













JUSTICIA

La historia mínima, esa que queda sólo registrada en la memoria de los detallistas, dirá que Ezpeleta fue algo más que un barrio a media hora del centro de Buenos Aires. Alguien recordará que sus vecinos de principios del siglo XXI lograron una proeza en la defensa de su derecho a vivir en una tierra sin contaminación. Ocurrió cuando la Justicia, por primera vez en la Argentina, falló a favor de la protección de su salud frente a la falta de pruebas sobre una posible fuente de contaminación. El fallo histórico lo firmó la Cámara de Apelación de La Plata y en él ordenó a la empresa Edesur detener el tendido de cables de alta tensión hacia la Subestación Sobral. Según los vecinos las ondas electromagnéticas que emitía esa planta los enfermaban. Para la empresa, cumplía con las normas.

Tres años después de aquel fallo histórico, Gladys Solioz, Angélica Boncosqui y Mirta Penela entraron al despacho del juez de Primera Instancia, Adolfo Gabino Ziulu, para preguntar por qué razón no se había hecho el censo estadístico ordenado también por la Justicia. En la reunión, las vecinas se enteraron de que faltaban los 13.000 dólares para pagarlo. Para esa misma época, en un barrio cercano, Berazategui, otro grupo de vecinos luchaban para impedir que instalen una subestación similar a la de Ezpeleta. El juez ordenó nuevamente hacer un censo para determinar el promedio de enfermos y muertos alrededor de la Subestación Sobral. Los resultados los compararían con los de otras zonas en las que no existieran subestaciones. El estudio lo pagará Edesur, la empresa cuestionada. Si queda demostrado que el nivel de enfermos en Ezpeleta es normal la otra subestación se levantará.









CANCER















María Elena Poljobich, la nieta de uno de los ministros del último zar de Rusia, fuma un Derby Suave en Ezpeleta. Las rosas de plástico en el florero de la mesa del living de su casa combinan con el rojo furioso de sus uñas. Maneja el cigarrillo con su mano izquierda, lo levanta del cenicero de vidrio tallado, lo coloca en la comisura de sus labios del mismo lado y pita largo. Tira el humo hacia arriba en un gesto copiado de una diva en blanco y negro, y las miles de arrugas leves se le contraen en una mueca que queda suspendida.

La nieta de uno de los ministros del último zar de Rusia, la de Ezpeleta, es de mala encarnadura, de esas a las que una herida le tarda mucho en curar. En cerrar. Tiene 73 años. Un cáncer de mama la dejó con un hueco profundo en la mitad de su tórax y con un desgano que no la deja hacer nada. La muerte de su hijo le marcó un tajo aún más profundo. El dolor que no cesa, todavía le vuelve transparentes los ojos celestes. El azúcar, que tres veces por día le pone su marido para cicatrizar las marcas del cuerpo, no puede con ella.

María Elena Poljobich se desnuda con un gesto que copió de su abuela y calca la mueca noble de aquella aristócrata rusa que no sabía ni peinarse sola. Comienza a desabrocharse la blusa para mostrar la marca en su cuerpo mientras, de costado, pita el Derby Suave largo. Se saca el relleno de nylon de una parte del corpiño. Se lo desabrocha. Se muestra. Sostiene con una mano su única mama como si fuera un mascarón de proa que a pesar de la lluvia y la bruma marina mantiene cierto esplendor. María Elena Poljobich se vuelve una esfinge. Pierde la mirada hacia delante y choca con la pared de su casa, donde también rebotan las ondas electromagnéticas. Sin mirar la cámara, pregunta de costado: ¿Así?

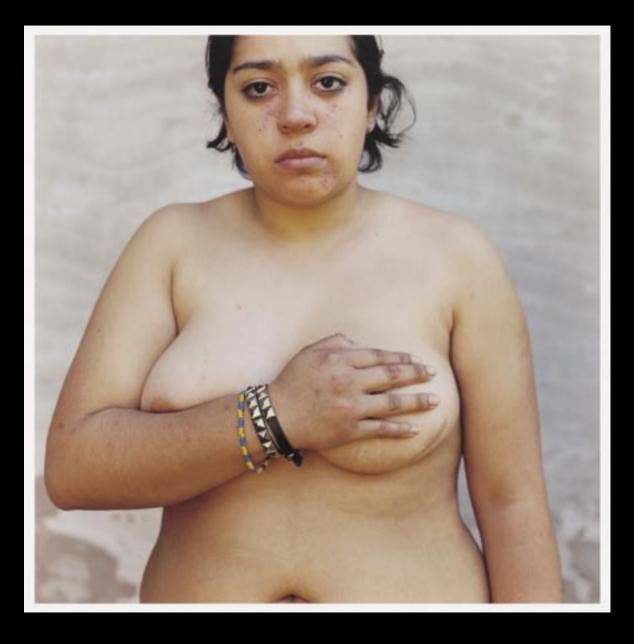
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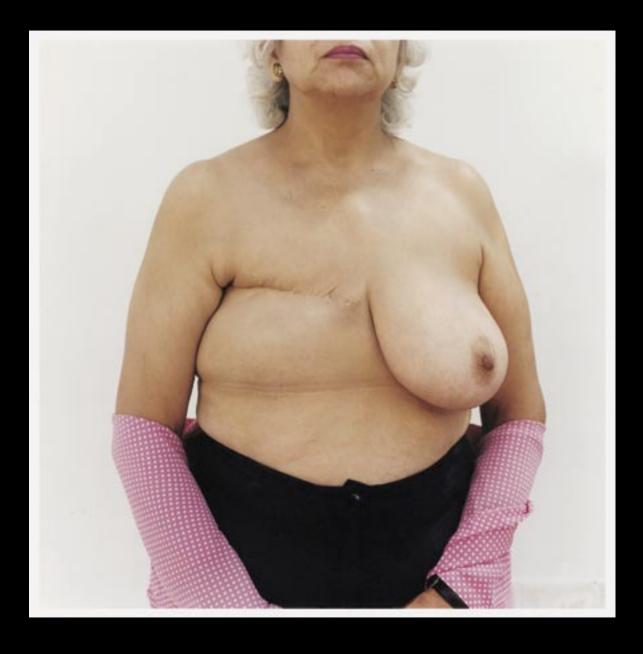
































