

Transatlantic Translations: A Trilogy of Insurgent Knowledges

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In this piece, by translating a series of notions developed by social movements on both sides of the Atlantic, we seek to reinvent some categories of struggle that are often taken for granted. What we would like to emphasize here is the tactical importance of engaging in what we could call 'constant research' to boost our campaigns, our direct actions, and activism in general.

What follows is a trilogy that could be read as one long coherent argument, or as three autonomous pieces that we call translations. Translation I delves into a critique of some of the categories that are used regularly in organizing. That section is entitled "Smashing Categories of Privilege." In Translation II, "Conocimiento en Movimiento: Research Riots and Mapping Revolutions," we present the tools of research and mapping, and discuss the importance of valuing and recording knowledges produced by social movements. In Translation III, Queering our Categories of Struggle, we return to the discussion of categories and argue that through research processes it is possible to update analysis and inform activism in effective and affective ways. The reader will notice that the overall piece often moves between examples and discussions happening on each side of the Atlantic. Our motivation for writing this paper was to try and create a space of encounter between activist traditions and activist tools. We forewarn you that the back and forth can be disorienting at times. Bear with us.

Introduction: What to make of 2000-2008?

Eight years into the millennium and where are we? For many people these have been years of defeat. The promise of a growing coordination of struggles based on the mobilization of global resistance seems to have vanished with the dusts of war. Iraq and Afghanistan have been invaded, with the wars there intensifying with each passing year. Wars at the borders – fought through anti-immigrant policies and sentiments – have grown; and a domestic neoliberal army appears to be increasingly advancing into more spheres of life through state budget crises, "working towards independence" initiatives, the attempt to privatize Social Security, foreclosures and corporate bailouts. Whether they appear as hurricanes in New Orleans or subprimes in Cincinnati (in both of those cases specifically smashing Afro-American neighborhoods and reinforcing – intentionally or not – a regime of deepening economic segregation), these crises become goldmines for the worst part aspects of predatory capitalism. These are just a few scenarios of the ongoing process of permanent global war anticipated by the Zapatistas.

Yet, just by looking at the past couple of years we can see movements of different stripes growing and new types of struggle developing. The millennium that, for many young movement activists, started with the hope brought by the mythical Seattle has not lost all its promise of alternative futures:

- The anti-war movement, which seemed confused for several years, is seeing increasing numbers of veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan take the powers that be to task, as well as the spread of anti-recruitment actions (and their links to other struggles);
- A migrant rights movement that is fighting back with astonishing vigor and has become more visible after the huge mobilizations and strikes of 2006;
- Key local struggles, signaling larger issues and possible new venues for struggle: the Coalition of Immokalee's Workers back-to-back victories against Taco Bell, McDonalds and Burger King (now going after Whole Foods and others), while fighting slavery in farmwork; the Miami Workers' Center taking housing issues to the Super Bowl; increasing coordination and mobilization by domestic workers in New York City (and beyond); two large strikes by cabbies and the Taxi Workers' Alliance in NYC; Baltimore's United Workers Association victory for homeless day laborers against baseball stadiums, and so on.
- We wouldn't want to forget the first U.S. Social Forum – which superceded many people's expectations. Clearly, not all is bleak, a thousand flowers are blooming despite the Bush blight – but this isn't a time to be dreamy and romantic (that already happened to many of us around the convention protests of the early 2000s).

As a way to contribute to the spread of new struggles and ways of struggling in the U.S., we wanted to share some ideas to identify and surpass some stumbling blocks that we have encountered in our organizing efforts. Thanks to our family and work situations we've spent time on both sides of the Atlantic, mostly (but not only) between the U.S. and Spain. Having one foot in movements and projects on both sides of the ocean

has forced us to encounter differences and tensions, to discover tools and try to translate unique experiences and ideas in new spaces. This contribution is made from the position of transatlantic activist translators (a sort of grassroots counter-NATO).

We wish to focus on those categories of struggle we've encountered in U.S. movements that, though at times useful, can often hinder movements, campaigns, and alliances between struggles.

What do we mean by Categories?

It may sound abstract, but really what we're talking about is something that we all use in our own work and thinking – categories and concepts like class (working vs. middle), race (black and white), sexuality (homo and hetero), imperialism, privilege. Sometimes they're categories imposed from above (used by politicians, quoted in the mass media, taught in schools, and so on) and we may be trying to subvert them; at other times, they're ideas posed by movements as a better way of understanding society and highlighting important issues.

