things started to work out.

Setting up devices

‘The particular situation of the country, the city and the municipality were going through, that of a deep crisis was important in the development of a participatory space. The 2001-2 crisis [see Introduction] was a critical moment for participatory policies. There was even interest from private companies. In the 2nd belt [the area where Moreno is situated in the Metropolitan region], where municipalities are poor, don’t have resources, even private companies realized that the rules of the game had changed. That they could not face their own expansion plans. The returns were less. They could not even do a basic maintenance of the services. They then bet on participatory partnerships, a participatory management. The idea of more participation during the 1990s was uphill. When the state sees that private companies are not responding to

their needs, they look for other solutions. In a war economy, conditions for participation are better. It should be that the better the tax base, the more participation. But it does not work like that. On the contrary, a total crisis was needed. People are becoming more and more marginalised, but neighbourhood solidarity works. This is ideal for a participatory project. As an NGO we took advantage of the situation. People also know that it is a moment of absolute demand, they know that if they do not participate, they can't get out. After this, each municipality does its own thing. In Moreno, even in the same context, maybe this project could not be done. But the municipality of Moreno has invested/bet on this project and included it in their government plans, which shows that they are going in this direction of creating spaces of participation. This is how you can materialize an idea. And maybe it can succeed'¹⁴⁴

As the quote above describes, the propitious timing of the start of the work of IIED-LA in the municipality of Moreno, in their first project on water and sanitation funded by the UNDP, was also the foundation for the Focus Cities Project. This quote points to particular conditions in which an NGO such as this one could engage in the process of enrolling, representing others and making themselves into actors in such an intervention. The financial, social and political crisis that Argentina underwent in 2001-2, which included high unemployment levels, political unrest and distrust of political institutions, limited returns for privatized service provision companies, and a municipality which lacked resources was a critical junction in that this allowed the creation of new spaces of participation, and the influence of new actors such as IIED-

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Hardoy, A., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Director, Buenos Aires

LA. Moreover, what Hardoy is doing here is framing the work of the NGO in terms of the way it is shaped by other actors, such as the State, different government agencies, political events, and so on, as well as the characteristics of particular municipalities. In the case of their work of Moreno, such moments of urgent need, moved the municipality, private businesses and people living in Moreno to find other ways of coping, of building legitimacy, of getting funds, as the old ways of dealing with things were not feasible, or were not adequate for the particular situation.

This critical juncture was one that this NGO used in their negotiations with the municipality to develop a project on water management in Moreno, and one that they also used in the negotiations for the Focus Cities project. In a way, these were the conditions, along with possibly the large number of organisations, and high level of participation of people in Moreno for a participatory project to flourish, rather than a good tax base or good socio-economical level, literacy or any other of the conditions that are supposed to be needed for a deliberative processes that I mentioned above.

The experience of working in a previous project in partnership with the municipality, the UNDP project on water and sanitation, worked for IIED-LA members to carve a space of trust. However, this did not mean that less work was needed for a new project, as a new network had to emerge for this project to exist.

For the Focus Cities project to take off, the first step was for IIED-LA to get involved in negotiations with the municipality about how this project was going to work, who was to be involved, and how, and coming up with terms of reference. These negotiations were a sensitive process. It took long months of negotiation, going back and forwards, between the NGO and the municipality. The contract that specified the terms of

reference became a kind of inscription device. An inscription device is a concept used by Latour and Woolgar (1986) to describe the way scientists in laboratories transformed 'pieces of matter into written documents' or more specifically, 'any item or apparatus which can transform a material substance into a figure or diagram which is directly usable by other members of the office space' (1986: 51). In this case, as I am not dealing with labs or even science and technology objects, but relationships and negotiations between an NGO, donor, and municipal workers, the terms of reference works as a way of translating delicate negotiations (the matter) into a device, a contract, that shows the effects of these negotiations but also maps the ways forward, as it became an important reference point. Defining who, what and when was to be involved created new associations within the networks of actors in the municipality, which had different effects. This first stage set the scene for what was to come. The next stage involved a process of engagement with a wider public by constructing the process of participation.

An important step was to decide how participation was to be structured and how to make people aware of this project and ensure their participation. A first practical step was to divide Moreno in four different areas. Moreno is a vast municipality, covering 186 km² and with a population of approximately 380,000 people divided into 156 neighbourhoods (Urquiza 2009: 52). Moreno, in its vast territory, includes different types of urbanisations that correlate with different types of income: upper-middle class and lower middle class, gated communities, informal settlements and many settlements that were built through national, provincial and NGO housing projects.

The division meant that people did not have to travel far for the meetings, as these took place in each area. It also meant that not so many people at a time participated in

workshops, which made participation easier and more manageable. In addition, each area could focus on their own problems and thus it allowed for more richness in detail and more relevant discussions for each area. The next step was to find a way to disseminate the project in each of the areas to ensure a good level of participation and representation to create a suitable public.

Participatory processes such as this one create certain publics. The Focus Cities project was aimed at poorer people, more than at middle or upper class neighbourhoods of Moreno. This can be seen in their aims, but also in the strategy for disseminating the information on the project. IIED-LA decided along with the municipality that the best way to disseminate the project would be through social workers. IIED-LA had worked before with many social workers and knew them well. In this way, they thought that word would spread, and quite a vast number of people would be 'covered'. The public was not there waiting, but was generated through the dissemination and the workshops.

The idea was that each of the areas of Moreno would have four workshops. Each workshop covered different issues. I participated in the four workshops in one of these areas of Moreno. The workshops were designed to be participatory, and used different devices for this. The first participatory workshop introduced the work of IIED-LA, their previous work in Moreno with water management through the UNDP project and gave closure to it. They introduced the Focus Cities project; its aims and methodology: participatory planning. They also listed the different actors that would be involved in the process: the municipality, IIED-LA and the participants of the different areas of Moreno. The role of the environment was less discussed. I reflect on the way environmental issues were shaped during the process on my fieldwork notes below:

I was curious about how nature and the environment were portrayed in this project. The workshops did not dwell on what were environmental problems. Put in an overly simplistic way, the underlying narrative was that humans were damaging the world we live in, and that we had to deal with the consequences of this in our everyday lives. The aim was to raise awareness of the ways we were damaging nature, to avoid future damage and to repair some of the damage done and to reach an equilibrium between people and the environment. During the first workshops participants were more tentative about what environmental problems were present in their areas, but through the process, they started being more attentive to these issues. Participants started talking about the environmental issues they saw around them and that affected their everyday lives: lack of drinking water; flooding, sewage, floods, rubbish. These accounts started to mix things up, making nature a bit less 'passive', but gave a prominent and unilateral place to how humans have done damage: either through ignorance, lack of alternatives, lack of regulation or provisions, and bad planning and management of public works¹⁴⁵.

The particular shape of the rubbish issue in Moreno was worked through the process, and involved the articulation of different forms of being affected by all involved. In Chapter 3, I described the socio-ontological dimensions that mediated the different involvement of the actors at stake, and showed how these entanglements were sources and resources for shaping the rubbish issue in Moreno (Marres 2007). In this and the next sections, I will describe the ways that the socio-technical arrangements were also important and were intimately linked with the shaping of the rubbish issue. Even though this shaping could be argued to have started at the point of the research

¹⁴⁵ Fieldwork Notes, November 2006, Moreno, Buenos Aires

call for Focus Cities and the application process, the first workshop was one of the starting points of this process in terms of the participation of the different actors, and in terms of defining the issues to be 'shaped'.

The second and third workshop involved asking participants about the environmental problems they faced in their neighbourhoods. They were asked to start mapping them and involving their neighbours and using different techniques, such as photography, to understand environmental problems in their area. Giant maps of the areas were printed and people worked around them, trying to mark environmental problems. The municipality was also supposed to work in creating their own maps, by gathering and systematising information that different areas of the municipality had on environmental problems and on the different projects that were being done, or planned to tackle these. These maps were later to be put into a computer programme called SIGA. The different groups presented their findings, their maps, to the whole group, and in the last workshop, people worked on possible causes of these problems as well as solutions. Maps were an important device in terms of specifying what the principle of inclusion meant. In this case it meant including the voices, problems and issues that people living in Moreno suffered and that were not recognised in the official maps of the municipality. Maps were conceived as another type of inscription device. However, there was a problem in the method by which these participatory maps would be translated and incorporated in the work of the municipality, which had to do with the highly technical aspects of SIGA, as I describe in my reflections on fieldwork below.

Using SIGA was part of the methodology that came with the funding of the project, through IDRC. IIED-LA decided to give it a try to see if it worked as a method. It was not

straightforward. People at the municipality had to be trained in how to use this programme. It took a long time also to translate the information from the maps made by the people to a computer programme. The people in charge of doing this commented that they came across several hurdles. Translating social and environmental problems into maps was not easy – as maps tend to work with points rather than fluid processes and borders. The different ways that people thought of problems also made it difficult to understand how to map it. For instance, some people marked a red area - rubbish problem - in a corner. This meant for them that it was a corner where people threw rubbish. For others marking with red a problem with rubbish, meant that there was a large dumping ground. So at points they organised outings where they went to see what people meant by their markings on the maps. As I learnt from interviews with IIED-LA members and municipal officers, only a few people had access to this programme and information, and this was used as a 'weapon' later on, when there were problems between areas in the municipality. The info was not passed on from one area to the other, making it difficult for the area in charge to work well and defeating much of the purpose of this exercise. So the participatory exercise ended up being in the hands of a few, because of the technical aspects of introducing this methodology.¹⁴⁶

As my notes above show, this technological device did not serve its purpose of making information less fragmented, or less exclusive, as was its original aim. It failed due to the technical aspects of its handling, which required a long time to process the information and to translate it into SIGA, as well as training to be able to use it, which

¹⁴⁶ Fieldwork Notes, December 2007, Moreno, Buenos Aires

made it easier for it to become a tool that was used in negotiating and affecting power relations. While maps were useful devices for enacting inclusion, SIGA failed to be so.

There were other devices used throughout the workshop meetings. This first phase of the project involved a broad participation base. The majority of the participants came representing a civil society organisation: of the 448 participants, 31 persons participated as neighbours and the rest represented 90 civil society organisations (IIED-LA January 2007). Women were the most committed and the majority of the participants in the workshops (IIED-LA January 2007). In this first round of workshops, the main task was not making decisions together but producing information on problems in the different areas and taking the first steps in designing solutions. It is important to note, however, that these participatory and deliberative groups were not just about talking.