Hace un rato que Beatriz de Depetris se dedica a acariciar con su dedo la figura plana de una fotografía en blanco y negro. En ella se ve a Ricardo Depetris con pantalones angostos y camisa clara en el preciso instante que da un salto: parece un Fred Astaire bailando en una cancha de bochas de un club de barrio. A pesar de que Depetris murió a finales de 1997, a ella le quedó en la mirada, una desolación que todavía parece no entender. Casi medio siglo antes, el padre de ella les había regalado, en Ezpeleta, el terreno de la esquina de La Guarda y Río Salado. En ese entonces, nada había de esa gigantesca torre con el cartel de "Peligro Alta Tensión" que hay ahora. El terreno de la Subestación Sobral era un descampado. La pareja se casó, levantó su casa que lleva el número 621. Vivieron. Un trabajo que les alcanzaba para vivir bien. Los fines de semana en el Club Sol de Mayo. Los campeonatos de bochas. Los viajes. Los planes de irse, recién jubilados, a vivir a Córdoba. "Pero esa columna se veía fea", cuenta la mujer. "Nadie podía pensar que iba a causar tantas muertes". Ricardo Depetris y su única hermana, María Luisa, se juntaban todas las tardes a tomar mate debajo del pino que está a unos metros de la gran torre. Hasta que un día, Depetris se resfrió. La congestión no se le iba. A las semanas, el diagnóstico fue cáncer de pulmón y un "ya no hay nada que hacer". Murió ahogado. Seis meses después, su hermana murió igual.

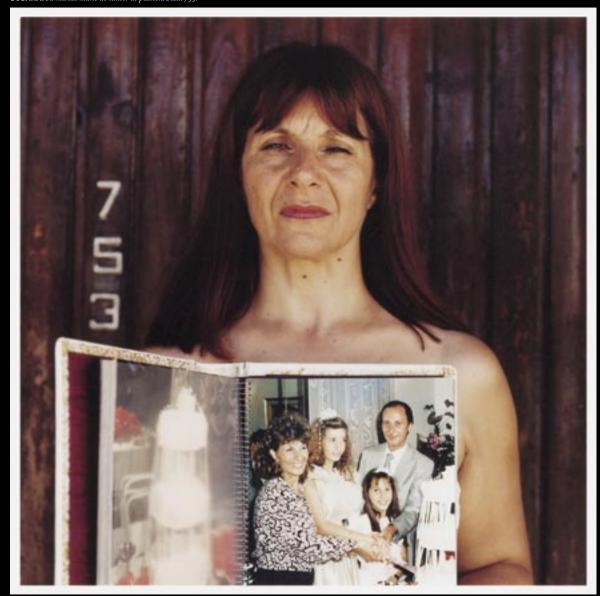




CRISTINA Y YESSICA. La abuela de Yessica falleció de cáncer de pulmón. Río Colorado 4934.







FABIANA, JULIÁN Y JOAQUÍN. Los mellizos nacieron sordos o con hipoacusia. Su mamá sufre de cataratas en los ojos. Río Salado 4855.



ONDAS ELECTROMAGNÉTICAS EN EZPELETA

La zona más afectada por la emisión de energía eléctrica emitida desde la Subestación Sobral, y por los cables de alta y media tensión que se dirigen y salen de ella, está comprendida por once manzanas. En este área, según los vecinos, viven 1.923 personas.

REFERENCIAS

+ Vecinos fallecidos

EN TOTAL

115 Vecinos que fallecieron *

• Vecinos enfermos

EN TOTAL

112 Vecinos que están enfermos*

(*) Recuento al 30 de julio de 2006.

GRAN BUENOS AIRES

UBICACION

Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires

Tiempo de viaje desde el Obelisco

30' por autopista

+++++ +++++ señala a un grup

Av. República de Francia

A Quilmes

E. Iglesias

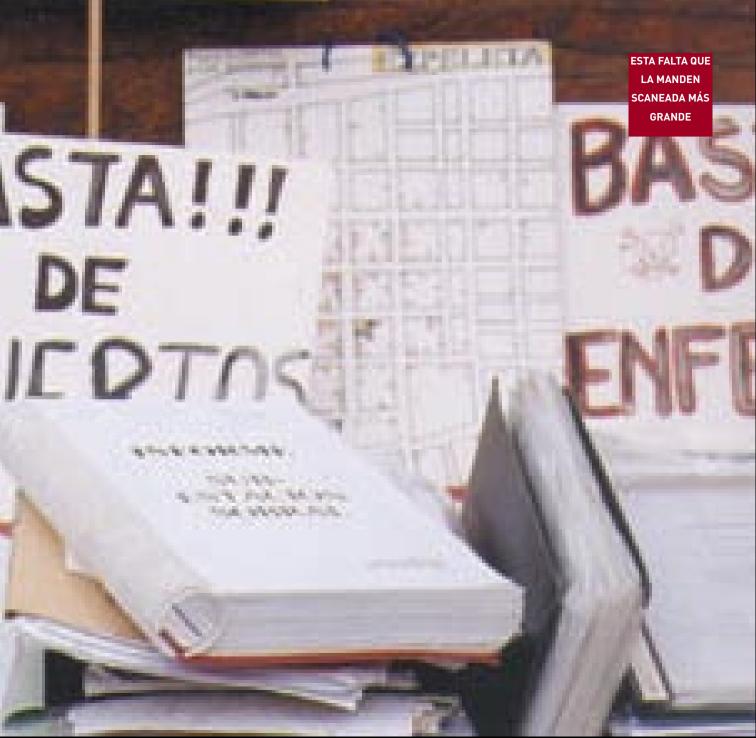
Esta marca señala a un grupo de vecinos que pidieron no ser identificados por diferentes razones. Sus casos se encuentran registrados en la denuncia ante la Justicia.













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Ref: A LOS VECINOS DE EZPELETA

Este libro es un testimonio de la incertidumbre con la que los vecinos de la subestación Sobral, en el barrio de Ezpeleta conviven a diario. Frente a esta realidad, pretendo no permanecer indiferente a los hechos que impunemente vienen cometiéndose.

A través de esta carta, apoyo el pedido de un informe de impacto ambiental objetivo en el barrio de Ezpeleta del partido de Quilmes, provincia de Buenos Aires. También solicito el urgente traslado de la subestación eléctrica Sobral a una zona no urbanizada.

Después de más de diez años de lucha, reclamos, enfermedades y muerte, los vecinos de esa localidad merecen una rápida solución al problema. La Justicia y el Estado están obligados a garantizar el derecho a la vida de todos los habitantes.

Autorizo a que esta carta sea presentada, según se considere, ante los organismos y funcionarios pertinentes.

SÓLO CON UNA SOLUCIÓN A ESTE RECLAMO, HABRÁ JUSTICIA.

