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Cartography and War Machines

Challenges and Experiences around Militant Research in Southern Europe

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> "There is a revolutionary becoming not to be confused with the future of revolutions nor must it be carried out by militants"
> "Nomadism is precisely this combination between war machine and smooth space"
> Gilles Deleuze

The intellectual-creative-communicative skills of the new activists, the need to rename the world from below in order to reestablish a non-mediated communication with society, together with the desire to produce understandings of the dizzying current social transformations we are living through, constitute the basis for a proliferation of experiences focused on the need to strongly link the intellect and collective action. What is being generated is truly

a “becoming militant researchers”[1]; the prosthetic use of research methodologies by social movements, and the production of cartographies or maps.

Research within and by movements is useful to break the invisible boundaries made by militant groups and exclusionary identities, as well as to question the inertia attached to the voluntarist activism based without a project nor self-reflection. However, we should go beyond. We should know how to always listen and test the emergent social uneasiness and potentialities, developing the capacity to transform the current atomization process into conjunctions and isolation in collective potency.

It is important to recognize that, currently, many participatory research methodologies tend to incorporate themselves into the institutional matrix with the purpose of facilitating the governability of disaffected societies before a representative democracy. The weakness and benevolence of certain “participatory” dynamics undertaken by institutions are well known. We cannot forget that “participatory interventions” have a recognized niche in the academia already, with the risks that this entails.

From the perspective of an “offensive” reconstruction of antagonist dynamics, we face the challenge of thinking both research and organizing together, in the context of great mobility and instability. We should avoid thinking through these two issues separately. We need to push the experience of militant research and participation beyond that point. For us, the need to link “becoming militant researchers” to different devices of collective aggregation and organization, constitutes a central priority. In many instances, militant and participatory research are able to situate an issue (explore and address a problem in complex ways).

They are also able to find things drawing a cartography of the territory, webbing together links between heterogeneous subjects and knowledges. However, in many instances, they are unable to build or insert themselves in plans of political action that are more conscious and ambitious.

We still trust in the ability of political subjectivities in movement to build large and potent collective machines. However, we believe that this will not happen if these research-participatory dynamics are not combined with organizing devices that "bite into" the real. At the same time, we have confirmed that the potential of the movement cannot be other than the capacity to chain the singular knowledges of the multitude and make them work like a vectoralized war machine. A war machine should work in a "centralized" fashion when the conflict breaks out, tensing itself. Immediately after, the machine is opened and is no longer tensed, in order to remake and propagate itself in a viric and porous fashion. These machines should be able to build processes of empowerment from below, winning concrete battles, transforming the social problems we are facing. If the action-research processes are not opened to broader communities and are not thought and constructed in concert with political projects of an "accumulative" and strategic dimension, they will not achieve the qualitative jump that we need.

Cartography and war machine are for us two magic–concepts in order to understand the limitations that we have referred to in regards to militant research. These concepts are useful to think and attack these problems at one and the same time. Cartography understood as the capacity by movements to investigate and map the real: craft-work to detect and make the appearance of interferences in the societies of 'consensus' resonate. Cartography understood as an abstract prototype for the analysis of a problem in

map form, diagramming blueprints of potential composition/ assemblage. They are open maps for orientation, “connectable in all of its dimensions; detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification”[2]

War machine understood as organizing-or-assemblage processes capable of transforming points into vectors: “like a lineal disposition constituted by lines of flight. In this sense, the war machine does not have war as its objective, its objective is linked to a very unique space, the smooth space that it itself constitutes, occupies and propagates”, having in mind that “a war machine can be more revolutionary or artistic than military”[3]. Therefore, it is about deciphering those vectors of subjectification that articulate the transformation of the real, many times in odd ways for the classical militant’s gaze. We would like to insist that it is not about interpreting to organize, but about detecting those points able to compose a common plane, a collective flight.

The tool of cartography allows us:

To identify the hot spots of contemporary conflict, its dynamics and actors, its movement and those trajectories that go from temporary uneasiness to the desire of building an alternative to one’s own situation.