There were many devices used to frame and also to institutionalise these spaces in ways that were compatible with the principles established in their proposal. I have described the use of contracts, maps and SIGA already. At each meeting people had to fill a form that stated their name, organisation, telephone number and signature, as well as add if they needed reimbursement for their transport expenses. This was a practical thing to do for IIED-LA to keep track of participation in meetings and issues of representation, and also to keep track of the budget. But it was also a way of formalising the space of participation, signing in showed their presence and commitment in paper, for the record. In addition, at each meeting one person, preferably a participant, had to fill in a record of the meeting in a book. In this way, people had the responsibility of writing up what happened, what was discussed and what was decided on each meeting, as well as keep the record of who was present.

This book was a tool to give these meetings more importance, to formalise and ritualise the space and was useful as a device for transparency as anybody could refer to what had happened, and everyone was responsible for its development. Two other, more sporadic devices for transparency and communication were the bulletins, which described the development of the projects so far and were distributed, as well as the making of a video of the process.

The way the meetings were structured was important, as were the facilitators. In the first four workshops, there was always a prepared agenda for the meetings – though there was room at the end for any other issues raised, and a round of introductions. The workshops included a short introduction of the agenda for the day explaining the activities planned, some form of active small group work (discussing, mapping, exchange of information, thinking together of solutions), and a presentation of this to the whole group, ending with setting the date for the next meeting and any 'homework', as well as outlining the activities for the next workshop.

Facilitators gave shape to the workshops in different ways. They led it, took a step back, tried to stop some people dominating the space, and included others who were usually silent, added new ideas, problems, got people thinking about other issues, allowed the discussion to go-off at a tangent if it was interesting, and/or brought it back to what was planned, provided some ground rules for discussion and tried to make them work, and so on. Their role was crucial to how things worked. Another tool, or device, in these workshop meetings that worked to make these more welcoming and relaxing, was to provide some food and drinks – generally fizzy drinks and mate. The role of IIED-LA as mediators was crucial. Facilitators are usually a footnote in this type of processes, but I found that participatory processes such as this one worked

because of a well-thought and structured programme, and because of the different ways the meeting was facilitated, which enabled it to reach its aims. Facilitators and plans for meetings were all crucial in the way the different devices were articulated.

The work of IIED-LA was to articulate different devices and things that enacted some of the principles invoked in their proposal for Focus Cities in particular ways. Contracts and terms of reference, maps, specialised computer programming (SIGA), written records of meetings, lists, bulletins, videos, as well as the tools for facilitation were all devices for enacting accountability, inclusion and equality in particular ways. Through these different devices, slowly a map of environmental issues was being articulated. Different areas emphasised different issues, but there were four common areas of work identified in this process: lack of drinking-water, sewage, flooding, and accumulation of waste. What to do with these and other issues was a matter for the next phase of the project.

Making decisions through deliberative devices

The next phase of the Focus Cities project involved starting to plan and propose different projects for the areas, to make decisions about which ones would be prioritised and chosen to be implemented. It was in this phase where the rubbish issue took a more definite shape. In order to do this, a new series of devices were to be implemented, which involved deliberation procedures, creation of a point system for prioritising projects and the criteria for choosing, training and information workshops, appointment of external consultants, creation of a watchdog committee and an open

tendering process among other things. This part of the project was one of the most challenging ones as it involved making decisions, rather than generating information or discussing possibilities. For this part of the project, a first step was staged that involved reducing the number of people involved in the decision-making process. This involved the emergence of representatives for different areas and the creation of an inter-area round table that included representatives of each of the areas, municipal officers and IIED-LA members. In this section, I will describe this part of the process of the Focus Cities project, by focus on the devices that were put in place for defining the issues, and the projects that would tackle these. Furthermore, I will highlight in turn issues that are important in terms of the enactment of democracy. First, I will describe the different attachments that are brought in the procedural definition of issues and decision-making and how these were worked through (or not) through particular devices (and their staging). Next, I will analyse another aspect of the process which needed to be articulated: the times and temporalities that the devices and actors brought to the process. Finally, I will describe the different shades of representation at play during the process, and how these made less straightforward the enactment of democratic 'goods'.

At the last of the first round of workshops in each of the areas, people had to propose or offer themselves as representatives of the area. Each area could have four/six representatives – depending on the extension and population of the area and the participants – and four 'back-ups'. These representatives, along with people from the municipality of Moreno and from IIED-LA, created the area and then the inter-area dialogue round table (*mesa interzonal*), which would carry on the work of deciding on priorities and elaborating projects for the Focus Cities project. This stage meant

putting new devices to work: the emergence of representatives of those first participants; area and inter-area round tables. The project was staged to pass from a broader participation base to a more focused representative base. These were considered necessary to make decisions, as too many people would make the process less dynamic, in terms of the difficulties of finding times for everyone to meet, as well as for reaching agreements. It also meant that there was less participation fatigue (Cornwall 2008: 280).

Representatives were not voted for, but were given the tacit go ahead by the participants attending to the workshops. This could prove problematic, as people volunteered for it, instead of being voted for. It would have been hard for anyone to object but they had to choose of offering themselves as representatives. The representative case was based in equal opportunities for 'office' so to say. In the area I attended, no problems seem to arise. However, in one of the areas, the participation was a bit low, and one of the things that were said was that there were too many *punteros* in place, which made people uneasy about the whole process, as the quote below suggests:

'There is low participation in this area. We were not sure what was happening, but it seems that there are different organisations that are in conflict with each other. If one project proposed by one group was chosen, the others don't want to be part of it any more. What is also problematic is the high presence of *punteros* in the area, which puts some people off'¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Urquiza, G., 16.1.2007, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires

Extra meetings and discussions were held with people from that area to pinpoint the problem and to try to convince and mobilise people to participate. We start to see some of the different forms of mediation, such as clientelism that are present here not only as *punteros*, but start to be involved as representatives which complicates the figures of these mediator roles, as I will describe later on. The process of election of representatives was not smooth in all the areas.

Based on the issues identified and the priorities set in the first workshops, the different area representatives worked along with the municipality and IIED-LA to design projects to further define these problems and to tackle them. For this, another set of workshops were planned. Each of these workshops at this stage was also about creating devices that were staged in a particular way to specify the meaning of the principles of inclusion, equality and accountability.

The first workshops were around training and information. First, each of the areas, with the help of an external consultant, worked at creating a series of project proposals that would tackle some of the issues that were identified and mapped as environmental problems. The projects were on waste, water management, sanitation, green spaces, cleaning of streams and environmental awareness education. The work of designing projects was done in approximately seven workshops, with high levels of participation and engagement (IIED-LA September 2007). As in the previous workshops, the device of keeping a book as a memory of the meetings was at work.

These workshops were important in different ways. They made people think carefully about the problems and potential solutions, which in many cases meant that they had to learn more technical things about these issues. Another skill that was developed

was that of creating a project proposal. To create a project proposal, several things need to be present, for instance, a budget. This meant that people needed to find out what things were needed, and how much things cost. Furthermore, they had to learn how to make projects adequate to what they were trying to solve, and also take into account other issues that particularly worried the people I interviewed. A special concern was finding ways in which they could participate and continue being involved in this project, as I described in Chapter 3, apart from their participation in the dialogue round-table, which meant thinking of community solutions to these problems.

The external consultant was another important device for these issues. As they were external, they were considered more neutral. Their expertise, in this case a person who worked for the United Nations, was useful in terms of giving information on the issues and the practicalities of making projects. In addition, I found that working with the consultant was highlighted as something that made them feel important. These workshops were a way of levelling forces, as Hardoy's quote stated in the second section. It worked as a way of making people more aware and more literate in the ways projects are thought of. In a way, it was about creating through the process more informed and skilled citizens, at the same time as the process served to construct the issues in particular ways as I describe below.

The next step was to create an inter-area dialogue round table that would include representatives of all the areas, plus members of IIED-LA and the municipality. All the project proposals from the different areas were presented and the participants analysed, debated, look for convergence between different projects, in order to integrate and find projects that would complement each other. This phase was a

deliberative process of decision-making. They had to find a way of prioritising and choosing projects. This was done by collectively choosing criteria for prioritising projects and using a point system to grade them and eventually choose between them. This phase of the project aligns with recent innovations in deliberative devices, such as deliberative mapping, which includes people and experts in the process of evaluating information on the issue, a set number of policy options, criteria for choosing and then to finally decide on an appraisal (see for instance: Chilvers and Burgess 2008, Davies 2006). However, the Focus cities project was more open – in terms of participants and the options to be included -and less expert-oriented.

There were some basic preliminary criteria that were agreed before starting the process which was that all projects had to give a sustainable solution to environmental problems and that these had to link to 'Focus Cities' objectives. In addition, projects could not go against any legal norms and they could not go against any critical technical aspects. These general terms framed the discussion. From these general principles, the criteria to evaluate the projects and to prioritise them through a system of points were developed (IIED-LA September 2007). The criteria were decided through discussion and debate. Necessary criteria were those conditions that meant that a project could go forward or that it would be excluded from consideration. There were two conditions that fitted this: that the project did not cost more than 1,300,000 Pesos, and that it had to be done within 18 months, the time limit of the 'Focus Cities' project. The desirable criteria included: social innovation, technical innovation, sustainability, solution to similar problems in other municipalities, generation of employment, number of direct and indirect beneficiaries (related to the investment)

and integration of the four areas. The projects were given points according to these criteria.

The deliberation on criteria and the development and use of a point system were devices that helped reach agreements, make decisions, and include different issues in an inclusive, equitable and transparent manner. These enacted and specified particular democratic principles, as they gave people the chance to state their priorities and differences and it opened up the process of decision-making. These devices were also a way to generate agreements and legitimacy. The collective creation of procedures to make decisions, as were the selection of criteria and the point system, bound people to the decisions that resulted of this procedure, even if these were not the ones that they would have preferred.

After these sessions, there were four full day workshops led by technical municipal teams aimed at informing and building people's skills. Basically, these workshops were meant to inform people on the municipal strategies for dealing with the environmental problems people identified in the participatory planning workshops. These workshops were useful in terms of people learning what the municipality was doing or planning to do in the near future, for people to learn more about the different aspects of the problems they had identified, and also to try to adjust the demand and projects developed by the people with what the municipality was doing to avoid duplication. In the last session, taking into account all the information and details given by the municipality, people went over again to the list of proposed projects in order to choose which seem to be the most feasible ones. Nine of them were selected to be studied in more depth (IIED-LA September 2007).