Mi nombre es	
y mi número de documento es el	
	The same of the same

TENSION ZONE

The eyes, together with the stomach and heart (even if we want to understand it in the metaphorical sense usually conferred to it) are our most flexible organs. What horrified us a short time ago, is not already seen by us. Our eyes adapt themselves to the idea that we have of ourselves. It is due to this reason that the image we get from the mirror is different from the one offered by the portrait made of us by somebody else, even from photographic portraits; even from photographic self portraits.

The image we have of ourselves, as well as the image we have of our society is an ideal construction, in which our memory participates, but above all our desire. That is why we do not look at our neighbours any longer. Our neighbours are our fellow men ... and they are too similar to us.

Non-electric carts, not only driven by horses but also by men and children (who are our neighbours), have returned to the wealthiest city neighbourhoods, which besides being the highest consumers are also the highest garbage producers. In 2001 their appearance took us all by surprise as a deterioration of the city landscape. We do not see them today.

Coming from Greater Buenos Aires, trucks and trains carry "cartoneros" who separate and collect our garbage. This image horrified us at first. But how long? We accept this reality nowadays; we do not see it any longer. We coexist with that reality, consigning its perception to a non-disturbing corner of our conscience.

Immersed in the capital policy, measured now by minute-to-minute ratings as long as these do not interfere with their own interests, mass media do nothing but reply and project what they suppose our desire to be. That is to say, the desire of the majority. TV news programmes last one hour. Weekly publications have sixty four pages. Newspapers have ninety six. The cultural section has one page. The Society section has two. Police news three. World news four. This is to give but one example, as this differs according to each case, of course. These are standardized, fixed measurements. It is not important what may happen in

the world, in culture or in society this week. Even if the towers fall down, Maria Julia is released from prison or Boca Juniors Club gets a draw, after the news programme Video Match or Francella's last sitcom will start. But even though nothing of this happens, news programmes do last one hour and the written press has a fixed number of pages to be daily filled with the same amount of "contents".

What is and what is not a piece of news is the result of a business machinery decision called journalist company, governed by economic interests whose scope may lead a weak government dependent on a daily-consensus dose, to extreme decisions such as a monetary devaluation.

Thus, the pain we feel identified with is a piece of news. Kidnappings, violent robberies to the elders and murders after rapes flow in abundance. When media identify their consumers' interest as one "type" of pain, they insist on showing cases of that type until the interest exhausts and it is replaced by renewed morbidity. But life is something different. And it goes on.

This book intends to create an area of journalism outside the media, an independent journalistic practice by an independent publishing company. Because what happens in Ezpeleta is not a piece of news. That is to say, "independently" regardless that the media may possibly "cover" the news, what has been happening in Ezpeleta during almost the last thirty years is still going on every single day.

We like to think that we can do something about it, from independent publishing and independent journalism, from photographic trial, in order to govern our eye's flexibility, an involuntary reflex. Training it to avoid diversion and against weariness.

When we finished reading the newspaper, we threw it away. Images of TV news programmes are being broadcast and, when almost asleep, intertwine confusingly with those of HBO and MTV. We do bet here that this book format will serve the purpose to focus our eyes on what our neighbours are fighting against with their own bodies.

As the State impoverishes, the worsening of the services that it provides becomes obvious. Before State inefficacy and the failure of its welfare role, social causes claiming for vindication have been appearing during the last years, spontaneously and in isolation, across the most different strata of civil society. In that context, and allowing me to consciously say that some particular groups are excluded, such as formerly arrested disappeared persons, relatives, Madres de Plaza de Mayo, Abuelas, HIJOS, Hermanos and the rest of the organizations promoting the defence of Human Rights fight for the cause of those disappeared and the right to memory. In another chapter, the Jewish community is all by itself in front of the Israel Embassy and AMIA bombing attacks. The picketers' claim for social programmes; República de Cromagnon next of kin victims' claim for some justice; the neighbours of Gualeguaychu fight to avoid the installation of cellulose processing plants in the city of Fray Bentos; and the list goes on... Each group concentrates on a suffering which seems to be unique (it is unique), and claims it to be exclusive. Ezpeleta neighbours are also alone in their cause. This book is proposed as an active gesture to be built in itself as a fighting tool. It intends to share Ezpeleta neighbours' cause, create conscience, claim for changes in public policies and, at best, create discussion and lead to participation and support by other social actors sensitive to the common cause of achieving a better

The district of Ezpeleta is nearby, in Quilmes, half an hour from the publishing company premises. It is not farther than the workshop of one of the printing houses to which we usually entrust our books. But Ezpeleta is a high tension zone. Southern Greater Buenos Aires has been an area of social tensions for some years now. But Ezpeleta is an electromagnetic tension zone. Originally built by SEGBA and then enlarged and managed by EDESUR in a fully urban zone, Sobral Substation power generation has criminal and heavy effects on the health of its population. And, however, despite its proximity and obviousness, we preferred not to learn about it.

and fairer society.

This is because somebody else's pain is among the things we would rather not see. Not to mention if this involves our nearby neighbours. People like us.

MURDERING WAVES

Melatonin decrease, nauseas, headaches, depression, cancerous pathologies, malformations, death.

Neighbours are of the opinion that these affections are due to electromagnetic fields generated by the transforming plant and request the moving of Sobral Substation. EDESUR states that it has not been possible to prove that these electromagnetic fields affect health. That is to say, despite death evidence and terrifying statistics, it alleges procedural inadmissibility and scientific gaps.

It is true that the World Health Organization (http://www.who. int/peh-enf/es) has still few certainties on the negative effects of electromagnetic fields on human health at household scale. It just argues that "it is out of the question that beyond certain thresholds, electromagnetic fields may trigger biological effects". And that the results of EMF Health Risk Assessment surveys will be available in some years' time... That is to say that, evident as it is, research development goes hand in hand with the interests of the technological-scientific-industrial society. But what happens with the high doses which Ezpeleta neighbours are exposed to? Why should the very same victims be the ones responsible for proving that the "causal link between affections suffered and the supposedly contaminating agent" is scientifically determined? Should not the mere doubt supported by the evidence of pain contained in these pages be sufficient enough to put and end to the source of this damage?