To think codes that articulate communication among the subjects implicated in a given issue, to learn from them and to experiment with communicative devices able to generate a new field of feeling and common reference.

To test those statements that would allow naming a given situation, in order to confirm its capacity of influence. Take on, then, the need to prefigure new, mobile and situational statements.

The production of new names and concepts is not the task of a militant, but it will always be a collective and choral exercise of enunciation.

To introduce the ephemeral as a variable that accompanies every organizing process. From that point on, doubt and experimentation will become constituent elements of all militant practice.

To generate groups able to transform themselves through constant recombination in interactions with “others”, understanding the outside as an asset and a singularity to be desired and appropriated

To transform militancy into a research process that surveys the passions, affects, humors, pathologies, fantasies, stories and becomings of social figures. In this way, the figure of the militant, as both researcher and nomad, looses all exteriority and is criss-crossed, through and over, by the dynamics of the situation which s/he inhabits, its crises, doubts and recompositions. This same figure then, being able to map excesses, pushing them beyond and composing them; linking statements, desires, and bodies. Transforming militant groups in analyzers and creative intercessors of social desires and statements.

Using the notion of war machine suggests the following to us:

To rethink the liaison with organization, surpassing the asphyxiating dichotomy between verticality and horizontality, understanding the important relationship between micro and macro politics, composing high co-efficients of transversality.

To assume a non-traumatic relationship with power, with a vocation for providing the multitude with a level of strength

capable of intervening in and altering current social designs. Map opportunities; making diagrams and sustaining a new, productive and rebel institutionality of the movement.

To think organization from a composite perspective that takes both molar and molecular dimensions into consideration. To experiment with a creative combination between tension and distension, between enunciative strength and tacit silence, between intervention in the public sphere and subterranean construction.

To think the combustion of cultural, artistic, analytical, political and desiring practices in complex terms.

To yearn for and put into action experiments full of audacity, testing the hypothesis that are being developed, verifying the doses of strength and intelligence that are able to articulate both networks and the set of competencies or skills with which we act.

To situate the role of militancy beyond research, for example, the articulation of devices able to formulate common experiences between extremely singular realities. This "obsession" for the common puts the relationship between communication and organizing at the center. Communicating potentially allied experiences is not enough to build organization, but it becomes its necessary condition.

Experiences in Southern Europe

A. Research and organizing from and against precarity

What are the new social subjects inhabiting the precarization of existence? How to build organizing mechanisms out of a precarious social composition for the 'coming together' of precarious figures?

What is the role of knowledge and research in the success of self-organizing processes by the new figures of precarity?

Precarias a la Deriva (Madrid)[4] is one of the most revealing experiences of militant research of the latest years. They have produced a thorough cartography of the multiple trajectories of precarious subjects in the metropolitan circuits of Madrid. After years of experience in the Women's squatted Social Center called Eskalera Karakola, PAD inaugurated a collective project of research in search of new partnerships for and strategies of cooperation, knowledge and subversion. The collective research process encompasses a self-survey of their own lives, though appealing and connecting with others, and creating a rich web of minor knowledges, critical skills and alliances among diverse precarities.

Departing from a feminist analysis and from the lived transformations of the metropolis, PAD has gone beyond any reductionist approach to precarity. Instead of constituting an exclusively labor-based phenomenon, it is about rethinking the intersections between different social stratifications (class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and identity, educational background, etc.) and how they constitute the new borders of the precarization of existence. They have been searching for common names and languages, links and strategies to subvert the corporation-city. Some of the "fundamental tools being used are: the drift, as a device to disconnect the crazed and routinized space-times, of the totally mobilized corporation-city and its 'population' (trips to work, shopping, daily itineraries in public transport) and as a path to rediscovery, with new eyes, common eyes, of the circuits of precarity; the workshop, as a place for sharing and deepening these visions; and the assemblies, as a space for self-reflection, identification of problems and formulation of

work and action hypotheses"[5]. Their numerous talks and public presentations, which speak to many European realities of [the] movement, have become an important reference for knowledge in first person about the process of producing a precarious existence. After a first phase of research that produced a DVD and a book, they are inaugurating now a new experiment: *Todasacien: Agencia de Asuntos Precarios*. This is a physical space that allows the "virtuous combination of consultancies, workshops and encounters among women to invent mechanisms of grassroots mutualism and the development of a precarious instinct", articulating a collective response to the phenomenon of precarity.