We use them almost second-handedly and they can help us to put common names on complex and abstract items; but what happens when these categories aren't sufficient to understand what's going on? What if we still use them even when they're no longer accurate?

This piece isn't meant to be exhaustive in any way – we're just going to talk about a few categories that we've encountered, and then present some ideas about how we can "keep on our toes" as movements and regularly "queer our categories" – in other words, how to move past fixity and respond to what's actually going on around us.

Translation I: Smashing Categories of Privilege

What are some of the categories social movements integrate in their lingo and practices? How are they used and why could it be a problem? We just want to address a few here. The broadest of these is the category of Privilege; then, how Class is understood; followed by the role of the University; and the use of Activist and Organizer as self-referential terms. We've encountered problems with these in many different movement milieu in the U.S. – small NGO's, autonomous collectives, grassroots community groups and workers centers – and have found them hampering the growth of struggles and alliances.

Privilege

The critique of privilege has been an important, even key, achievement to acknowledge a relation of power. U.S. social movements seem to be quite unique in regards to this: working on the question of privilege, as to how class, race, sexual orientation, and ethnic background carry certain kinds of 'unwritten' rights or lack thereof. Through workshops, meeting process, and shared ethics in general, this work has been useful in creating and strengthening grassroots movements and a non-elitist, anti-authoritarian culture. In some sense the critique of privilege is something we've inherited from the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, especially the explosion of "diversity" in struggle seen in Black liberation, afro-feminism, Chicano/Chicana movements, Indian/Indigenous movements, queer struggle, and functional diversity/handicapped rights, just to name a few. Having to confront these realities forced many movement activists to rethink how they understood oppression in the broader society as a whole and how they understood oppressive practices within movements. While the 1970s are long gone in some ways (and in others not at all) this critique has become something that many movements acknowledge they have to face in order to avoid reproducing oppressive dynamics in their own groups and in order to expand political participation to groups of people who are excluded from certain forms of activism. This critique has worked its way into many daily movement practices, such as examining how 'white skin privilege' works in many visible/invisible ways in our movements; an awareness of process in our meetings and workshops so that those whose voices are normally silenced have a chance to participate and those normally empowered check themselves; the availability of daycare at large meetings in order to facilitate the participation of parents; and even something as simple as not-smoking in meetings.

We won't expand further here on the contributions of the critique of privilege. We see it as something that movements in many places could learn from. The critique of privilege has also lead to its own problems though. Many times our focus on those who are categorized as "unprivileged" can fall into what we would call 'activist forms of profiling,' therein looking for the "authentic" subjects of struggle and oppression, those with "real" problems and with whom we will stand in 'solidarity'.

This understanding of privilege has also become a means of handicapping potential social movement activity and horizontal alliances, or dismissing some that already exist. We've often found real people with very real

problems consistently categorized as 'privileged' because of a particular status they have, and therefore their only genuine way of being involved in activism is to fight for 'others' rather than starting from their own condition. Or, they have to justify to the world that they are 'really-really' part of the "oppressed" in order to have their cause and demands acknowledged. We have to consistently play the victim in this sense (as one activist companera in Spain told us), rather than rejoicing in struggles on many fronts and seeing how we challenge the effects of existing privilege amongst ourselves.

A brief story to illustrate the kinds of awkward situations that this can lead to: A few years ago, two companeros of ours attended an anti-racist workshop focused partly on recognizing white skin privilege and its effects upon our activism and our lives. One of these companeros would be categorized as white and is also homeless (or was at the time), drifting in and out of day labor centers and shelters. Being told repeatedly that he was 'privileged' and had to get a handle on that didn't connect to him. Even though the workshop facilitation was very competent overall, and had excellent analysis, they were unable to step out of the categories within which they were analyzing the world. While we're pretty sure you could find ways that our companero did experience white skin privilege, to hammer it home didn't make sense and only created a divide where there could be a linkage. For instance, when discussing police brutality, tell individuals facing homelessness who are categorized as "white" that cops are normally 'nice' to them because of their skin is akin to telling Iraqis that Blackwater is normally nice to civilians.