The National Energy Regulating Authority (ENRE) states that "its controlling powers are limited to verifying compliance with the guidelines set forth in Resolution 77/98 by the National Energy Secretariat which establishes the rules to be fulfilled by electric energy transformers and distributors, reason by which

-as it argues- this governmental agency is responsible for the electromagnetic levels allowed". EDESUR states that "the different measurements of the industrial frequency of the electromagnetic field levels generated by that power transforming plant (...) were not higher than those allowed by the regulations". And finally that "concerning the potential adoption of the measures requested by the shareholders (neighbours) –put and end to the use of the lines as power transmitters and removal of Sobral substation and existing wiring- the company points our that the National Interconnected System could be seriously affected and, as a consequence, the public interest and the wellbeing of the rest of electric service users (...), as well as that for an efficient power transportation and distribution tensions (voltage) are increased to 500 kv and that, upon reaching the area where this will be consumed, the energy flow is distributed, tension decreasing successively by means of transforming stations until low tension level is reached (220,000; 132,000; 33,000; 13,200; and finally 220 volts).

The judges hearing the case express that "in order to establish the degree of liabilities and solutions, it should be preliminary recalled that environmental law is mainly governed, in our National legal system, by the National Constitution which, after its reform in 1994, included in its Article 41 the right of all the inhabitants of the Nation to "enjoy the right to a healthful, balanced environment fit for human development, so that productive activities satisfy current needs without compromising those of future generations". Also, they claim that "exposure to electromagnetic fields, even to levels lower than those legally permitted, is not an impediment neither to release electric companies from liability for health damages which Ezpeleta inhabitants may suffer in this case, nor to delimit ENRE's responsibility for defective exercise of police power".

We are aware off-the-record that some EDESUR directors are conscious of the effect caused by Sobral Substation and that it "should" be replaced. However, regardless of the costs involved in so doing, they know that, should they go ahead, new complaints and notifications to replace other substations would be submitted... The cost would be so high that the company total operation would not be viable. They would rather leave the country.

As far as we and Ezpeleta neighbours are concerned, this would be a secondary consequence. Supposing that this takes place, should not the State retake the administration of electric power for the benefit of citizens? Of course it should be the State which affords the costs of adapting technology to the needs of the population. Is there not then a political background to this situation? If we consider that we live in a country which is always prone to an energy crisis, the answer is quite obvious.

We do believe in a responsibility shared by different sectors. Years go by and diseases develop, environmental impact assessments are not carried out, science remains silent, justice does not act, companies propose no solutions, the media forgets, neighbours die. Since this book started taking form two years ago, at least twenty neighbours have passed away due to reasons "allegedly" directly linked to the generation of the Substation electromagnetic fields.

In the meantime, in San Juan de Berazategui neighbourhood, some minutes away from Ezpeleta, EDESUR is attempting to recover a no-longer-in-use SEGBA plant to transform it into a new high-and-medium tension substation to satisfy the demands of new country clubs and suburban developments. Neighbourhood pavements have been ditched by the company workers during the day and refilled by the neighbours at night, conscious of the tragic future this means to them. While these lines are being written down, the company has changed its strategy: workmen have started working escorted by uniformed policemen and the dissuasive presence of bodyguards in civil attire.

ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELDS BECOME NUDIST FIELDS

Before the rejection of what we would prefer not to exist, nudity attracts our attention. María Eugenia Cerutti resorts to two ancient traditions: nudity in art and photography, and the use of artistic nudity as a resource of political activism.

Neither artists nor well-known personalities are here... and

the reasons are not vague or universal. The main characters of this book are housewives who suffer. Men and women of a neighbourhood who decided to pose nude and dramatically expose themselves for us to see the devils they are victims of, in the absence of responses from the Justice, their municipal representatives, the ENRE and mass media. They show us the marks evidencing their suffering, the traces of their pain, spots on their bodies as irrefutable documents of what used to be full bodies, complete families.

A domino effect took place. It was just one neighbour getting

naked and the rest of them imitated him. When they discovered one another, in shock at the other's mutilation, identified by their own, they accepted to discover themselves.

We, who do not live in Ezpeleta, cannot hear the noise of electric generators. Neither can we see the electromagnetic fields they produce. Only the traces of the devil they "generate".

Let us see. This is the least we can all ask for to our sensitivity in fracts of the ground stress when for hear and in a continuous field in the second second

Let us see. This is the least we can all ask for to our sensitivity in front of the moral strength of those taking off their clothes to reveal their nudity.

And then, once we have seen and discovered it, what else can we do?

JUSTICE

The minor story, the one registered only in the mind of those who go into detail, will tell that Ezpeleta was more than a neighbourhood located at half-an-hour's drive from Buenos Aires' downtown. Someone will remember that, at the beginning of the 21st century, their neighbours achieved to defend their right to live free of contamination. It was when Justice, for the first time in Argentina, ruled in favour of protecting their health before the lack of evidence of a possible contamination source. The historic judgment was signed by La Plata Court of Appeals. It ordered EDESUR to stop high-tension wiring installation towards Sobral Substation. As these neighbours claimed, the electromagnetic waves emanating from that very same plant cause them to get ill. As to the company, it complied with the rules.

Three years after that historic judgment, Gladys Solioz, Angélica

Boncosqui y Mirta Penela came into the office of the Judge of First Instance Adolfo Gabino Ziulu and enquired him about the reason why the statistical census also ordered by the court had not been carried out. At the meeting, these women learned that the amount of US\$ 13,000 necessary to perform it were not available. By that time, in Berazategui, a nearby neighbourhood, other group of neighbours struggled to prevent the building of a substation similar to the one erected in Ezpeleta. The Judge ordered again to carry out a census to determine the average of ill people and deaths in the surroundings of Sobral Substation. The results of that census would be compared to those of substation-free areas. The study will be afforded by EDESUR, the company under question. If it is proven that the level of ill people in Ezpeleta is normal, the other Substation will be built.

ANATOMY OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD

There is a fish bowl in Gladys Solioz's dining room. Fish look normal in it, except for a detail: every once in a while one of them dies. On the previous days, the fish doomed to die usually announces its death with a ceremony: it swims alone on the surface. Brenda Ullman, the family's eldest daughter, follows now with her finger the fatal ritual of a black fish within the glass

walls. She is 23 years old and is very talkative. She wants to be an actress and, somehow, she already is. She is not short of genes. Her blonde hair is part of her paternal heredity, the Ullmans. "Like the actress", she says. But it is difficult to stick to a vocation in Quilmes, located in the middle of the shantytowns around Buenos Aires, middle-class neighbourhoods, motorways and

people who once wanted to progress. Brenda Ullman speaks. Almost breathlessly, she says that no plant grew at the garden, that nothing grows in the garden. She gesticulates. She tells that fish die. She laughs. She says that contamination is in the air, arising out from the wall just behind the fish bowl: from Sobral Substation. Brenda Ullman insists that contamination cannot be seen while one breaths and electromagnetic waves fly through the air. While she speaks one cannot help thinking that in the same air transmitting her voice lays the possible reason for fish death, for garden infertility and for so many illnesses and people who died within these eleven blocks in Ezpeleta district. It is impossible not to think the same as everybody does: "I am breathing cancer", while, perhaps, at that very moment some body cell is giving the incorrect order and birth to the illness. The streets of Ezpeleta are wide enough for two cars travelling at the same time. But that seldom happens: the streets usually are kids' football playing field, the lane of some bicycles, the way of some cars lowering the speed until they stop at the door of a house. Pavements are also as wide as streets. At mid morning, Angélica Boncosqui stamps her feet on them while walking to the corner grocer's in a rush, as if she started her way to the market once the gas rings of her cook are on. Shortly after, also in a hurry, Fabiana Diaz carries her children home back from school.

