

The first time I visited CUSAM

The first time I visited CUSAM within Unidad Penal N.º 48 of Servicio Penitenciario Bonaerense (SPB), I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to sit in on a sociology seminar. The professor was one of those people who effortlessly spoke in fully formed, organized paragraphs, who distilled concepts with nuance and grace. He held onto the room's attention the entire time. He was able to capture the complexity of a phenomenon - the wrinkles - while also letting an idea unfold into a narrative. Whether it was a discussion of economic, political, or symbolic violence; the way that capitalism generates its own logic; or the social processes that decide how much things are worth, the professor managed to tell a story.

Sitting in this room, I was struck by the distinct way in which I did not know who was who. Part of what makes CUSAM unique is that a CUSAM classroom can include any combination of currently incarcerated students, formerly incarcerated students, those who work within the prison facility, students from the surrounding area of the prison facility, and students from the Universidad Nacional de San Martín campus. There was a beauty to this ambiguity. There are no uniforms in the classroom. This creates a profound setting in which the dialogue between students and the professor is able to shed some of the barriers and categorizations that so often linger in educational spaces within carceral settings. Murals lined the walls, including that of the white shawl representing the mothers of the disappeared, and two mates circulated. Seated beneath this artwork, students began to chime in and engage in the discussion and I was again deeply impressed by the commentary that was at once complicating and clarifying the material, that was honing in on a concept but also expanding it, problematizing it, elevating it. From the library to the radio station to the classroom, I was honored to visit CUSAM and have a small window into the space that it cultivates.