Another brief story comes from an activist from central-eastern Europe: Recently, upon arriving in the U.S., he became active in the founding of a new collective related to global justice efforts. Though it started with much promise the group very quickly became bogged down on the question of privilege. Most or all of the members felt that they were privileged in some way and that this hampered the type of activism they could engage in. Group meetings began to revolve around the fact that 'if we're privileged, then we can't mobilize on our own.' Since no one who was 'authentically oppressed' was there the group had to wait. Eventually the group collapsed under the weight of this problem. This activist companero was shocked and didn't quite understand – the privilege issue made sense to a point, but wouldn't it be better to 'use' that privilege in the cause of a struggle – even to struggle from that privilege – instead of assuming there's nothing to do? Granted this was one activists' view, but his impressions highlight our points.
Class (middle class, working class and poverty)

We Are All 'Middle Class': La clase media infinita

Even in a country with such visible class differences and some of the highest rates of inequality in the Global North (and beyond in many cases), we're still clumsy when talking about class, and we mean movement activists just as much as the "general population" (for lack of a better term). Part of the problem we see with regard to our understanding of class could be related to how we speak about privilege. Also, much of our clumsiness when it comes to class revolves around our use of the term "middle class." In many movement circles we have an aversion to anything that can be associated with "middle class" – and yet we're talking about a country where "middle class" is part of the national identity! It's a confusing and muddled notion and often fails to tell us much of anything. It seems to be used in the U.S. generally as a way to designate anyone above homelessness and below the Rockefellers.

Making the Middle Class a Political Concept

That which is "middle class" is unworthy – yet this doesn't mean there aren't serious class related problems faced by people with this label. Often enough middle-class gets associated with certain activities, jobs or shopping habits, without any deeper analysis. University students, teachers, homeowners and café latte drinkers get thrown in the same bag without much thought.

This labeling, coupled with the disdain associated with 'middle-class' (disdain by activists anyway – since for many people it's a goal to be 'middle class'), precludes the development of many struggles and the possibility of coalitions. What's an example of this lack of analysis we're talking about? Many jobs that we associate with "working class" – including factory jobs such as car manufacturing – while filled with health and job risks, provide larger salaries and have greater job security than university Teaching Assistants, Adjunct professors, those employed in services associated with middle-class consumption (coffee shops for instance), or highly trained freelancers hopping from contract to contract. While organizing efforts have begun in these

realms (like the Industrial Workers of the World's campaign to organize Starbucks or various Teaching Assistant unions) and discussions have begun to break through the veneer of "middle-class" (like Barbara Ehrenreich's recent work *Bait and Switch*) – we're still in the 'baby steps' phase of this kind of critique and the organizing it requires. Even many habits of "consumption" and status markers of having made it to the middle-class are based on dangerous and unstable debt mechanisms: home loans, car loans, credit cards, and student loans. They create an inflated form of consumption, but as the subprime crisis shows us, this situation can blow apart in very little time.

If we associate things like a university education with middle class life, then is it any surprise we don't see the kind of student battles you see in neighboring countries like Canada or Mexico? If university education isn't worth fighting for (because it's middle class) can we really complain about sky-rocketing student debt?

What are we talking about anyway when we say "class"?

We offer some of the above examples to highlight two points that were brought to our attention by activist companions from the U.S. when comparing movements in the U.S. and Spain:

- What's often called "middle class" in the U.S., and therefore dismissed politically for social movements, is often considered "working class" elsewhere. Even though a country (such as Spain) may be more class-conscious, the "middle class" as understood in the States actually gets smaller or includes the working class – so that students, doctors, teachers, translators, programmers, and more are considered working class. Even certain styles of dress and attitude might be considered middle class attributes, but they aren't seen to fundamentally change you or make your concerns irrelevant. It's not that there is no recognition of certain sorts of privileges that come with certain professions, salaries, or other factors. Rather it's that most of the "middle class" can be understood as a part of the working classes. The result of this means that people can agree on defending certain types of services as rights – education, access to health care, quality public transport, and other "social wages" are seen as "class issues" that affect large swaths of the population – not just some romantic notion of a genuine working class.
- Secondly, often when we speak of "class" in the States we're talking about consumption patterns and questions of status rather than something akin to "those who own the means of production," as opposed to those who don't. What exactly a bourgeois upper class looks like in today's economy might be different than a top-hat wearing, cigar-smoking industrialist, but it seems much more relevant to clarifying political differences and opening up potential coalitions than whether or not some members of our "group" eat white bread, bagels or croissants. We don't mean to belittle the attention given to other aspects of class (such as status, cultural patterns, links to ethnicity or race) by many movements, but to refocus some of the overall attention and possibly shift some of our language and attitude so that more people can feel addressed by questions of class when it comes to outreach and mobilization.