We can see here how the socio-technical arrangements of this process were important for shaping the rubbish issue and the projects that arose to tackle it. Learning more about the issues and about the technical aspects of different solutions, framing these in terms of budgets and practical projects, and the use of external consultants to design projects collectively, slowly defined the rubbish issue in particular ways. This process was also affected by meetings and encounters with the people and work of the municipality. Finally, the deliberation on criteria and the development and use of a point system meant that rubbish (and the other environmental issues at stake) was encountered, understood, processed and shaped in particular ways. Rubbish, at the same time, also shaped these projects. At the very least, its 'management' had to take the materiality and agency of rubbish into account if the effects of the materiality of rubbish at work were to be avoided, that is, smells, contamination and other non-human interactions.

An important dimension of democratic models and democratic practice is also the *staging* of devices, and thus, the temporalities of democratic practice. I have described here how different devices were used and staged at particular times to reach collective decisions, which enact principles in particular ways. For instance, the move from a wider participation model to a smaller representative base, or the different devices used for staging a more informed deliberative process – through training, exchanges with municipality - in order to design, prioritise and choose projects, were thought of in terms of participatory and deliberative enactments of democratic principles such as inclusion, equality and accountability.

This assemblage was not a straightforward achievement in terms of enacting democracy. In the participatory and deliberative process, the articulation of different

attachments, timing and times, was a difficult and complex issue, as were the layers of representation present, and frictions that these layers provoked. But I argue here that in order to understand how democracy was enacted in Moreno, these articulations have to be studied in more detail as they show the complexities of democratic practice. The next subsections will describe these issues in more detail.

From diagnosing to doing: the challenges

One of the challenges at this stage was the transition from ‘diagnosing’ the problems to doing something about them. This raises the problems involved in issue articulation and it shows how deliberation brings more to the fore than rational debate. The quote below shows us the different attachments people brought at the moment of making decisions that defined issues in this deliberative exercise:

‘The hardest part seemed to be, for the municipality and for the people involved, agreeing on one common objective and working towards it. This is very complex and difficult to achieve. Agendas were torn between thinking about their immediate neighbourhood interests and the maximum political credit. [...] It is easier to be generous when all is up in the air, but not so much when one has to delineate what to do. The municipality suddenly got strong and pushed their own project, that of Los Robles, though the waste project was the one that appealed to the people. People also turned more to their ‘area’. By this I mean that they stopped thinking in terms of their group, or the inter-area interests to thinking about their own neighbourhood’¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Hardoy, J., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno, Buenos Aires

This quote points to one key aspect of deliberative democracy: that of making decisions together through deliberation. Deliberation is not always just about having a good discussion, but about having to make decisions, to leave things out, to prioritize. Participation and deliberation in the first part of the project was about informing, exchanging information, and debating problems, causes and solutions. This proved to be less contentious than this phase, where things had to become more defined. The issues that this quote points to, such as the different interests and agendas that people bring to the forum is a classic problem in deliberative democracy studies, and one which has been criticised by, for instance, radical democracy approaches.

Another crucial issue in terms of democratic practice is the way that issues are constructed, and the attachments that different participants bring and that have to be worked through. I have described in Chapter 3 the particular ways in which the rubbish issue was constructed in Moreno. Rubbish provoked in a particular way in Moreno, which involved the creation of particular assemblages. The visibility and closeness of rubbish created particular issues for the people of Moreno that were articulated into what became the rubbish issue through the Focus Cities project. Furthermore, it showed that there was more the political to deliberation than conflictive relations or rational arguments. In this way, it challenged deliberative democracy theories that are based on an ideal deliberative forum where people leave their interests behind and focus on rationally discussing and debating on the common good. In this case, the different interests and agendas people brought to the deliberative table had to be worked through, and this was not easy. These difficulties, and the ways that this was dealt with (or not) are important as they show how the materiality of the process shaped rubbish as an issue in Moreno, and the particular way that democracy was enacted.

The confrontation that Jorgelina Hardoy describes is one that created some friction in the process. This took place between people and the municipality, when some municipal officers were trying to push a project that people were not so keen on (Los Robles Park). IIED-LA members felt that even though it was clear from the start that it was a participatory process, and thus, the projects to be chosen were open, some people in the municipality had a fixed idea of what was to come out of it.

‘They [the municipality] go along with the idea of participation, but at the same time have a defined notion of what should happen which does not work well with the process. When things go differently than what they expected, conflicts emerged, and some felt hard done by’¹⁴⁹

When this did not happen according to a pre-existent plan that some actors had in mind, things started to get difficult as the quote above points out. The inter-area table decided they wanted another project more than the one that was being pushed by the municipality. However, the preferences of participants did not go down well with some areas of the municipality. This is because the effect of choosing the rubbish project was that one area of the municipality would become more important in terms of the Focus Cities project, which meant accessing an extra budget and project for their area of work. The resulting passage from one area of work to another was tricky. This process of articulation took a long time and involved issues that tapped onto entrenched relations and organisational forms that went beyond the Focus Cities project, but that this project affected. Some of the quotes below point out these issues:

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Urquiza, G., 7.1.2008, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires, Argentina

‘One of the hardest things was the transition from one area of work of the municipality to the other. It delayed the process a lot’¹⁵⁰

‘There were power games between the different areas of the municipality. There was a sense of treason and disarticulation when the project of rubbish was chosen instead of the one IDUAR proposed [...] The SIGA was used as way of putting a stick in the wheels by not passing the information on’¹⁵¹

‘One of the difficulties of working and reaching agreements is the disjuncture and fragmentation of the work of the municipality in different secretaries, each with its own idiosyncrasies and plans [...] What happened here went beyond this project. There were many interests at stake’¹⁵²

These quotes point to the way the municipality divided its work, to its disarticulation. But it also shows how an intervention can bring out and play with these ‘structures’. The conflicts, the different relations and the effects on power relations involved in this process, shows in a different way that the articulation of issues in deliberative spaces is not free from conflict and it involves different articulations apart from rational arguments. In deliberation then, many other issues, apart from the ‘common good’ were at stake. Or more precisely, I argue here that the resulting ‘common goods’ were made up of the meshing of different agendas, interests, and personal traits, as they were shaped by this particular socio-technical process.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Hardoy, J., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

¹⁵¹ Interview with Hardoy, A., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Director, Moreno, Buenos Aires

¹⁵² Interview with Pandiella, G., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

The struggle to articulate interests was also related to the challenges of articulating the different temporalities that different actors, as well as different devices, brought to the process, which I analyse below.

Articulating temporalities

Time is an important device in participatory and deliberative processes. Participatory and deliberative processes extend the time of decision-making as well the time that it takes to carry out processes, compared to a decision made by one or few individuals. The inclusion of more people and the particular devices in the process makes it more time-consuming, for all the people involved. This feature of the process was good for many reasons: giving time for all involved to adjust and to learn how to work together. But it also brought some problems due to the different timings and temporalities that had to be adjusted in the process. The complexity of managing different temporalities was one of the main issues in this project, as the quote below points out:

‘For me, the principal obstacle for this project is the work of making compatible different timings. From the urgency of people, the constraints placed by our funding and the particularities of this project, and the slow workings of the municipality’¹⁵³

The quote above identifies three actors, with three different temporalities that need to be articulated: IIED-LA, neighbours and municipal workers. The problem emerges in terms of the differences between expectations, constraints and practices of the actors involved.

¹⁵³ Interview with Urquiza, G., 7.1.2008, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires

IIED-LA members faced the work and constraints of a project, which had particular timings set by the project and by the donors, to whom they were accountable. IIED-LA had the responsibility to send both financial and progress reports at set times, and had to comply with their proposal and the timing promised. There was some room for manoeuvring and negotiation on many of these issues, but not that much, as the funding would not be forthcoming if no progress was made. IIED-LA also had visits and meetings with the donor's representatives where they had to show and discuss how things were evolving.

People living in Moreno, who faced pressing environmental problems in their daily lives wanted these to be solved quickly and effectively, and had other pressures on their time than that of participating in the project. The participants I interviewed all commented that one of the negative things about the project was the long, extended time, it took, especially the phase of decision-making. For example, see the quotes below:

'This phase is stretching like chewing gum'¹⁵⁴

'The problem is how long it is taking, too long'¹⁵⁵

The participants were more in a hurry, but the project did also extend beyond what was planned, and IIED-LA members also were worried and aware of this. The problem was the different time-frames of the municipality.

Municipal officers had many pressures, other urgencies and priorities, and had to work within constraints, norms, forms of working and particular patterns of decision-

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Zapata, M., 18.10.2007, representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Garcia, R., 4.1.2008, representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

making. This meant that they had to adjust to slower times, as layers of bureaucracy meant they had to run through particular procedures to be able to do things. The way decisions were made also constrained the quick resolution of problems. A vertical mode of decision-making prevailed in which people always seemed to have to check with their 'uppers' before doing anything. The personality of people working in the municipality had a huge impact on how efficiently and how horizontal or vertical decision-making could be, as the quote below shows.

'In Moreno, they don't want to take the risk of opening the game. They are more controlling. There is no place for something different, to make mistakes, to innovate. Only routine. The officers only tell you what the Secretary thinks. They have to take to him every small decision, and wait for his decisions to do things. In Moreno, in contrast to other places I work with, I have to be careful of what I say, I cannot engage in a more open discussion'¹⁵⁶

The bureaucracy of the municipality, as well as the idiosyncrasies of the people working there, meant that the process was slowed down at particular times, and with particular issues. I mentioned before how gossip networks often interfered with more open communication forms and negotiations too.

Furthermore, elections took place in the middle of this process and further extended the period of decision-making and of getting the projects started as different people-representatives and municipality workers- were busy with this important political event, and because things tend to stand still until elections are passed in case there are any changes in how things are organised, though it was pretty certain that the same

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Hardoy, A., 7. 1.2008, IIED-LA Director, Moreno, Buenos Aires

candidate would be re-elected. These different needs and timings and different ways of doing politics had to be adjusted and worked on constantly to make these different actors work together in a process such as this one.