Entránsito *[Intransit]* (Málaga), a space for research and action around precarious issues, is the product of the experiences developed in the Social Center "*Casa de Iniciativas*". It was a long itinerary made of migrant struggles and self-education work about social transformations in the contemporary world. This initiative was born with the goal of understanding current changes in labor, trying to detect common situations crossed by subjectivities "in transit", in order to experiment with modes of action and organizing attuned to these new political animals.

Once the incapacity of the classical union model to address temporary and flexible workers had been tested and proven, the next task then was to begin with an initial attempt of getting closer to – analyzing and understanding – the forms of social uneasiness, emotive tonalities and modes of inhabiting that fragmented territory where the construction of a common looks impossible.

Entránsito has promoted spaces of contagious encounter between precarious people – both native-born and migrants –, in order to rethink the strategy of defining new collective rights that are able

to attack the current emptying of the notion of citizenship we live with nowadays. Redefinitions of citizenship for Entránsito include struggling for guarantees to a social salary and freedom of movement for everybody. Together with other social networks they have coordinated the research project Otra Málaga [Another Málaga] ("*precarity, immigration and financial speculation in the territory we inhabit*"). The results have produced a different map of Málaga's territory, a book of interviews and a DVD about the reality of social conflicts and movements in the province of Málaga. Another important project of this collective is constructing public spaces for movement in Southern Europe. The collective has also help to put together (together with other realities of the territory) the successful event of EuroMayDaySur (the May 1st celebration/ protest for precarious people), and to build the network called *Precari@s en Movimiento*, connecting collectives in Málaga, Sevilla, Granada, Jerez y Córdoba.

The **Oficina de Derechos Sociales** *[ODS – Center for Social Rights]* (Sevilla), placed in the neighborhood community center of Pumarejo, has launched a process of "co-research about the circuits of precarity"[6]. This project attempts to complement their daily work as a social and legal consultancy focused on the problems suffered by the "un-guaranteed" [*no-garantizados,* those without access to their social rights]. Problems dealing with housing issues, migration papers and labor rights are, for example, the most frequent problems faced by this singular office on an everyday basis. The ODS combines distinct planes of work by trying to transform the problems brought up by isolated individuals into the consultancy office [as in case work] into processes of social self-organization, creating mutual aid networks, and strategies in search of concrete victories against the abuses made by

home-owners and bosses as well as against the shortages of the state's social protection or welfare system. In order to address these issues, the ODS uses two central axes for its work in combination. On the one hand, identifying or testing what kind of "institutions" and infrastructures can social movements create in order to de-precarize living conditions. On the other hand, experimentation in order to construct a model of social syndicalism/union able to intervene in the current processes of precarization that go far beyond labor relations in the strict sense.

At the same time, the ODS proposes to research and build a narrative in first person about this subjectivity that is still under construction which we call the *precariat*. The co-research project by ODS tries to expand the reflection about current living conditions experienced all of us as precarious people, and to search for forms of grassroots empowerment. Workshops, debates, surveys and video-analysis experiments are nurturing the rich collective process underway called MayDaySur. In this way, the ODS is building a process of reflection with activists working against precarity and trying to adjust the dual tasks of creating forces of social composition with the services and roles of the consultancy office.

B. Maps of territory, tools of social movement articulation and enunciation

How to transform a map into a process of re-signifying a territory and re-articulating social movements? How to name a territory undergoing permanent transformation? How to situate new mechanisms of power, conflicts and emergent social subjects in a fragmented and complex territory?