University: A Privileged Bubble?

U.S. based university movements seem to be plagued by quite a bit of this thinking – both from within their own ranks as well as in how they are perceived by other movements. Some very impressive and necessary mobilizations have taken place in recent years: anti-war work, anti-sweat-shop activism, and local student labor solidarity serve as some examples. However, in order to subvert the current conditions in the university something more is needed: struggles from within the university's population in regards to their own conditions. Only a few notable exceptions exist, such as the work of the Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM!) in New York City, or the struggle of students at Gallaudet University – besides that there has been little opposition to things like continuous tuition hikes, rising student debt; federal and state cutbacks in student aid; and the marketization of student life and campuses. After all, the logic goes, it's the 'middle classes' going to university, or folks who will become 'middle class,' and not genuinely 'grass-roots' 'community-based' or 'working-class' people – hence it's not worth defending.

Many U.S. student movements mobilize from a discourse of privilege. Due to the particular context of the U.S., just getting into higher education separates one from the 'real' people. From this position, the only possibility is to "help" others or show solidarity "for" them, without problematizing how general socio-economic changes are affecting everybody, including oneself. The downside of this logic of course is that by not defending things like accessible education, low tuition, or more public funds for research, higher education is becoming increasingly stratified and exclusionary.

For different economic, political and personal reasons, some of us ended up studying and working at a university located in the U.S. south. What we perceived as the isolation of the ghettoized U.S. academy was

a source of frustration during the first years of our program. However, after conversations with others, we realized that the isolation was reinforced by the myth of the university as the ivory tower as both displaced from the 'real world' as well as from 'real activism.' But as inhabitants of the university, it was not difficult to see how higher education institutions were contributing to the process of neoliberalization of the economy we'd been fighting all along.

As temporary inhabitants of the university, we thought a lot about this question, especially thanks to the Counter-Cartography Collective (3C's; <http://www.countercartographies.org>) in which we participated. Together, we realized how our spatial understanding of the university as a discrete and untouched entity (the 'ivory tower' or the 'secluded research bubble distant from the world') was inadequate for figuring out what was going on and what to do. This thinking effectively erases the multiple roles of universities in employment and flexible labor markets, the knowledge economy and corporate research, defense contracts and recruiting, finance capitalism (through loans, university endowments and investments), and gentrification. The university is one of the main actors in the current economy and is completely embedded within the 'real world out there.' Additionally, the university has contributed to the production and reproduction of the neo-liberal world that many of us have been trying to fight back from the "outside." Thus, activism at the heart of the university is more necessary than ever for a process of exploring, hacking, subverting the shortcomings and possibilities of the systems' very "reproduction machines."

“Activist” / “Organizer”

Another category that we think is worth questioning is that of “activist” and “organizer.” These may be two of the key categories that accompany movements in the States, but they may also be two of its biggest stumbling blocks. While often worn (implicitly or explicitly) as a badge of pride, these identities can also become an exclusive club that disempowers many people from activism. Ask anyone who has had to change “scenes,” contexts or countries – or even ‘step out’ of activism and then ‘step back in’ – and they can tell you of the limits that openly coded activist circles have: acronyms, cultural codes, appropriate behaviors, and often times a certain feeling of superiority. This behavior can lead to a ‘professionalization’ of activism in which folks who are genuinely interested in moving on an issue feel that there are people better suited for the job and that they can just delegate to those individuals and organizations. While it’s inevitable and even positive that certain groups become reference points for a community, if this makes people feel that they shouldn’t act “unless ordered to” we run the risk of destroying our movements. Some of this can be linked to criticisms of the non-profit industrial complex, and the manner in which foundations decide which organizers or organizations to give grants to. Indeed, there begins to be an internalization of this latent elitization of activism. Many of us have experienced or even participated in these ‘insiders clubs’ of ‘organizers.’ We don’t have to be members of a legally constituted 501(c)3 to see this, as it is a part of activist culture that has permeated many sectors (from “union organizers,” to NGO “staffers,” even to “key anarchist folks” who always tell others they’re not key). We recognize that this is difficult to overcome – even the fact that we can talk about ‘activists’ as such in the rest of this essay belies part of the problem. The article “Give up Activism,” written right after the June 18th 1999 protests in London gets right to this issue. Instead of creating a movement based on “organizers” and “activists,” how can we ‘activate’ different parts of the social fabrics that we are all part of?