The streets of Ezpeleta show another architectural excess: the columns. As regards their size, they could well be part of a Soviet Russian avenue. Two persons are needed to embrace them. A yellow sign at the bottom warns about the danger of doing so. "High tension", it says. The rest of the structure is only grey smooth and flat cement, which climbs up as if it were one of those trees which grow endlessly in the Grimm Brothers' stories. The wires can hardly be seen from the floor: up above they transport high tension – 132,000 volts.

Energy also circulates underneath Ezpeleta streets. Streets and pavements show no trace of the ditches along which high-and-medium tension wires run. Electricity up and down. The wire weft weaves a network which reaches the corner of Padre Bruzzone

Street and Rio Colorado Street, that is to say, the land next to Gladys Solioz 's house. Right there, two 132,000-volt high tension wires go into Sobral Substation and some 13,200-volt medium tension wires go out. Nobody knows how many of this kind there are. A large thick wall hides the energy destination. The wall has just been painted. The electricity company has this work done strangely frequently, every time daylight reveals some writing on it. Always a disturbing message. It generally says "death". Sometimes, it includes an algebraic expression: Cancer = Death. If there were not these warnings and the too many "on sale" boards at many houses around the substation, Ezpeleta would look like a normal neighbourhood. As normal as the fish bowl in Gladys Solioz 's dining room. But, from time to time, a black fish swims alone on the surface and Brenda Ullman knows that it is a warning: the fish will soon die.

It takes thirty minutes to reach by motorway Ezpeleta from Buenos Aires obelisk. The toll gate acts as the welcome arch to a circuit similar to a drivers' test one. Some metres ahead, the street gets rougher and becomes then a line of holes to be dodged when driving fast. Precise movements are needed: the quickest way is reportedly said to be also the most dangerous. The warning becomes reality in any Saturday afternoon. The second traffic light is red: two young men wearing a cap and baggy trousers suddenly appear from a cross street as if hurrying up to cross during the red light. When they get near a car window of one of the two cars waiting for the traffic light to change, the tallest boy produces a gun and aims at the driver. The gun grey colour shines. No police car is nearby and the only option is to accelerate. Two blocks ahead, the police car drives at such a slow speed that it seems from another planet. It has received the theft alert. It turns on the sirens and blue revolving lights and speeds up. The most straightforward way is the most dangerous: along this road you quickly reach Ezpeleta Cemetery. On the corner, where a huge cross erects, one has to turn right. Soon, the high tension tower looms. Just follow them to reach the Solioz's family house.

The coloured plastic flowers need neither soil nor water. It is the first Wednesday of February 2005 and those on German Solioz's brown-marbled grave shine among the rest. His daughter, Gladys Solioz, together with two of her three children have cleaned them for the photograph. There is almost nobody in the area. The temperature is 24° C, lower than the average temperature at this time of the year, gives a worrying but pleasant calmness.

German Solioz had lung cancer. He died on 10 August 1998 after having stayed in an intensive care unit for one month and a half. Two years before her father's death, Gladys cut the first article of a scientific journal which warned about the danger of high tension electrical wiring in urban areas. "They are coming here", she thought and put the page away. There was a small warehouse of the State-owned electricity company SEGBA next to her house. The Municipality of Quilmes assured that it would become a square, the same as the one where Gladys Solioz remembers playing at, when she lived half a block away from there. But so far the square is not but a memory from childhood. Had Gladys Solioz and her husband known that the true destination of the land on the corner would be otherwise, they would have not started building the face brick house where they now live, at the age of 45 and with their three children. After the privatisation of the company, workers arrived one September morning in 1992. Gladys Solioz's clipping folder kept on growing as thick as a telephone directory of a big city. Pages and pages contain medical histories and death certificates of most of the almost two thousand neighbours who live in the eleven blocks around her house. There is also a map inside the folder. A sketch that Gladys Solioz has been marking by hand for several years. When unfolded, the sketch occupies half of the dining room table board. On it, she draws green crosses referring to neighbours suffering cancer. The red crosses are dedicated to those who passed away. It is ten years now since she started a home-made census resulting into 115 dead and 112 ill.

ANATOMY OF A STRUGGLE

Gladys Solioz tries to shelter from the suffocating heat of a summer day under a tree which hardly provides any shade. She is outside her house, waiting for Angélica Boncosqui, a neighbour who, like her, wondered whether the cause of her illness was the electric power substation located twenty metres from her house. Boncosqui is 56 years old and has been living in the neighbourhood since she got married in 1978, when the land on the corner was a vacant site; a square for the neighbourhood children, indeed. Boncosqui comes walking fast, breathless. Words come out of her mouth as if they had been waiting to do it for a long time. It seems that she is short of time for everything. She has been suffering from breast cancer for the last ten years. As a consequence of the operation in which one of her breasts and several nodes were extirpated, she cannot move one of her arms as quickly as she used to. She does not clean the floor any longer as she used to. Neither does she knead ravioli. She feels -she saysmutilated, living "within a radiation sandwich".

- I came across Mary -she starts talking as if she were to tell the latest gossip of the neighbourhood. She told me that Mirta resumed chemotherapy sessions.

Once inside her house, Gladys Solioz attempts to summarize the story of her neighbourhood. After several years of suspicion that the reason of such an evil was that buzzing heard by many in the streets, they contacted Julio Sobrino, president of the Taxpayers, Consumers and Users Coordinating Association, a non-governmental organization devoted to teaching citizens to petition, sue and fight for their rights. Almost without noticing it, those days in the 90s became hours of street fighting in Ezpeleta. The struggle began upon the arrival of workers of EDESUR, the electricity company which undertook the State-owned company. From the neighbours 'viewpoint, workers worked almost clandestinely. They came into the warehouse in big trucks and their activities never stopped. They were trying to get any sense of 24-hour activities. Explosions at the corner site were frequent. Only one question pending: what had happened? Some imagined

that, behind the big thick walls, parties took place including fireworks. Until on 28 May one explosion at two in the morning got them out of bed. The gates were blown up in the air and landed in the opposite side of the street. A blackout followed in the whole neighbourhood. Firemen and the police turned up shortly after. That night, Gladys Solioz ended up at the Police Station to report misuse of the substation. As evidence, she left a piece of a worker's shirt. It was burned.