The Focus Cities project enacted and assembled different power dynamics through the unfolding of particular devices, which resulted in the creation of the 'goods' for this project. Different strategies, devices, and timings, were at play and were important in terms of how the issues were shaped, and how the process worked. The shaping of the issues was done through the particular assemblages of different socio-ontological attachments and socio-technical arrangements. The spaces and times of participation and deliberation are more complex than what theoretical models of democracy propose. This is the case too for issues of representation, which I analyse next.

Shades of representation

The inter-area round table finally chose five projects. The first project was for an environmental awareness campaign to be done throughout Moreno. The other four were 'area' projects, that is, projects that would benefit more directly each area. Three professionals were invited to help design and budget these projects. The projects were: a thematic park, a recreational park from restored wasteland, improvement of community water networks and a separating plant for dry waste (IIED-LA November 2009). The first three were minor projects compared to the expense of the waste project. The decision to carry out the waste project as the main project, the one that the majority of participants wanted, had different consequences. As I described above, it generated some resentment and a sense of betrayal in some of the municipality workers, which meant the transition from one area to the other was made more

difficult. On the other hand, the people I interviewed from the inter-area dialogue round table found this process empowering in a way. They felt that what they wanted counted, and this was a novel experience for many. The quotes below show this:

‘There was a before and after moment in this project. That was when we opposed the project that the municipality was pushing, that of Los Robles. It was an important moment that showed that it was not in vain working for a year and a half with this project’¹⁵⁷

‘An important moment was the opposition of people to the Los Robles project. It showed them that the process counted’¹⁵⁸

This was a key moment that shows how the participants had some power in the decision-making process, even against an actor such as the municipality. As Pandiella, one of IIED-LA members states below, this was an effect of the space generated by the Focus Cities project:

‘The space that this project generated gave them more leverage than others in terms of their relations to the municipality. This does not mean that they still don’t have relations outside this project, and that those do not influence what happens here. This is an alternative space, an added way of relating’¹⁵⁹

This process managed to give people more influence in how things were to be done, as this quote points out. This was different to other relationships people had with the municipality, such as those of clientelism. Most of the people involved had other ties

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Bel, C., 4.1.2008, Focus Cities representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Urquiza, G., 7.1.2008, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Moreno, Buenos Aires

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Pandiella, G., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

and ways of relating with the municipality. IIED-LA members were aware of these different forms of representation, as implied in the quote above and below, and how these panned out in the project.

'Representation is to restrict, to delegate to certain people. The delegation is not free. These [levels of representation] are very heterogeneous. There are neighbourhoods in which political clientelism is stronger than others, but it is complex. The coercion, repression (not physical) is about punishments and rewards. The more complex the neighbourhood, the more you get this type of representation. In the municipality of Moreno you have a bit of everything. Where there is more poverty, you find these representational levels.'¹⁶⁰

As this quote calls attention to, there are different levels of representation already present in Moreno. This project added another layer. However, these sometimes overlapped. For instance, many *punteros* were also some of the representatives for the different areas. This caused some conflicts. I have mentioned before that people in certain areas refused to participate saying that too many *punteros* were going to the meeting. The problem was that, according to one of the IIED-LA members, the people who complained were opposition *punteros*, that is, they played the same role, but in opposed political parties, as can be seen below:

'In many cases, those who participate are the ones that are already associated in some way. This type of politics [clientelism] is the one that generates networks here. The only ones that generate networks are the ones that are constructed politically. The ones that protest do so because they are opposed

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Pandiella, G., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

to the *punteros* of the official political party, but that are in a way just opposition *punteros*. The logic is the same. The small pockets of alternative organisations leave when they see these at play. We have tried to reach those, for instance, by focusing on different ways of disseminating this process, of creating the participant base, trying to go on the side of these established channels'¹⁶¹

The quote above reveals some of the complexities involved in participation and representation in this project. The project had to work in a situation where the predominant form of association, which fuelled participation, was that of clientelism, so it had to find ways of challenging or going to the side of these relations.

Furthermore, as *punteros* had close relations with the municipality, it made it unclear who they were representing. In some cases they acted as 'informants' of what was going on, and used these relations in ways which complicated relations between IIED-LA and the municipality as they sometimes spread gossip or inaccurate information about what was going on. As Urquiza describes below, the meetings became sources of information for *punteros*:

'The networks created through the meetings, *punteros* and corridor gossiping, are powerful enough to sometimes de-stabilise the project. We are constantly negotiating, clarifying and convincing the municipality on every little issue, but this is made worse by invented or exaggerated issues created through gossip'¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Interview with Urquiza, G., 7.1.2008, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires

¹⁶² Interview with Urquiza, G., 7.1.2008, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires

The presence of *punteros* muddled the notion of people's representatives, and created issues because of their particular forms of relationships with municipal officers as the quote above shows. However, this space was used by others apart from *punteros*. The independence of this from clientelist networks varied in a continuum, rather than being clear cut. For instance, some representatives of the areas differentiated themselves from this type of representation and used the space to express themselves, as the quote below shows:

'I am not in any social plans, nor I have relations with anybody, so I can say what I want, always with respect, because I am not tied up like others are'¹⁶³

This quote makes clear that political ties meant exactly that: ties about speaking out that stopped people being able to be critical. They were tied in clientelistic relations. As the quote above shows, some people were not so free to talk and express their opinions as they were tied to other networks. And as the comment above suggests, those not engaged in this way felt proud of their independence. Other representatives were more pragmatic, in terms of being able to criticise but also being aware that there are benefits to creating and keeping good relations with the municipality.

'They already know me, when I have to protest, I protest. But I also give support. I already had a relationship with the municipality, through other projects, and through having a 'plan trabajar' [social welfare plan for the unemployed]'¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Interview with Bel, C., 4.1.2008, Focus Cities representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Garcia, R., 4.1.2008, representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

‘Unfortunately, through politicians you can do things. We don’t do politics of the sort I give you this for that. But we are in contact, we talk, we go to meetings of different political leaders. It is productive and edifying’¹⁶⁵

The quotes above show how some participants were careful about their ties with the municipality. As Auyero (2000a) shows, there are different levels of relations with *punteros*, different levels of ties. He describes how ‘while the brokers’ ties to their inner circles are dense and intense, their ties to the outer circles are more sparse and intermittent’ (*Ibid*: 67). These participants had benefited from these ties before and knew that these levels of representation had their uses and did not see their relationship - for instance the need to participate of meetings of political leaders for instance - as negative. Their narratives imply that they could be placed in the middle, not as part of the innermost circles of *punteros*, though not part of the most outer circles either. Most of these relations continued, and some flourished with the Focus Cities project as it gave them more contacts and more familiarity between municipal workers and neighbours, as we can see from the quote below.

‘Through this project I had more contact with social workers, who before did not know who I was, but are now starting to get to know me. This [project] makes me see other things, makes me able to mediate other things through social workers, and through other ways...It is also useful to know more about things, to learn, to share’¹⁶⁶

This project then was not simply a way of pushing other ways of relating or representation to the side. As we have seen from the above quotes, these relations

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Zapata, M., 18.10.2007, representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Zapata, M., 18.10.2007, representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

very much persisted, changed and new ones flourished. Moments such as the one when people opposed some of the plans of the municipality, however, also gave space for a different way of relating, as one of IED-LA members expresses below:

'The exercise, for the people, is that the level of participation surpasses/differentiates itself from the level of the political representative for that neighbourhood, that being the *puntero*, the director of the sanitary unit, of the soup kitchen; to break a bit that barrier. It is also an exercise in thinking something, such as the environment, in a more integral manner. And to then identify problems and do something about them'¹⁶⁷

In terms of representation the project aimed at breaking some of these barriers, at changing ways of relating, as this quote shows. It aimed at carving another space, another way of relating to the municipality to get some of their needs covered. If one of the issues with clientelist networks is that they are set up so as to become the only channels of resource flows (Auyero 2000a: 68), this space attempts to counter this construct. But it was also about changing the ways people thought about, and thus represented, their environment, their view of problems and their capacity to do something about them. It was a process that built a representation of what the environmental problems were, rather than this representation being there before the process started.

Representation in this particular deliberative space built through the Focus Cities project was a way of working *around* and *with* different forms of representation, and giving space to build different configurations. The notion that representatives were

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Pandiella, G., 7.1.2008, IED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

capable of designing, choosing and tackling problems, as well later be part of the management and also of a watchdog committee, was not easy or straightforward to put into practice. This was also seen in other ways, such as the frictions that involving representatives in the process of tender involved in a later phase of the project, as again, different interests, attachments and notions of expertise had to be articulated. The complexities of representation present in this process complicated the ways that this project could be said to enact democracy.

Through this complex process, the rubbish issue took shape. This complexity, and I would add non-coherence, makes it hard to analyse in terms of a straightforward understanding of democracy. But it shows how democracy is enacted in different ways, and times, through different devices, and through particular ways of staging them, that worked to expand the ways, to create friction, as well as to complement, the ways that democracy was enacted in Moreno.

Next, I will analyse another important element to understand the complexities of democracy in practice and, more specifically, the ways in which this process assembled: the intermingling of process and outcomes.

The tangle of process and outcomes

In my last visit in 2010, all the projects had been chosen and had started. The area projects were developing well and were managed by the neighbours and participants. To have a material outcome of the projects they worked on for long periods of time

was a relief in many senses. As Urquiza points out below, the outcomes were a way of measuring the development of the participatory process.

'The capacity to achieve interventions in the different areas is important for everyone involved. In a way, the material outcomes are a measure of the success of the participatory management and planning'¹⁶⁸

There was mostly a sense of achievement at making this happen. There was also a sense of relief at having something to show for all their work – not only by IIED-LA members, but also by representatives and municipal officers. However, the waste project was still delayed. IIED-LA members were frustrated at this turn of events, as well as participants, as a lot could have been done with the momentum of the awareness campaigns, the resources and the people willing to be involved in the planning. On the other hand, it was a good move to have also set aside money for different projects for each area, as it gave everyone involved something tangible out of the process.

I want to start by arguing that a key thing that kept the participation going was the promise of a material outcome out of it. I use here the notion of material outcome in a very narrow way to mean the particular projects that were put in place as a result of the participatory and deliberative process. This is what sustained participation and interest in this project for such a long time. However, I will also argue that this narrow definition of outcomes was less narrow in practice and that outcomes cannot be separated from the processes that generated them in terms of understanding how democracy is enacted. For instance, the way the process was designed and staged was

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Urquiza, G., 7.1.2008, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires

very important in terms of the legitimacy and satisfaction of these outcomes. Understanding how processes and outcomes are intrinsically linked allows us to see what democracy can be good for.