Some final words on privilege, class, university and “activist / “organizer:”

The notion of the ‘privileged middle class’ that ‘consumes happily until it dies’ limits many types of struggles. Often the only avenue for folks is to either turn to counter-culture, or to try to justify their positions as genuinely miserable (like in many Teaching Assistant struggles). In a country where the term ‘middle class’ applies to so many kinds of people and is something so many folks identify with, one possible role of U.S.-based movements is to problematize and radicalize the term ‘middle class’ (without losing the critique of privilege).

Translation II: Conocimiento en Movimiento: Research Riots & Mapping Revolutions

Knowledges from Social Struggles

A problem we’ve seen in the U.S. (and at times participated in) is a lack of reflection on actions, campaigns, and movements in order to learn lessons, share those lessons and tools with others, and recuperate genealogies of struggles through written histories and the maintenance of archives. This isn’t the typical criticism of anti-intellectualism in U.S. movements; rather it’s a question of how to avoid having to constantly

re-invent the wheel. How do we learn and build on our experiences in order advance our causes? How do we share those experiences with others? Often, simple things like keeping track of a collective's activities and sharing its history with others are left by the wayside in the grind of daily activist work.

While in other countries there has been an explosion of experiments within social movements that attempt to encourage systematic reflection, record keeping, and other activities related to knowledge production (from the initiatives on militant research to the proliferation of autonomous universities), U.S. social movements are moving more slowly on this. In our experience there has been a lack of attention towards the production and distribution of knowledge: the textual production by and about movements is low or oriented to quick and dirty report-back activities, and there are far fewer venues for reflection, such as conferences and publications. One way to improve our tactics might be to recuperate our collective memory, in addition to realizing that what movements do – from poster making to elaborate speeches to creative direct actions – is to produce “insurgent knowledges” worth recording and thinking through.

The potential of taking our own ‘knowledges’ seriously, by sharing and exchanging them, implies a powerful way of doing politics. By beginning with our own knowledges, we become able to speak on our own behalf and to develop alliances reciprocally.

Rigid categories work (and do their damage) when attention isn't paid to one's own history and knowledge. These categories act like exported brands that must be dealt with as pre-made products. Instead of categorical politics, a focus on knowledge-making would deliver a kind of situated organizing that takes one's own experiences as a starting point. Here, research and inquiry serves as an entryway into this kind of non-categorical politics.

In this section, we begin by emphasizing the insurgent expertise that ferments in organizing processes, and reference some historical examples of this process. We then discuss how research serves as a possible avenue for channeling those knowledges. Finally, we end up describing the diverse array of political possibilities resulting from different concrete research experiments. Much of the material of this section is based on our engagement and current involvement with the Madrid-based Precarias a la Deriva, a militant research project, and its current phase as Agencia Precaria.

We are the Experts

On a Sunday afternoon at Eskalera Karakola, a women's social center in downtown Madrid's Lavapiés neighborhood, around forty women packed a large cozy room at street level on Embajadores Street. The scenario: a red floor, posters from actions on the wall, big window to the street, as well as a coffee table filled with hot drinks and snacks. It was the beginning of one of the monthly workshops about domestic workers organizing and imagining the possibility of “a domestic revolution.” It was organized by Agencia de Asuntos Precarios and SEDOAC (Active Domestic Service) during 2008.

During the round of introductions, some domestic workers new to the workshops expressed their interest in talking to lawyers, and asked if la Agencia was a legal consultancy. One member of la Agencia explained, Well, not really, there are institutions to offer that kind of legal information. La Agencia though is a way to create tools of self defense (herramientas de auto-defensa), given certain unjust and challenging situations at your workplace and beyond...Situations that can not be solved only by legal solutions... the principle is to depart from our own experiences as real experts on our own situations...who else is going to know what our problems are better than us?”