Two months later, there was an even louder explosion. It was almost seven in the morning of 28 July when the gate opened up with a blow and awakened all those living nearby. Afterwards, Ernesto Peragallo heartbreaking shout was heard. Brenda Ullman was 14 years old and leaned out of the bull's eye of her house wall. The wall behind the fish bowl.

- Mummy! He is getting burned! -she yelled. Peragallo was standing up, his arms stretched in a cross. Up from his waist, he was ablaze. With resignation, he told his mate: "Look how I am burning myself". They tried to put out the fire with water buckets. The Ullmans learned from the papers that Peregallo was 43 years old and that he could not reach the hospital alive. He died in the EDESUR van while being taken to hospital. - Mummy -asked next day Claus, Gladys Solioz's youngest child- the man is already up in heaven or still stuck to electricity? Two years later, on 22 September 1999, another big explosion took place. It was 13:26 and Jorge Aloy, a 23-year-old worker, died on that occasion. On those days ditches began to be made. It was an omen: a new high tension installation would reach Sobral Substation. Gladys Solioz's family and many neighbours stood up before the workers to stop them from digging. They even threw themselves into the ditches to stop them. It was 26 June 2002, one day which would become a landmark turning point in Argentine history. From the early hours, the Avellaneda bridge which links the City of Buenos Aires and Greater Buenos Aires had been blocked by four thousand picketers. The crisis of 2001 had left half of the population under the poverty line. That

midday the police repressed the demonstrators. Two of them

were executed: Maximiliano Kosteki and Darío Santillán. "The

massacre of Avellaneda" took place at less than fifteen-minute driving from Ezpeleta and repression was also there. Two hundred policemen against fifty neighbours trying to stop EDESUR works. While southern Buenos Aires was immersed in tear gas smoke, in Ezpeleta one Town Councillor, Miriam Magdalena, and two Deputies, Francisco "El Barba" Gutiérrez and Alfredo Villalba turned up to defend the neighbours. After some months, they achieved that two bills were submitted at the National Congress: one of them, forbidding the air installation of medium and high tension wiring in inhabited areas; and another one demanding the moving of Sobral Substation to a site not surrounded by households. But the docket did not receive any treatment. After the repression, the struggle began to take place during the nights. At two in the morning, children and adults from the neighbourhood got up, came out into the streets and covered the holes made by EDESUR workers during the day. Ditches became trenches. When workers realize that they had to do them again, they changed the tactics. They gave up working during the day. They surprisingly arrived in the early hours, turned off the truck engines some blocks in advance and, silently, dug the ditches in the darkness. Next morning, neighbours were shocked to see, with a big frustration, that works had already been done: they knew that every single metre of the ditch meant more wires and energy. And what was the problem about that? People started getting ill. Gladys Solioz went round visiting the neighbourhood and nearly always met someone who told her about a new case. A seven-yearold boy came across Claus, her youngest child, in the "Sol de Mayo" club. Her mother had died of a devastating cancer. They made up a plan: go to the substation with a hammer and destroy it. At that time, the Soliozs had read and searched on the internet. "Electromagnetic" or "electro pollution". These were the key words. It was just googling them and the results went from thousands of scientific theories, which either did not scare them at all or they confirmed their suspicions. The World Health Organization concern on the consequences of exposure to this kind of waves had led them to request a study in several countries of the world. The aim of the report, which is not finished yet, is to determine

whether higher exposure to electromagnetic waves cause illnesses. A study carried out by this organization has already been proven that children exposed to more than 0,3 microtesla —the unit to measure the strength of electromagnetic fields- may double the possibilities of developing leukaemia, the blood cancer. However, Argentine law allows for an emission of up to 25 microtesla in urban areas, that is to say, 8,000 percent more than the 0,3 microtesla which may trigger leukaemia amongst children.

In 2002, the images and claim of Ezpeleta neighbours were broadcast in the television programme Punto.doc under the title "Cancer, the dead and impunity". With the news bombing, instead of achieving a reply from any Government agency, the testimonies increased fear among those who were already frightened, created more suspicions among those who were building up conspiratorial hypotheses and accusing gaze on the part of politicians. "It is all about collective psychosis", one of them said.

Within this confusion, a reply appeared, also in the internet: "There is a social pressure based on the hypersensitivity to possible harmful effects on health of exposure to electromagnetic fields. This hypersensitivity arises from a series of scientific articles of an exclusively epidemiological character (...) Even more confusing are some personal alarmist interpretations which become public from ignorance of the most elemental scientific rigor".

At that time, Gladys Solioz and her neighbours could give Physics lessons. The environmental problem led them to rebuild a story dating back to the beginning of all principle: the Big Bang, the explosion explaining the most accepted origin of the Universe. According to this theory, after the first boom, what was left swarming around in space was a great number of photons, electrons, positrons and neutrinos. The union and combination among these particles is named electromagnetic interaction. This union is one of the four main characters of the history of the Universe and the one most directly related to mankind. To give but one example, the cell is the result of electromagnetic coupling of organic molecules. Therefore, the existence of every

person is only possible in an electromagnetic environment. In the pursuit of a metaphor: this complex mechanism is the most intimate structure of any matter. Trying to live without them is like trying to live without air, sun or food. Impossible. That is way so many hold that an extended exposure to these waves may cause transformation in the human body and, therefore, illnesses. This is the doubt that Gladys Solioz had when her father and neighbours died. All of them died of cancer?, she wondered.

In the house at 4612 Rio Colorado Street, there is a tape entitled "Big fish" under the living room coffee table. Tim Burton's film tells the story of a father through his son's recollections. The air smells of rosemary. By the table there is a bowl containing water and herbs. Until a short time ago, it was boiling on the cook. The dining room communicates with the living room and, through a curtained arch, with the kitchen. The day is unpleasant. At the back orchard, there are several lemon and peach trees, but only one apple tree. Analía Figueroa holds in her hands a photograph of her father, Antonio Figueroa. She is telling the story of this employee of the Building Workers Union, who worked in social affairs until he got ill. That was in May 1999. The diagnosis stated rectum tumour and then came the operation. The living room looks too empty. Antonio Figueroa's bed had been there, in the centre, till a short time ago and the absence of this piece of furniture is as strong as the father's absence. Analía Figueroa insists on explaining how she looked for alternatives for the illness. How the simplest of things becomes the most complex whit a sick person at home. The loneliness of having someone who suffers whilst the rest of things follows its usual rhythm. The illness isolates. "You know you will be back home and that he will be there, suffering. While everything goes on and there is no support. Each of us bears the pain as he or she can". Analía Figueroa is 34 years old and she was about to become a nun in the past. Now, facing her sick neighbours who remind her of her father, she wonders about the human absence to accompany somebody else's pain. How is it possible that teachers are not trained to support sick children and their school mates.