Rizoma *[Rhizome]*(Málaga) has created a transdisciplinary space where people can get together to study, discuss, theorize and intervene on issues related with current territorial transformations, urbanism and the consequences of the intrusion of neoliberalism in all spheres of our lives. Rizoma has produced multiple articles, discussion groups and has developed a unique form of critical pedagogy within an academic setting. Additionally though, Rizoma has also developed a choral research project about the convulsive territory they inhabit which they've baptized ZoMeCS (Zona Metropolitana de la Costa del Sol). This territory/zone has been especially punished by the effects of mass tourism, real estate speculation and environmental destruction. Through a drift called 020404 *Deriva en ZoMeCS*[7], this research project has demonstrated a unique capacity to invent a research tool able to generate critical knowledge production, and this in a time when the academy seems to have established an open alliance with private interests. The experimental drifts of the Rizoma group, carried out by more than 300 students and professors of the School of Architecture of Granada, were open to uncertainty and to the strange interaction with the urban landscapes which were traversed. These drifts have worked as a "research-performance" about the micro-physical aspects of the becomings of this area of Málaga's cost: what kind of images do we observe?; how are urban development projects organizing the territory?; what kind of subjects inhabit the territory and how do they perceive its current transformations?; what kind of work are we facing? These were some of the questions to be addressed by the working groups through images, texts, and drawings during these macro-drifts. These walking-narratives have resulted in collectively authored books, published under creative commons license, and they have

produced a chain of unforeseen effects, both in students and professors, that since then, have been engaging different projects.

Cartografía Otra Málaga (Málaga). In the framework of the Málaga Social Forum, the Entránsito collective wanted to develop a social cartography over the territory with two main objectives. On the one hand, to provide visibility to the crisis of the current development model, by focusing on three conflicts considered to be strategic: precarious labor, real estate speculation and migrant movements. On the other hand, to survey different organizing experiences, even the smallest and most marginal ones, in order to create relations between them, and inaugurate or strengthen coordination efforts among them. The main research group traveled over the entire province, armed with the methodological tools of qualitative sociology, blank maps, a camera and hundred of questions. While the material product of the investigation has been very rich, the organizing processes resulting form this research have surpassed the expected objectives. This rich process of interconnection and proliferation of relationships has facilitated the creation of an migrant coordinating committee in Málaga, the diffusion and extension of organizing work around precarity and the consolidation of ecologist networks in defense of the coastal zone. The Otra Málaga project is a clear example of how useful these political-research devices may be in re-compositing social movement processes, going beyond any kind of academicism. It has also allowed for a re-signification/re-definition of the territory by focusing on the conflicts faced by the local population, providing an alternative vision in a context marked by maps produced by tourist agencies, real estate promotions and an imaginary oriented excessively towards mass tourism and private consumerism. This research project has not only opened dozens of contacts with

previously unknown collectives and experiences, but has helped to nurture new political spaces.

¿De que va realmente el Fórum 2004? *[What is the Forum really about?]*(Barcelona)[8] is a cartography born out of the collective will of connecting and networking the different knowledges and visions that were critical of the *Fórum de las Culturas* event taking place in Barcelona along with its municipality, full of "progressive" talk and vocabulary. The map was planned as a tool that could be used by different social collectives in the campaign against the Forum2004; thus a map-action. On one side, points of action throughout Barcelona were marked, headquarters of the large corporations that were participating in the financing of the Forum, and describing how they conducted their business. On the other side, the marketing campaign behind the Forum was exposed. Barcelona was sold as the city of world peace, multiculturalism and sustainability. This side explained the real estate speculation behind the Forum and its blueprints for a corporate-centered city instead. The map, by displacing the original sense of the Forum, was subverting this "event-city-logo". Additionally, the map provided visibility to those social conflicts hidden by the happy, civic and innocuous look developed by the progressive culture of the spectacle-city.

The map was collectively constructed, and one of the important aspects of this process was it ability to propagate and stimulate a creative and extensive campaign that was able to articulate diverse sensibilities. The goal was to boycott the event and its economic, urbanistic, speculative, as well as symbolic deployment. Its important to mention that a set of actions, mobilizations and communication devices (such as *forumatón*) sustained and invigorated the cartographic work. The map contributed – in an

unmeasurable and invaluable way – to the failure of the Forum's marketing control team as well as its legitimacy and attendance.