From the proposal of this project, we have seen how, for IIED-LA members, process was important. However, they were clear that having a material outcome – that was more than a research publication or document- was an important part of the success of this project. As Pandiella, a member of IIED-LA, argues, ‘this is a process that without money to do works is hard to sustain’¹⁶⁹. In addition, this experience was important for them to show donors that it makes the process of participation much more sustainable and rewarding, and its research outcomes more interesting and relevant. The possibility of having a material outcome, of actually resolving some of the problems that people faced instead of just doing research about them, helped in different ways. It helped as an incentive, a hook, to engage the municipality and neighbours in Moreno. It also increased their leverage in their negotiations with these different actors. For instance, the strong legitimacy the municipality had from elections - they were voted for by 80% of the people - made it trickier in a way to open up participation, as the municipality might not see the need for it. However, as we have described previously, other issues such as a deep economic crisis and a crisis of trust in government that the 2001-2 crisis crystallised made this project appealing for the municipality in ways that I will describe below.

The participation of the government in the dialogue round tables was strategic in this project to be able to ‘confront the strategy of the municipality with the needs of the

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Pandiella, G., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

population¹⁷⁰. Two different legitimacies are at work here, that of the municipality as elected representatives and that of unelected representatives from civil society organisations and neighbours of Moreno. This is not necessarily so clear cut as we have shown above due to different levels of representation overlapping, but the space created by the project still managed to conform and confront these two actors.

The municipality found both the process and the outcome seductive for different reasons. First, it gave them a way of getting more things done in a moment of crisis where resources to do public works were severely limited. Second, it added to the ways in which they could construct their legitimacy beyond voting. Even though the legitimacy of the municipality was very strong in terms of elections, they would gain in terms of other forms of political legitimacy that this project could bring. Third, it potentially lowered the demand of people as they understood through this process how hard, how expensive and also why the municipality acts as it does. This is described by one of IIED-LA workers below.

‘To hear people’s demands and the possibilities of the municipality in the same forum lowers the level of demand, because they [the municipality] explain why they decide one thing instead of another, so that decisions do not seem arbitrary’¹⁷¹

As this quote implies, if it went well, this process would generate trust in the municipality, as people would understand the constraints they were under, and also see their willingness to be involved in this process as a gesture of their preoccupation with people’s needs.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Pandiella, G., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

¹⁷¹ Interview with Pandiella, G., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

For participants, the outcomes were surely important. That was the reason many of them made the effort to participate in such a time-consuming process. However, the process did not seem to be just a means to an end. I have shown above different quotes by participants that stated how important it was for them to learn different things in this process. How they gained much from this process in terms of learning, but also of building different relationships with the municipality. The capacity of participants to confront the municipality in terms of the election of projects was also a turning point for many. As we can gather from the quotes below taken from interviews with representatives of the inter-area round table, democracy meant different things for people, from being able to cover their basic needs by having jobs, to being heard and for demands to be met and being properly represented.

‘For me it is for people to have jobs. Equal opportunities for people, jobs for all the heads of households’¹⁷²

‘To be heard, that our claims are heard, and that they do something about them’¹⁷³

‘There are places where the municipality reaches, and others that it does not. I live at the limit with Jose C. Paz [neighbouring municipality], and here the municipality does not reach us, we don’t have a councillor, or representative or anything. We do have *Planes Trabajar, Plan Jefes y Jefas, Comadres, La Leche,*

¹⁷² Interview with Zapata, M., 18.10.2007, representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

¹⁷³ Interview with Garcia, R., 4.1.2008, representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

la Bolsa [welfare programmes which its distribution is linked to clientelist networks] But no local voting'¹⁷⁴

These responses to my question about the meaning of democracy are interesting in that they show an understanding of democracy as intimately linked processes and outcomes. The quotes point to principles of inclusion and equality. They point at processes of being heard and of being represented, that is, included, but these are intimately linked to the outcomes of these processes: that they do something about their demands, that they have access to jobs, which is another form of inclusion, but also a way of having an equal opportunity from which to start from, a form of levelling.

For participants, the projects were very important. As I have shown above, and in Chapter 3, people considered very important their ability to participate in the development of the projects, as well as in the monitoring and management, at the moment of choosing projects. If they were able to participate they would more likely gain experience in, be paid, or at least be able to make the project relevant for their needs. Other things were considered an important outcome of this process: getting to know different people and networking, which allowed them to build useful relations that could come in handy for the future.

The general responses about the project were positive for all involved. However, the outcomes that people mentioned were not always those of the actual projects. As an IIED-LA member describes below, the outcomes are not always linear or easily quantifiable.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Bel, C., 4.1.2008, Focus Cities representative of area four, Moreno, Buenos Aires

‘The process is positive, it is about small steps, some forward, some backwards, some to the side, it is not linear. But a space was created, a way of doing installed. It was really powerful to see how people opposed the Los Robles project of the municipality. It is a space where they have more power than others’¹⁷⁵

The creation of a space where participants had a real say on how things were managed, and where they could plan, manage and monitor concrete projects that would make a difference in their lives with the municipality, was a very important outcome. In this case, the process was the outcome. The expectations for this project were not about revolutionary changes, but small modest interventions, as the quote below describes:

‘We are working on complex problems in a complex context. We are not with the winners of the system – so what do we generate? Expectations. To help people is what gives meaning to my job. Even if it is about making a small difference, and might not change the overall scheme of things. There won’t be a revolutionary change. To think that would be frustrating. It is a job of a lower scale that has a qualitative impact. I don’t work to change the equation. I am working where it adds up’¹⁷⁶

The aim then was about installing slow, small changes that make a difference in peoples’ lives. These small changes can be seen in other outcomes of the project, such as the difference in peoples’ skills that this IIED-LA member describes below:

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Pandiella, G., 7.1.2008, IIED-LA Focus Cities researcher, Moreno Buenos Aires

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Urquiza, G., 7.1.2008, Research manager of Focus Cities project, IIED-LA, Buenos Aires

‘Has this process changed anything? One does not get the ideal, but the process served some of its purposes. For instance, you saw the people who have been participating the whole year, and people who just started and there was a big gap in terms of how they understood problems, in terms of how to work together. You can tell there has been some process of learning’¹⁷⁷

These quotes show different aspects of the outcomes of this process. They show a hard to quantify outcome, which is the skill of participation, of decision-making, of discussion. There is also the space where people can have a say and also can actually decide what they want in spite of strong opposition. How lasting an impact the different ways of doing, working and interacting, how stable things become, depends on how things continue. The way democratic spaces such as these ones can be sustained, rely, as I have shown, on using different devices for enacting principles such as inclusion, equality and transparency. Once this project ended, there were plans to keep in place some of these procedures. How ‘embedded’ and sustainable these changes would be without this daily support and this type of mediation remains to be seen.

Democracy in practice inextricably links process and outcomes. As Saward (2003) suggests, democratic principles gain their meaning and force through their enactment (*Ibid*: 163). Furthermore, principles and devices also work in a reflective way, as the value and usefulness of the principles will be seen by how devices work. I would argue that the enactments of normative principles of democracy cannot be separated from its devices (*how* this is done), but also from *what* it rules upon (the issue), *who* are those affected, and *where* this happens. Understanding how the process and

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Hardoy, J., 7.1.2008, Focus cities researcher, IIED-LA, Moreno, Buenos Aires

outcomes of this project enact democracy necessarily implies understanding where and how this was done and what different things, actors and relations were at play and in place.

The unfolding of the practices of this project cannot be said to enact democracy in linear ways, as these different elements make it a complex and non-coherent endeavour. However, understanding, describing and mapping this complexity is important as it gives us a sense of how democracy is done in particular places. We can see here how the practice of democracy is shaped through and around issues such as rubbish, and how at the same time, issues are moved and shaped through the materiality of democratic practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I turned the analysis of the material politics of rubbish in a different direction. I wanted to show that in order to understand the material politics of rubbish, and its link to normative enactments, we also need to pay attention to the materialities of democratic practice. That is, we need to find ways of understanding and describing the ways in which socio-technical arrangements work in practice. Having described in more detail how the materiality of rubbish and of rubbish practices was important in democratic terms in Chapter 3 and 4, I focused here instead on how the materiality of the democratic process is important in understanding the material politics of rubbish. I described here the different ways that democratic principles, devices, timings and sites got articulated in Moreno, Buenos Aires, through the

development of the Focus Cities project, and showed how this project enacted to democracy in particular ways.

To understand the relations, practices and devices present in the Focus Cities project, I needed theoretical tools that would help me grasp how more everyday practices were also part of enacting democracy. I described the tools I used for this in the first section: a combination of Saward's (2003) notion of 'reflective proceduralism' and insights from the ANT literature. Saward's notion of reflexive proceduralism was useful in giving me a way to analyze different models of democracy in order to see how these models propose and prioritise particular principles and devices that make democratic practice (Saward 2003). In this way, I could move away from particular models, and use their many useful insights to understand what was going on in practice. ANT was useful in this way by showing me how to pay attention to different actors, to their particular associations, the different forms of mediation, and the ways that practices enact particular realities, in this case, the way democracy is done in Moreno.

The principles of inclusion, equality, accountability upheld in the Focus Cities proposal were specified in practice through different devices such as contracts, maps, records of meetings, lists, training, deliberative devices such as point systems and election of criteria, open tendering processes, and a watchdog committee. I have shown the different sites where the issues were defined and political relations were built and articulated through different devices, enacting these democratic principles, though not in a 'pure' way. Some of these sites were: municipal offices, IIED-LA offices, workshop meetings, deliberative spaces, neighbourhoods and areas where people lived, worked, argued, and entered relations such as those of clientelism to different degrees, the sites of environmental problems, and the more elusive spaces of corridors, email and

phone exchanges. Each of the sites also articulates with particular temporalities, as I have described above, which were more often than not, in friction during this process.

In this way, I have shown how democracy does not have a fixed meaning, way of working or established outcome but depends on the practices that enact it, the issues, the sites where this takes place as well as the actors and relations involved. It is important to note that how democracy is enacted in particular sites relate to many other relations. I have noted how some of these relations affected the process such as the particular political conjuncture of the aftermath of the 2001-2 crisis, local and national elections, the creation of vertical and closed forms of working in the municipality, and clientelism. As these were not the focus of the chapter, I have noted throughout how these played a part in shaping this process, affecting the enactments of democracy of this particular project, but I would argue that this project was also an instance in which these relations were re-enacted in different ways.