Sabrina Basualdo was one of these girls who had to explain at school what it meant to suffer from cancer. She is a part of the confirmed statistics: she lived opposite the Sobral Substation and her exposure to electromagnetic waves was continuous. She was diagnosed acute lymphoblastic leukaemia when she was fourteen. The living room window blinds are down and do not allow to see the wall which hides the possible source of contamination and of her suffering. Once the diagnosis was confirmed, she still remembers doctors saying that the illness evolution depended also on her strength to fight against it. Fundraising festivals were organised in the neighbourhood to afford her treatment. But Sabrina Basualdo was not the only girl suffering from leukaemia. Those days, Fabián Roccía got the same illness. He was thirteen years old and lived at 657 Padre Bruzzone Street. He died of the same cause as Mauro Prieto, who also lived at the street but at the age of four.

Sabrina Basualdo´s life during those years was divided between the efforts to do her homework and to travelling from Ezpeleta to La Plata Infant Hospital for her treatments. Sometimes her health deteriorated and she had to stay in hospital. She did not go to school. Today, the 25-year-old girl, with a big smile and freckles, still has after-effects from the illness which still hurt her. After many aggressive treatments to strike cancer dead, some of her bones were pulverised. She has one metal femur as well as metal parts of the bones of one of her arms. She is pregnant and is moving far away from the Substation together with her boyfriend. She does not want her son to be exposed to a radiation world. It was enough with her. As one of her last actions in Ezpeleta, she decided to pose nude before the camera. A scar cord runs on her leg and arm. She puts the X-Rays on the wall to show what cannot be seen: that her skeleton has metal bones.

ANATOMY OF A NUDE

Angélica Boncosqui does not get undressed any longer, not even before her husband. Despite this, she did not hesitate to take off her clothes to show her mutilated body. She was the first one to do it. It took place on one of the first mornings of interviews, at the end of November 2002. The act of intimate courage was revealed when the photographic session came to an end in her house yard. The home made stew was almost ready. The ravioli had been kneaded by her husband the night before because she did not have the strength to do it. The operation snatched it away from her, along with the mammary gland and several armpit nodes. Once the photographs had been taken, "Nené" —as she likes being called-came into the dining room with a gesture of astonishment on her face. She sighed deeply, gave a look at the cooking pots and? said: "I do not get undressed not even before my husband".

This first photograph had a reason, to denounce what was going on in her neighbourhood and it had its effect: many others were encouraged to show their marked bodies. In most cases the situation was almost the same. When they saw the photographed nudes of their neighbours, the others undressed bodies, the pain of the others had a moving effect. The other's reflect seemed to deepen the own pain. "Look how she is, poor her", said Juan Pagano. The ways of undressing were all different. Sometimes there were room for jokes. "It is for Playboy", María Velásquez and Mirta Penela joked. Other sessions were absolutely solemn. "Do you see how flaccid skin old ladies have", whispered Vicenta Leonilda when the session was over. Noelia Turdo lied back on an armchair, used her hands to hide and the gesture was a beautiful display of sensuality towards her sixty-seven-year body. "That is how we are. We are like any other neighbour, but that is how we are. Amputated", said Angélica Boncosqui in front of her photograph and, while looking at the rest of the photographs. In environmental struggles, television or photograph cameras generally point at the nature or objects. They are huge dams, large floods, machines, turbulent and strange coloured rivers. Dead fish. At the most, the act of showing enables to see such strange people that the possible audience finds difficult to identify with. They are either too poor or went through a war or a nuclear disaster like Chernobyl, or water took everything away from them and they are helpless. Spread on Gladys Solioz's dining room table, the nude photographs constituted the most intimate map of

any neighbourhood. The two neighbours had attended Alberto Barreto's funeral two days before, one of the neighbours who had posed nude, and they were going to pay a visit to Graciela Tenesczuk. Morphine was helping her to bear the pain of the final days. She took thirty milligrams daily and ten medicines. She needed a total budged amount of eight hundred pesos per month, more than twice the Argentine basic salary.

Gladys Solioz and Angélica Boncosqui went out to the wide streets of Ezpeleta like any other neighbour from the outskirts of Buenos Aires. But while they were walking they made a tour: the illness route. "The lady who lives here is ill. The man next door died last year. In the house next door, three members of the family died of cancer". Solioz and Boncosqui rang the bell at 860 Río Gallegos Street. Graciela Tenasczuk could not open the door. She had been born thirty seven years ago at that very place. Together with her husband, by mid 2001, and behind her parents 'house, they had build their own home. They lived there one year and

a half planning refurbishments until she was diagnosed breast cancer. Two years later, there was no test which were not negative. She had metastasis: two tumours in her brain and one in her liver. "You start learning to live with his too", she said while the birds she had raised in freedom flew over her garden. In full agony, she posed undressed. This was the last image captured by the camera in Ezpeleta. "This may be useful to prevent anyone else from getting ill", she said in a tiny sigh allowed by pain. Then, she slowly took off her blouse. She undid her bra. She showed her swollen stomach. She remained in silence. Her body without clothes was the only thing left to her. She died two days later, in the same neighbourhood where she was born, some metres from the electric power substation on the corner where she herself and Gladys Solioz used to play when they were young girls. When the land was a square and, in springtime, received an invasion of butterflies and they believed that the butterflies 'time would repeat every next September of their lives. Butterflies would always come back.

Maria Elena Poljobich, the granddaughter of one of the ministers of the last Russian czar, smokes a Derby light cigarette in Ezpeleta. The plastic roses in the vase on the living room table of her house match the strong red polish of her nails. She handles the cigarette with her left hand, lifts it from the carved glass ashtray, puts it in the left corner of her mouth and takes a long puff... She puffs the smoke up in a gesture imitated from a white-and-black diva, and thousands of small wrinkles contract in a gesture of suspense.