Another stated:

This is a space to share those knowledges to form a common knowledge, useful for many of us....that's the goal of today's encounter: to narrate and share our concrete expertise. What to do in certain cases and what to avoid, etcetera...things that a lawyer would be unable to know...”

A domestic worker from the Caribbean also expressed herself in the following terms, in reference to a big institutional event with participation from government offices, large unions, national associations of domestic

workers, as well as some businesses:

Exactly! The experience and knowledge on domestic work is not owned by them, but by ourselves...in order to improve the conditions of this sector, the organizing has to come from ourselves, arranging informal encounters during our everyday lives – encounters that involve a lot of story telling, since we have a lot of dramatic stories to share, as well as music and dance. Then, we can devote some time and energy to those other spaces that claim to represent us, but our participation in those would already depart from a solid strengthening of our connections, arguments and building of a common voice.

Let us jump to the other side of the Atlantic for a brief review of similar experiences.

Knowledge is Power a la USA

This episode could resonate with certain community organizing efforts or popular education processes, traditions that are quite well established in the United States. Even if we were to start this section in a tone critical towards knowledge questions among North American social movements, throughout our piece we'd like to bring along counter-examples. To this day Latin-American born traditions of Freire's Pedagogy of Liberation and Participatory Action Research provide us with inspiration. Both traditions were based in the philosophy that "knowledge is power." Great projects like the Highlander Center, known for its outstanding work on popular education for civil rights, were influenced by the action research and critical pedagogy movements (yet also predated them!). These movements were crisscrossing the Global South as part of the anti-colonial and land-reform struggles of the 1960s and 1970s. In terms of U.S. contributions with regards to empowering force of education and analysis, it is important to mention Afro-American Radical Pedagogy, and in particular, work by bell hooks concerning anti-authoritarian notions of teaching.

On top of the major influence of critical pedagogy and action research, another important component of expertise building is the work of the American philosopher John Dewey. Dewey's pragmatism questioned the neutrality of science and insisted on the practical use of research. For Dewey, knowing wasn't about looking for the truth, but looking for the useful. Regardless of the possible appropriations of this pragmatist view of science, it had an empowering influence on community organizing processes in 1950s. Research strengthened the movement of social workers to develop more effective strategies of direct action by and for affected communities. This pragmatist view of science also inspired a little-known experiment in action-anthropology. Yet another radically different way of politicizing knowledge-making was pioneered by the feminist movement, especially after the 1970s. Both at the theoretical and practical levels, feminists developed strong critiques of mainstream notions of objectivity as abstract, neutral, and bodiless. Instead, they proposed a different kind of epistemology based in situated experience. This was practiced within consciousness-raising groups in the feminist movement.

We would like to conclude our genealogy of experiments of insurgent knowledges in the U.S. with a more recent case: the unprecedented example of ACT UP, born in New York and then expanding to Paris and other places. Created out of the turmoil in the 1980s against the stigmatization of AIDS, it was one of the first struggles to openly engage the question of expert knowledge.

ACT UP's uniqueness resides in its challenges to medical authority, demanding that care become more democratic and less pharmaceutical-driven. Thus, the movement was invested in getting to know the medical jargon, as well as important medical arguments, in order to discuss care on the same plane as "experts" and successfully ask for feasible demands that were not available before. The impressive amount of medical research, translation, publication and distribution challenges notions of engaging and producing expert scientific knowledge. ACT UP as well posits that "Knowledge is Power," though this time closer to the notion of power developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault.

While Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire emphasized the empowering force of knowing more and better about your own conditions, Foucault recognized power as a force able to constitute reality. This force includes the powers-that-be' construction of the world as an instrument of dominant scientific knowledge. According to Foucault, much of reality is maintained through certain regimes of truth. These regimes of truth are made real through discourse – very often scientific or expert discourses – to produce "truth-effects." These truth-effects in turn define and shape what we see, experience and think; what it is possible to say and do; as well as what is outside the realm of comprehensibility. In effect, our knowledge of the world, as well as how we understand 'truth' and 'reality,' both enable and constrain our actions. Thus, in order to fight back against the truth-effects of the scientific discourse on AIDS that began by describing it as an incurable illness to be

socially excluded, the movements had to invest in understanding this scientific discourse in order to intervene in it and hijack it from within.