I have described how articulation got done through everyday practices, in particular sites and through the building of relations through different actors, both human and non-human. These articulations enacted democracy in particular ways and include a much wider range of relations than those of conflict and opposition, and that are as interesting and necessary for democracy. I have shown how participatory and deliberative processes involved hard work and how they raised difficult issues. The different agendas and interests that actors 'brought' were also elaborated, changed and negotiated through the process. That is, they were articulated in the process. These differences are part of what made this process interesting and what made actors stick to the process so they should not be seen only in terms of obstacles. The sites and practices present in this process were many, and included more everyday as

well as eventful practices and sites. These different sites, layers of representation, distributed practices, were described in this chapter as part of the development of a project that contributed to enacting and specifying what democracy is in this particular site.

These actors, practices, devices and relations did not map onto one another to create one linear path or obstacle to democracy. Instead, I have shown how these all were part of how democracy was enacted in this particular site. In this sense, and following Mol (2005a), democracy is multiple. These enactments were done through particular devices which specified particular normative principles related to democratic practice. Different practices in different sites were related, coordinated (or not) in different ways. No linear progress could be said to be reached, but the different relations and actors that worked together to make this project, added, and thus, affected the ways that democracy was being enacted in other sites and through other devices and relations. For instance, the creation of this participatory and deliberative space did not do away with unequal, indifferent, hierarchical or clientelistic relations, but worked with, around, and on the side, of these relations and added other sites and layers to these multiple political doings that enacted democracy in particular ways.

It created a space where people could decide and deliberate together with the municipality about what was important for them. This space added to others, such as elections and *punteros*, which formed how democracy was enacted in this site. In many theoretical discussions, different sites, actors, devices and relations, would be considered external, irrelevant or obstacles to building democracy. Looking at democracy in practice, linking more situated involvements with those of collective decision-making (Marres 2010), helped me understand these practices, sites, relations,

as very much part of what makes democracy what it is in particular places. To discard these actors, practices, relations, and devices would impoverish the description and understanding of democratic practice.

By paying attention to the specific principles and devices (and their staging) that were at work in the development of the Focus Cities project in Moreno, I could more explicitly link everyday and more eventful practices of a participatory environmental management project to the ways that democracy was being done in this particular site. This chapter has shown how an ethnographic account can link the materiality of practices to more normative political orientations such as democracy, and thus, show the ways in which democracy is made what it is in particular places.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

The work of building the world we live in is incessant. The world is built of relations in everyday life that include humans and non-humans in different ways, at different times and sites. Politics is not an external sphere to which everyday relations are then brought. Politics and democracy are made up of these mundane things. They are made up of the way we (humans and non-humans) do and undo things and the multiple ways we relate. The starting point of this thesis was that in order to understand what politics and democracy are in particular places we have to look at *how* things are being done in everyday practices, such as those around rubbish. Furthermore, I set out the case for counting and foregrounding the materiality of things and of practices to be able to understand how and what the issues of politics are made to be. This is because if we discount the difference that materials, things, objects and devices make in the making of politics and democracy in particular places, we miss out on the more subtle ways in which things become stable as well as change.

This thesis analyses how the distinctive materiality of rubbish matters in the making of politics and democracy in Buenos Aires. But the particularities of this case also speak to the study of actor-network theory, materiality, politics and democracy. In this conclusion, I will underline some of the key contributions of this thesis.

By reflecting on the process of generating materials, this thesis brings a new dimension to the discussion on methods which has not been developed much in the literature. In addition, this thesis contributes to understanding and extending how, when and where the materiality of rubbish and of rubbish practices matters to the study of politics and

democracy in Buenos Aires. By doing this, it articulates and extends the literature on materiality by providing an ethnographic account which starts to specify the ways in which materiality is important to politics and democracy and to link it to normative practices of democracy. It contributes to ANT theories by posing challenges that come from extending the practices that are studied to those that are not strictly related to science and technology, and in a different setting, as well as by developing links to more normative-oriented political practices that have not been fully attended to. Finally, it responds to calls from Geography to close the gap between complex relational analyses of space and more normative dimensions of democratic practices (Barnett and Low 2004, Stokke 2009), by providing a post-colonial account of how politics and democracy are practiced in particular sites, through and with particular materials. I describe and expand below this thesis' methodological, empirical and theoretical contributions.

Methodological contributions

This thesis contributes to the debates on methodology by opening up the discussion on the difficulties of doing more-than-human styles of work. In terms of doing fieldwork, one of my starting points was to consider methods as interventions (Law 2006). As important as it was for this research to acknowledge how realities are messy and that methodological debate and practices need to be re-formulated to highlight methods as generative interventions, this posed some challenges at the moment of doing fieldwork and of writing. Though there are some important contributions in

terms of guidance as to the methodological issues for this type of research (see for instance Czarniawska 2007), and some aspects of ethnographic research are present in ANT accounts (see for instance discussion on method in Mol 2005a), there is a need for a fuller discussion on the difficulties and limits that different methods and approaches bring to those engaging with more-than-human styles of doing fieldwork.

One of the greatest challenges of engaging with more-than-human styles of work is the duty of experimentation and risk that comes with this (Whatmore 2006: 606). This duty extends to issues of methods. As Whatmore notes, engaging in a more-than-human geography involves the need to 'supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods that rely on generating talk and text with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject' (*Ibid*: 606-7). In Chapter 2, I analysed some of the most important issues I faced in this sense. The first challenge I faced was that of 'following' practices in a more violent context and where there are not precedents in terms of shadowing, for instance, or conducting some forms and instances of participant observation. These limits have been explored in the ethnography literature, but less so in terms of doing ANT studies. Second, doing ethnography in a building, laboratory or an institution, which are sites that are also multiple as Law (1994) and Mol (2005a) have shown, is different from trying to engage with practices that are more dispersed and arguably more complex, as were the practices around rubbish, which meant there was a different degree of messiness to account for that was not so easy to navigate during fieldwork or in the writing process.

Furthermore, using ethnographic methods made me face some of the limitations of these styles of work. First, it confronted me with the issue of things being more-than-

relational. Recent ANT studies, and also the vibrant materialities literature tackle this issue, but don't give many clues in terms of methods. The vibrant materialities literature has been important in establishing the significance of paying attention to things, to distribute agency, to take seriously the notion of emergence, instability and non-coherence. As Braun (2008a) points out, different analysis on materiality provides us with multiple ways in which to resist reductionism and closure, and instead forces us to look at the politics of nature in terms of experimentation. However, as this author also points out, it is important once these points have been established, to take these points forward to understand how organization occurs (Braun 2008a: 675). An ethnographic study such as this one could not rely solely, for instance, on re-enchantment techniques (Bennett 2004), or the analysis of media images (Hawkins 2009). Thus, it had to face the challenge of using these premises in understanding and describing how things were important, emergent, but also *how* this takes place. For this, the thesis experimented with methods and with writing, and describes the challenges faced while trying to find ways of paying attention to how the materialities of rubbish and rubbish practices mattered.

One of the experiments that I tried for this research was to generate materials through the use of participatory video. This attempt at finding more visual ways of accounting for the materiality of rubbish and rubbish practices was also fraught with difficulties. Some of the difficulties relate to the type of method I chose, that of participatory video, which means that the stories and visual material are made with participants, but also by participants. In this case, the materiality of rubbish and the practices around it proved to be elusive. This could be a question of lack of visual literacy, but also relates to the reticence of participants to engage with the materiality of rubbish and rubbish

practices. As I explain in Chapter 2, this could be because participants were less willing to engage with the materiality of their work, than about presenting the issues they faced in the building of a cooperative. But I argue that this was related to the particular materiality of rubbish, as well as its layered significance. The shame attached to working with rubbish could account for the lack of enthusiasm and distance in their engagement with it in the video, which is a device for re-presenting themselves. This signals a potential limit to ANT and materiality studies, as the excitement of the relations with non-humans does not always travel well. Experimenting with participatory video allowed me to start to see some of the limits of ANT and vibrant materialities studies that I have engaged with in this thesis, as the relations between materials, their relations, their 'excess' and their symbolic dimensions, are not so well understood.

Writing was also a practice and moment of the research process that required risks and experimentation, especially in terms of finding ways of making space, that is, of representing, non-humans, embodied practices, and the uniqueness of materialities, while trying at the same time to negotiate this with the requirement of presentation of a more normative process, such as that of a PhD thesis.

This thesis, thus, provides a needed reflection on the ethnographic challenges that are faced when engaging in more-than-human styles of work. The issues I encountered during fieldwork point to practical issues generating materials, but also start to contribute to some of the empirical and theoretical issues which this thesis engages with and to which I now turn.

Empirical contributions

This thesis shows how the materiality of rubbish, and of rubbish practices, matter for politics and democracy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This is simply because the material qualities of rubbish, as enacted in different practices and relations, make a difference in how things are done. However, rubbish makes a difference, *in particular ways and in particular times and sites* for the enactment of politics and democracy in Buenos Aires.

I have analysed and shown throughout the thesis the different ways, sites and times rubbish matters to politics and democracy in Buenos Aires. First, I have shown how rubbish was made into an issue in two sites of Buenos Aires, Bajo Flores and Moreno, through a controversy and through a participatory environmental project respectively. Rubbish built around it, at each time and site, very particular actors, practices, politics, and it figured in particular ways in the way politics was done and the way democracy was enacted. The ways in which rubbish was 'accessible' – made by everybody, found everywhere, not requiring from the start very technical skills to separate its materials – was enacted in these two sites in ways which had a particular material and political affordance. The heterogeneous mix of materials that make up what rubbish was in Buenos Aires, made it possible for people to recover the value of some of its material. Furthermore, the busy non-human relations that rubbish hosts, and which has undesirable effects for humans (and non-humans), such as contamination, smells, spreading of diseases, and so on, was important in making up the rubbish issue in both sites, albeit in different ways, depending on how these were experienced, who experienced them and through what processes rubbish was made into an issue. In the

CABA, in the aftermath of the crisis and in the midst of high social mobilization, the multiplication of *cartoneros*, the visibility of their work and of the debris left behind (as well as its smelly and unhygienic effects) for middle class urban dwellers, turned *cartoneros* and rubbish into a controversial issue. In Moreno, the process of an environmental participatory management project prompted the creation of rubbish as an issue, as well as the daily encounters with rubbish and its 'accessibility'. Rubbish and the practices around rubbish, such as *cartoneros'* work, at this particular times and places, moved people in a way that other materials did not.