The granddaughter of one of the ministers of the last Russian czar, from Ezpeleta, is one of those women whose tissues take long to heal, whose injuries take long to cure. Cicatrising. She is 73 years old. Breast cancer left her a deep hollow in the middle of her thorax and a feeling of unwillingness that does not let her do anything. The death of her son marked an even deeper slash on her. Her light blue eyes still become transparent. The sugar that her husband puts on her injuries

three times a day to heal the spots on her body is not enough. Maria Elena Poljobich gets undressed in a gesture copied from her grandmother, and reproduces the noble gesture of that Russian aristocrat who did not even know to comb her hair. She begins by undoing her blouse to show the mark on her body while, at the same time, sideways, takes a puff of the long Derby light cigarette. She removes the nylon filling from a part of her bra. She undoes it. She exhibits herself. She holds her only breast in her hand as if it were a figurehead which, despite the rain and sea mist, still keeps some splendour. María Elena Poljobich becomes a sphinx. Her gaze fades ahead and bumps the wall of her house on which the electromagnetic waves also bounce. Without looking at the camera, she asks, sideways: Is it OK like this?

Maria Elena Poljobich, housewife, 73, 4732 Brown Street, Ezpeleta. She died in September 2005.

Carlos Córdoba was driving his truck on his way back from Villa Gesell when he noticed something strange in his body. In the middle of boredom, he lightly touched his neck with his hand and touched a lump. He had been spending most part of the day on a truck for more than twelve years. His wife and his sons, Luciano and Leandro, were waiting for him in his house in Ezpeleta. Carlos Córdoba was 29 and had plans to build a bedroom for his elder son. But fever did not go down and got him off the truck for some weeks. There were dozens of medical consultations and analyses until he got the diagnosis: Hodking lymphoma. Córdoba swore that he would not give up during his first visit to the

specialist doctor Mercedes Melgarejos, in La Plata. An unknown person approached him in the waiting room and told him: "never give up". The treatment was long. The illness seemed to be as strong as his big body. The treatment took more than six years to beat the illness. Carlos followed the treatment and went on driving his truck on the road. Chemotherapy caused him serious stomach aches and forced him to vomit on the roadside. From other cars people shouted at him: "Drunkard!"

Carlos Córdoba, truck driver, 45, Hodking lymphoma, 4671 Río Colorado Street, Ezpeleta.

"When I started radiotherapy sessions, I used to carry my medical history. I introduced myself to the doctors. I told them how old I were, how many children I had. I have three children and I breastfed them until they were 6 months. My grandmother died seven months ago. She died because she was old. Twenty days before dying, she started to say: "Well, it's all over now. I got tired". She died because she was old. My mother is really well. She only suffers from some pain in her knee. I've never smoked. I've never taken drugs. I'm not allergic. I've always had healthy food. But well... I got this. The doctor, at first, asked me: Do you smoke? And he asked me several questions to find the reason of my disease. My answer to all his questions was "no". So, he asked me: "Madam, why did you get sick? The bank has not given your money back? My answer was also no. He insisted on asking "Why you got sick?" Then, I plucked up courage and told him: "I live near a substation". There was silence and he sighed: "Ah! That may be the reason".

At first I thought I was the only one. In fact, when people talked about ecology I thought: "this must be dangerous because of the substation". But I thought it as an explosion danger. If it explodes one day, we'll all explode. I had not become aware of how dangerous it was. Once I learnt that PCB transformers cause cancer. Three children from school had got sick. I started to read. Almost at that time, I met Gladys reporting on the possible consequences of the substation in the neighbourhood and I thought then: "Ah, she's over. She must be sick". But then I learned that she was not. I witnessed the very beginning of this movement from my bed, as I was under treatment. I saw them struggling and then I realised. Especially afterwards, when I started telling that I was sick and many women started to tell me: "I was also operated on!"

Mirta Penela, teacher, 38, breast cancer, 4666 Brown Street, Ezpeleta.

ARGENTINE RECIPE

In May 2003, New York business newspaper *The Wall Street Journal* published a piece of news: "Argentine recipe: swallow 70 beetles and call us in the morning". The illustration of an Ulomoides Dermestoides took possession of the front page of the newspaper,

between a headline describing an attack in Indonesia and a large report on Japan's banking system reform.

Ten years before the date of that publication, nobody had ever seen an Ulomoides Dermestoides in Argentina. They reached the country by truck, preceded by a healing reputation. Weevils started to be smuggled through Paraguayan frontier by a group of truck drivers and the number of consumers grew almost at the same speed as insects' reproduction. It is estimated that more than 100,000 Argentines consume them daily. Ezpeleta neighbours are part of this group. They reached Ezpeleta through a solidarity network organized via Internet by Rubén Diesinker, a computer analyst from Corrientes Province.

Black and hard-winged, these insects are to be swallowed alive so that they may heal. Based on no scientific evidence, their defenders assure that, once within the stomach, the weevils expel a substance that strengthens the immunological system and help to heal illnesses such as cancer. The recipe says that one should start by eating one insect on the first day and increase the number of insects, one each day, until reaching the amount of 70. Upon this state, the daily dose decreases in the same progression. In total, it takes 140 days and 4,900 weevils.

Weevils have not natural enemies in Argentina. Only scientists are afraid of them. They imagine that any of them may escape from their habitat -a glass jar and whole meal bread- and turn into a plague for crops and grains; turn into an irremediable curse.

Beatriz de Depetris ´ finger has been caressing the flat figure of a white and black photograph for a long while. Ricardo Depetris is on the photograph, wearing narrow trousers and a light-coloured shirt, on the very moment he is making a jump: he looks like some Fred Astaire dancing in a bochas field at a neighbourhood club. Desolation seized her gaze after her husband's death, which she stills seems not to understand, although Depetris died at the end of 1997. Almost half a century before, her father had given them as a present the landsite located on the corner of La Guarda and Rio Salado streets, in Ezpeleta. There was nothing then of that huge tower with the "Danger. High tension" board hanging today. The landsite of Sobral Substation was an empty site. The couple got married, built her house, numbered 621.

And they lived. One job was enough to live well. They spent their weekends at Sol de Mayo Club. The bochas championships. The trips. The plans to leave and live in Cordoba, when retired. "The column looks ugly", says the woman. "Nobody could imagine that it could cause so many deaths". Ricardo Depetris and her only sister, Maria Luisa Depetris, used to gather to take mate in the afternoons under the pine tree at some metres from the tower. Until some day, Depetris got a cold. The congestion persisted. Some weeks later, he got a diagnosis of lung cancer and a "there is nothing to do". He died suffocated. Six months afterward, her sister died in the same way.

Beatriz de Depetris, housewife, 67, 621 La Guarda Street, Ezpeleta.