Cartography of the geopolitical area of Gibaltrar Strait[9] This project was born in the midst of the collective process called *Indymedia Madiaq* (Strait in Arabic). Indymedia Estrecho[10] is a politico-communicative project that paradoxically wants to situate itself beyond a city, beyond borders and the very divisions between nation nation-states. Making a cartography of an "Other-territory" – a border zone of high strategic importance co-inhabited by social processes of great intensity and violence – become a necessary tool to orient ourselves and our practices/praxis. The map allowed for the development of an inventory of the knowledges embedded in large and diverse social networks, and assisted in placing them in relation to one another, socializing them. Different type of people participated from the beginning of the project: networks of social movements and activists, communicative-agents and people from both coasts. On side A of the map the goal was to provide a different vision the Straits, a dynamic vision, criss-crossed by diverse flows with different intensities transforming this territory into a battlefield between control and excess. Migratory flows, capital movements, information and communication networks, surveillance systems and detention centers, the transport of all kinds of merchandise, the militarization of space, and areas of intensive [agricultural] exploitation. At one and the same time, the map signaled spaces of resistance and struggle, providing visibility to the emergence of organizing experiences.

Side B attempted to show the development, in recent years, of social spaces and events that have allowed the diffuse creation of movement networks that never existed before. It also tried to present concepts, images and texts that have somehow helped

constitute the network of subjectivities participating, in different ways, in Indymedia Estrecho.

The somewhat chaotic feeling of this cartography is due to the impossibility of showing a territory undergoing permanent transformation in a coherent and consistent fashion. This territory has been convulsed by intense social dynamics and criss-crossed by flows and networks of high complexity. This cartography has allowed a complete re-definition of this geographic area. It has also contributed immensely to the development and consolidation of the Indymedia Estrecho project, providing visual images for the main goal of that project: disobeying borders in order to build an "Other-territory".

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These are some of the experiences that we consider important at the intersections between militancy and research. They are practices that are difficult to classify and characterized by their dynamism. Each one of them continues its path, recomposing/recombining itself with the paths of the movement and generating, luckily, effects and resonances that exceed the initial goals of their authors.

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[1] For further development of this problematic, see the collective publication: Marta Malo de Molina (ed.) Nociones comunes. Experiencias y ensayos entre investigación y militancia, Traficantes de sueños, Madrid, 2004, http://www.sindominio.net/traficantes/editorial/nociones_comunes.htm; for the English translation of the first part of the books' introduction Common notions, part 1: workers-inquiry, co-research, consciousness-raising see http://

transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0406/malo/en; furthermore the article by Marisa Pérez Colina, Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, Marta Malo de Molina y Amador Fernández-Savater, Ingredientes de una onda global, en Desacuerdos, nº 2, Macba/Arteleku/Unia Arte y Pensamiento, Barcelona, 2005, http://www.estrecho.indymedia.org/newswire/display/17603/index.php

[2] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Mil mesetas. Capitalismo y esquizofrenia*, Pretextos, Valencia, 1994. [Available in English as *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Translated by Brian Massumi. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1987. Quote from page 12 of the English version]

[3] Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Conversaciones. 1972-1990*, Pretextos, Valencia, 1999.

[4] http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias.htm.

[5] Precarias a la Deriva, *A la deriva. Por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina*, Traficantes de sueños, Madrid, 2004, http://www.sindominio.net/traficantes/editorial/precariasaladerivapdf.htm. [Portions of this book are available in English at Precarias a la Deriva's website: http://sindominio.net/karakola/precarias.htm]

[6] http://laboprecario.org.es/tiki-index.php?page=sevilla.

[7] http://www.rizoma.org/html/020404.html.

[8] *¿De qué va realmente el Fórum?*, http://www.sindominio.net/mapas/es/mapa_es.htm.

[9] http://mcs.hackitectura.net/tiki-index.php?page=MAPA%3A+cartografiando+el+territorio+madiaq.

[10] http://estrecho.indymedia.org/ or http://madiaq.indymedia.org/.