The importance of the materiality of rubbish could also be seen in the ways it shaped its governing. In Chapter 4, I focused on the different ways of governing rubbish, from its administration by city government offices, the business of its removal and transport, its burying and its separation. This chapter shows how rubbish matters differently, and creates around it different materials and practices, depending on what needs to be done, with which things, and who participates in this doing. Rubbish is enacted differently in each site. Governing practices enacted particular material qualities of rubbish in different sites and times. For instance, the business of collecting and transporting had to deal with the quick decomposing times of rubbish, the way the materials spread (needing thus special brushes, bags and trucks), its weight, while the need for burying it enacted the effects of the ways in which organic and inorganic matter interacted, and also how rain and heat influenced this process. Thus, these qualities of rubbish were central in designing these matters in terms of soil coverage, pumps, pipes, treatments for leachate liquid and gas, and so on. In this way, rubbish mattered in the ways that rubbish was 'managed'.

The ways of governing rubbish were also shaped by, and related to, the particular histories of management, and the particular actors and sites rubbish brought together. In addition, I have shown how this meant that the different itineraries and sites of rubbish created complex, and necessarily non-coherent definitions of what was 'good' and, thus, of what needed to be done. The materiality of rubbish mattered in terms of understanding how it became political, as well as how democracy was enacted through its governing. This highlights the need to look at the materiality of rubbish and practices around rubbish to understand how politics and democracy are done in Buenos Aires.

The way in which the materiality of rubbish mattered for politics and democracy in Buenos Aires is also related to its particular symbolic 'charge'. As much as I have shown the ways rubbish was enacted and shaped in different ways, I have also pointed out throughout this thesis that rubbish cannot completely be defined by these relations. Rubbish seems to always escape the attempts at its control by humans and to belong to non-human assemblages that have their own dynamics and force, which humans tend to 'contain' in different ways, but never completely succeed in doing. As this thesis has shown, especially in Chapter 3, this excess of rubbish was layered with the symbolic orderings that brought shame to those that engaged with it, and thus, had positioning effects for the people involved with rubbish, but also for the 'place' of Buenos Aires and Argentina in the global, which seemed to hinge on how this excess was 'controlled' and managed (Law 2004). Rubbish, in this sense, had a particular political affordance that was different from other materials, practices and issues.

While doing this research, I realised the importance of looking at the materiality of the political and democratic process too, which is often not studied in ANT or theories of

materiality. In this thesis, I have tried to convey the materiality of rubbish, in terms of how rubbish was enrolled and enacted in different ways, in an attempt to show how the materiality of rubbish mattered. I have shown how rubbish, and the practices and relations built around it, had a unique resonance, and a unique way of generating particular politics. However, this had to do with a host of other relations, and other processes at play.

The ways that rubbish was managed or processed had to do with particular histories and ways of doing but also protocols that are at work in these particular sites. Rubbish was done through illegal; informal and/or clientelist networks, as much as through processes such as public debates, legislature, voting, media debates, and participatory projects. Chapter 5 focuses on the importance of the materiality of an environmental participatory project to the ways that rubbish and democracy were enacted. In this chapter, I focused on the socio-technical arrangements that worked to create a time and space of public participation around rubbish. I explicitly mapped here the ways that the materiality of this process linked to the enactments of normative democratic principles. I showed how the particular materiality of this participatory project, through its devices, and the ways they were staged, shaped the rubbish issue and enacted democracy in particular ways.

So materialities mattered in the making of politics and democracy. And I have shown *how* materialities mattered in four key ways. First, the materiality of rubbish mattered because of its potential for disturbance. Encounters with rubbish, practices around rubbish, and symbolic resonances made rubbish into a matter of public concern. Second, socio-material attachments and practices around rubbish mattered in the way the rubbish issue was shaped. Third, the materiality of rubbish matters as its material

qualities affect its governing and creates particular ways of defining what is 'good'. Finally, the materiality of the political process matters in the way the issues are shaped too. How all these forms of materialities interact makes the political and democratic process what it is in a particular time and place.

I argue here that the insights and the particularity of this case – this material, this time and site and these forms of politics - are not only important for Buenos Aires. They also contribute to and challenge theories of materiality, ANT and theories of politics and democracy, as I describe below.

Theoretical contributions

By showing how rubbish mattered, this study adds to the literature on materiality and waste. As I have shown in Chapter 1, much of social science research on waste tends to articulate waste in terms of its management, and thus in terms of metrics, or in terms of its politics, but without paying due attention to how waste matters in terms of the politics built around it. As more recent approaches to waste have done (see for instance Gregson and Crang 2010, Hawkins 2009), I have provided different geographies and politics of waste, that are more attuned to the ways in which the matter of waste matters. This thesis drew on different literatures on materiality in order to understand the particular ways in which rubbish was enacted, which worked to make rubbish what it was in Buenos Aires, and the ways politics and democracy were done.

The description of the different ways in which materiality mattered in the making of politics and democracy in Buenos Aires drew upon the literature of materiality in novel ways, to adapt to this particular case. As I described above, materialities mattered for politics and democracy in different ways: for its potential for disturbance, for the way materialities generate through their relations and histories a particular symbolic dimension that weights in the ways that it becomes political, and for the importance that socio-material attachments as much as socio-technical arrangements have in terms of shaping the issues and in their governing. Thus, the different types of materiality studied throughout this thesis, from the materiality of things, materials to those of practices, of lives and processes are crucial for how politics and democracy are enacted in a particular site. Furthermore, I have shown how materialities matter in terms of the particular relations that are built around them and also in terms of what is not included in these relations, and that makes these materials unique and, in some ways, unknowable. In addition, materialities matter not only in terms of their 'thingness', but also in terms of the symbolic dimensions that these materialities might generate.

This thesis extends the debates around the politics of materiality by expanding the meanings and sorts of materialities that are to be included in studies of the politics of things. I have shown in this thesis how the materiality of rubbish and of practices around rubbish mattered to shape the political process and contribute to the ways democracy is being enacted. But I have argued here that to understand how these link to democratic processes we need to expand the practices to include the materialities of democratic process, that is, the socio-material attachments that are inseparable from its shaping as a political matter, the particular forms of governing matter, as well

as the socio-technical arrangements that enable public participation around issues. These are crucial elements to understand the link to more normative aspects of democratic practice, an issue which has not yet been so developed in the literature.

This thesis develops the vibrant materialities literature by providing an ethnographic account of the material politics of rubbish, as I have noted above. This thesis' starting point was that materialities matter to the making of politics and democracy. But it elaborated on *how, where, when* and *which* materiality mattered. This thesis has shown how an ethnographic account is crucial to pay attention to difference, and thus, to understand and develop the ways that materialities matter to the making of politics and democracy. By extending the types of materialities that mattered, and by articulating different aspects of the materiality debate through an ethnographic account, this thesis has contributed to understanding how different aspects of materiality are crucial to understanding how politics and democracy are practiced in particular sites.

This thesis contributes, extends and at times questions ANT approaches, especially around its understanding of politics, through extending the practices that are studied to those that are not strictly related to science and technology, by doing this in a different setting, as well as by developing links to more normative-oriented political practices that have not been fully attended to.

ANT approaches have been crucial in showing how there is nothing inherently political about the materials of rubbish, but that they become so through particular heterogeneous associations which include humans and non-humans. I have specified here the ways in which rubbish became political, and the different ways in which the

political process worked around this issue. The study of the materiality of rubbish and rubbish processes, an issue that is not so near the typical issues which ANT studies focuses on, elaborated on how the ways of being political are understood. To specify the ways that issues were political, I creatively combined the work of Latour (2007) and Mol (2005a) to convey the importance of considering together the time, forms and sites of politics. I have shown how it was not sufficient to think of different *moments* of the political trajectory of rubbish, but also take into account the different *sites* where rubbish was being done in different ways, simultaneously. The complexity created by this issue contributes to specifying how issues are political, and to expand the issues that need to be taken into account in a study of politics.

The particularity of rubbish practices in Buenos Aires, which differ from those more centred on scientific and technical matters in 'first world' countries, brings other challenges in terms of accounting for its messier and more extended practices. In Chapter 2, and above, I outlined the difficulties raised by doing fieldwork in a different setting, which is not so conducive to 'following' things and to 'writing them up'. In addition, the study of the politics of rubbish has shown how this particular material brings up the difficulty of attending to non-humans. This is because the materiality of rubbish, which generates particular associations with other non-humans that could be said to be indifferent to the doings of humans, brings an excess that is hard to account for, but for its relations to humans. This is an issue that is problematic for ANT, and that has been dealt with in different ways, significantly in studies that attempt to leave space for non-identity, and that focus on how things emerge through partial relations that leave some space for withdrawal, for difference (see for instance Bennett 2004, Bingham 2006, Hawkins 2009, Hinchliffe 2007). By looking at different types of

practices in a different setting, this thesis contributes to creating a post-colonial study of ANT. As Anderson (2002) suggests, postcolonial studies of science and technology might offer more richly textured answers to the questions raised by ANT studies (*Ibid*: 649). More than an account of how theory travels, this thesis is a contribution to a post-colonial ANT in terms of the ways the particularity of this case challenge what a material politics looks like.

Furthermore, this excess of rubbish, and I would add, of things, relates here to the symbolic relations that this particular material brings and which were important in terms of the ways it became political, a dimension not usually taken into account in ANT studies. I argue here that an important aspect of materiality can be the symbolic relations it 'carries', which relate and change depending on which material/s we are talking about. As I have showed in Chapter 1, the symbolic dimension of rubbish has been studied, but not in a way that links its particular materiality, its symbolic dimension, the politics it generates and its links to normative aspects of democratic practice. This was a very important element in this case.

This thesis challenges some ANT author's emphasis on ordering in their account of politics. The analysis of the multiple ways that rubbish was political showed that the non-coherence of the rubbish process worked together in ways that did not generate a single material ordering. This multiplied the ways in which the 'good' could also be understood. These different ways of doing rubbish were not reducible to one another. They had to be mediated and articulated in more public ways, as these related to more normative dimensions of democratic practice. I proposed that the focus of many ANT studies on politics as forms of ordering is not so fruitful. To focus on politics as ordering can be restrictive and could mean missing out on the significance of the non-

coherent ways in which things are political. The capacity of ANT approaches to open the sites, actors, forms of relations, passions and times of the political could be put to better use without the emphasis on social ordering, to formulate a material politics that can start to link to normative criteria that underpin democratic processes.

Some ANT studies have begun to make more explicit the links between different ways issues become political and more normative political orientations such as democracy (see for instance Braun and Whatmore 2010a, Latour and Weibel 2005). However, this is an area in need of development. By combining insights of ANT with democratic theory, this thesis has shown a way of making more explicit the links between the materiality of everyday practices and socio-technical arrangements of public participation and normative issues of democratic practice in particular settings. In this way, this thesis is a contribution to the literature on politics and democracy, as it responds to calls from Geography to close the gap between complex relational analyses of space and more normative dimensions of democratic practices (Barnett and Low 2004, Stokke 2009) and for more ethnographic accounts of democracy and the state (Corbridge et al. 2005, O'Donnell 1999, Painter 2006b, Paley 2002, Slater 2002, Stokke 2009).

The particular articulation of theoretical approaches used in this thesis has contributed to challenging notions of radical democracy and of theories of deliberation, which constrict the type of relations, actors, and ways in which politics and democracy can be thought of. Looking at the complex assemblages that created the rubbish issue at different moments and sites, has shown that there is more to the political and to deliberation than conflictive relations or rational arguments, and that to disregard the myriad ways, relations, actors and sites that make this process what it is in particular

places, impoverishes our view of how politics and democracy matter, and how these make spaces for difference. Taking into account the importance of the materiality of the democratic process has also shown how these processes are important in understanding how issues are political and enact democratic practice.

By paying attention to the specific principles and devices (and their staging) that were at work in the development of a participatory environmental project in Moreno, I could more explicitly link the everyday and more eventful practices of this project to the ways that democracy was being done in this particular site. In this way, I showed one way in which the meanings and practices of democracy can be extended but at the same time remain meaningfully connected to its normative aspects. This thesis has shown then how an ethnographic account can link the materiality of practices to more normative political orientations of democracy, and thus, show the ways in which democracy is practised in particular places. In this way, this thesis articulated a post-colonial account of democratic practice, that challenged universalistic assumptions in democratic theory, avoiding a teleology of institutionalisation and investigated alternative geographies of democracy (Corbridge et al. 2005, Hobson 2009, Jones 2004, O'Donnell 1999, Painter 2006a, Slater 2002, Stokke 2009).

Telling stories about the different ways that rubbish was done animates the ways that politics and democracy is being practised in particular places. This is not because this way of describing and analysing politics and democracy provides a blueprint for how politics should be done, but because it situates, specifies and gives an understanding of how these get done. In this way, even if this thesis is not geared towards social policy, it can highlight issues that other approaches might not stop to consider by giving a more nuanced and complex account of the way rubbish is done in Argentina, and

particularly to the ways in which cooperatives have been narrated in Argentina. This is especially poignant, as cooperatives are hailed in the media and by politicians, as the preferred mode of enlisting *cartoneros* and of separating rubbish into recyclable materials, and are now in the process of being included in the formal waste collection strategy of the CABA. However, this inclusion is supported assuming that the conditions for this type of organisation to work are given, rather than need to be assembled (Schamber 2007c: 220). By paying attention to the difficulties such cooperatives encounter, this thesis can provide insights on the challenges this type of organisation faces, which call for more attuned social policy and support to reduce the likelihood that this new experiment ends in failure.

This thesis has shown the possibilities that engagements between ANT, materiality, politics and democracy can bring to understanding how material geographies matter in the ways that democracy is practiced. Further research can use this conception of material politics to investigate how different practices, especially those that are further removed from science and technology, give a different texture to the way matter matters in how democracy is practiced, as well as to start to open up other spaces in which this is done. This ethnographic account of how politics worked around and with rubbish throughout this thesis, contributes also to postcolonial studies of politics and democracy as it shows how material geographies matter in the ways that democracies are enacted.

Appendix: List of Interviews and Workshops

Fieldwork: October 2006 - January 2007		
Date	Interviewee/Event	Position/site
09/10/06	Felix Jonas	External advisor to the Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene
11/10/06	Hilda Herzer	Social science researcher, Urbanism, Sociology, UBA
12/10/06	Francisco Suárez	Anthropologist working on waste, UNGS, Instituto del Conurbano
13/10/06	Gastón Urquiza	IIED-LA Research Manager of Focus Cities project
17/10/06	Nicolás Schiffman	Greenpeace officer
20/10/06	Eduardo Villalba	Chief of staff, Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene
23/10/06	Interviews with El Ceibo members	Cooperative of <i>cartoneros</i> in Palermo
24/10/06	Cinthia Schammah	Social science researcher on illegal dumping
01/11/06	Meeting with Francisco Monzón	President of CERBaF, Bajo Flores
16/11/06	1st workshop in Moreno	Focus Cities project
22/11/06	2nd workshop in Moreno	Focus Cities project
29/11/06	3rd workshop in Moreno	Focus Cities project
1/12/06	Meeting with Gastón Urquiza	IIED-LA Research Manager of Focus Cities project
6/12/06	4th Workshop in Moreno	Focus Cities project
7/12/06	Participatory Video training workshop	CERBaF, Bajo Flores
9/12/06	Barbecue in Separation Plant	CERBaF, Bajo Flores
13/12/06	Participatory video interviews	CERBaF, Bajo Flores

14/12/06	interview with Liliana Martucci	IDUAR officer, Municipality of Moreno
18/12/06	Participatory video interviews Interview with Francisco Monzón	CERBaF, Bajo Flores President of CERBaF, Bajo Flores
08/01/07	Participatory video interviews Interview with Jessica Koehs	CERBaF, Bajo Flores Social science researcher on waste issues
10/01/07	Inter-area dialogue round table	Focus Cities project, Moreno
11/01/07	Interview with Pablo Schamber Interview with Claudio Suárez for Participatory video	Social science researcher on waste, Universidad de Lanús and Environment officer, National Ministry of Environment Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene
12/01/07	Interview with Felix Cariboni	DGPRU officer
16/01/07	Tour of CEAMSE Interview Marcela Pozzuoli	CEAMSE landfill site tour In charge of Separation Plants, CEAMSE
16/01/07	Interview Gastón Urquiza Interview Jorgelina Hardoy	Research Manager of Focus Cities project , IIED-LA Focus Cities project Researcher, IIED-LA
17/01/07	Interview with Adrián Gayoso	Doctor at Primary Health Unit, Municipality of Moreno
18/1/07	Participatory video	CERBaF, Bajo Flores
19/01/07	Interview with Ana Hardoy Participatory video	IIED-LA Director CERBaF, Bajo Flores
22/01/07	Participatory video Interview with Gustavo Pandiella	CERBaF, Bajo Flores Focus Cities project Researcher, IIED-LA
23/01/07	Interview with Sergio Cuaderno	Officer, Secretary of Public Works,

		Municipality of Moreno
23/01/07	Interview with Gladys Moyano	Local government officer, CGP 5, Bajo Flores
Fieldwork: October 2007 - January 2008		
09/10/07	Eduardo Villalba	Environment officer, Ex-chief of Staff, Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene
10/10/07	Meeting with Francisco Monzón	Member of CERBaF, Bajo Flores
11/10/07	Interview Gastón Urquiza	Research Manager of Focus Cities project , IIED-LA
10/10/07	Phone call with Gustavo Visolini	Subsecretary of Urban Hygiene officer
16/10/07	Interview with Felix Cariboni	DGPRU officer
18/10/07	Moreno inter-area dialogue round table Interview with Mabel Zapata	Focus Cities project, Moreno Representative of area four, Focus cities Project, Moreno
23/10/07	Interview with Carlos Hurtz	CEAMSE Director
12/11/07	Interview with Diego Torres	Quality control manager, URBASUR
12/11/07	Interview with Lorena Monzón	New President of CERBaF, Bajo Flores
15/11/07	Moreno inter-area dialogue round table	Focus Cities project, Moreno
23/11/07	Interview with Julio Leguizamón	Officer, Secretary of Public Works, Municipality of Moreno
26/11/07	Interviews with CERBaF members	CERBaF, Bajo Flores
27/11/07	Interviews and conversations with CERBaF members	CERBaF, Bajo Flores
28/11/07	Interviews with CERBaF members Interview with Lorena Monzón	CERBaF, Bajo Flores New President of CERBaF

29/11/07	URBASUR Supervision tour Urbasur Moreno inter-area dialogue round table	URBASUR, waste collection company Focus Cities project
30/11/07	Interview Marcela Pozzuoli	In charge of Separation Plants, CEAMSE officer
3/12/07	Interview with Francisco Suárez Interview with Marcelo Rosso	Anthropologist working on waste, UNGS, Instituto del Conurbano CEAMSE officer
6/12/07	inter-area dialogue round table	Focus Cities project, Moreno
10/12/07	Informal conversations with social science researchers on waste	Social science researchers on waste
11/12/07	Interviews with CERBaF members	CERBaF, Bajo Flores
12/12/07	Interview with Felix Cariboni	DGPRU officer
20/12/07	Interview with Bajo Flores members	CERBaF, Bajo Flores
21/12/07	Interview with CEAMSE officer	CEAMSE officer
26/12/07	Interview with Cristian Finelli	Ente de Higiene Urbana, Public waste collection entity
4/1/08	CERBaF feedback sessions	CERBaF, Bajo Flores
4/1/08	Interview with Roque García Interview with Carmen Bel	Representative area four, Focus Cities project Representative area four, Focus Cities project
7/1/08	Interview Gastón Urquiza Interview Jorgelina Hardoy Interview with Ana Hardoy	Research Manager of Focus Cities project , IIED-LA Focus Cities project Researcher, IIED-LA IIED-LA Director

	Interview with Gustavo Pandiella	Focus Cities project Researcher, IIED-LA
8/1/08	Interview with Eduardo Perrone Interview with Hernán Boquete	Representative area four, Focus Cities project Officer, Secretary of Public Works, Municipality of Moreno
9/1/08	Interview with Gustavo Grasso Interview with Gustavo Visolini	City government officer, Urban Hygiene City government officer, Urban Hygiene

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