Building on the example of ACT UP New York, let us focus on the question of systematic knowledge production: the question of research embedded in social movements.

Research Riots

Many grassroots organizing and autonomous collectives depart from the empowering realization that they are producing knowledges, and thus power, and somehow reality/ies. "Militant research is that process of re-appropriation of our own capacity of worlds-making, which (...) questions, problematizes and pushes the real through a series of concrete procedures." (Precarias a la Deriva 2004) .

There are different ways of dealing with those productions: some treat knowledges subtly, letting them act upon concrete organizing practices; others treat them more systematically through efforts at registering them and developing research questions, hypotheses and projects of inquiry with the goal of better understanding their conditions. This piece focuses on the potentialities of the ones that bring a conscious philosophy and practice of research into their political organizing.

It makes sense: a way of producing knowledge specifically for social movements in order to evaluate steps taken, to understand new contexts, or to open up new issues of struggle. It seems particularly pertinent to the post-Genoa, and post-September 11th moments – how to make sense of it all and move forward; how to explore alternative ways of challenging a complex system of oppressions. At times we were confronted by the difficulties presented by the apparent distance between much 'research' and 'activism.' Many of our own itineraries in movement collectives had dabbled in research and found, through inspiring examples, that it was possible to think of a form of in-depth research that came from and responded to social movements, whose methods themselves reflected movement politics, and the results of this informed on-the-ground resistance.

For these collectives, research is not separated from action – if they are separated, you end up with "dead books" that might look interesting, but are the result of a project destined to produce a book without further goals. According to one of the members of Precarias a la Deriva, the book they produced was: ...alive and able to produce communicative resonance's, self-identification with the argument, and thus networking, because not only was it born out of a process of social struggle, but also it was released during an intense political moment where the notion of precariedad was being debated within European social movements. The goal of this publication was to work at the level of the imagination by cross-pollinating potential rebellion among those living a precarious existence. It sought to inspire certain de-politicized sectors of the population to think of their conditions as susceptible to change, generating new subjectivities sensitive to the discourse of precarity."

The second phase of their research is not so focused on generating communicative resonance: Rather, we are trying to engage in actual organizing experiments and building an everyday process with those people that have felt close to the analysis and language generated through the initial research phase. This on-the-ground organizing, being developed during the new phase of Precarias a la Deriva – as Agencia Precaria– involves different activities. The goal now is to strengthen a common language and solidify relationships and alliances among diverse sectors through workshops, expeditions, casework support and organizing actions. All of these activities are pierced through with the philosophy of research. Where is research in the business of organizing ?

Research is not something apart from a concrete struggle – it is embedded within it: "the goal of the research is simply to improve our knowledge about ourselves and our knowledge about others..."

"Many of us come from activist backgrounds that are very enclosed. You just hang out with people similar to you, and live through categories and codes of struggle you inherited from others. Everything from clothing to your own vocabulary speaks of a certain type of readily recognizable person: the activist, the squatter, etc. There is a problem of a ghetto-identity that does not allow you to cross trajectories with different people, except your own. Research was a tool to open up, to start knowing more about those others that we spoke about from a discursive level, but without actual or everyday encounters. However, it is not the political research a la Italiana, where the intellectual goes to the factory to talk to the real subjects of oppression. It

is a research process that involves radically diverse parties, searching for an understanding of their own situations, developing together a collective language able to name the problems in order to fight them". "Conceiving and conducting research in this way does not imply a formalized project with a rigorous research plan. It is a posteriori, in the process of writing and putting the pieces together, when things start to look more coherent. It is not like the professional model where the research project is well defined from the beginning, rather it is conceived as an open-ended process, always exposed to improvisation, open to encounters; maybe it is a more organic process".

"Our main references are the traditions of action-research and self-inquiry, including the idea of simultaneous thinking and acting, or the Zapatista call to 'ask while walking' – research as a process of searching for tools, of putting together cartographies, recording our own steps. The process could include fieldtrips, workshops, collective writing, doing actions together".

Argentina 2001

The first time we encountered an activist group directly embracing research as a constituent trait of their struggle was in Buenos Aires. While visiting family in the post-crisis momentum, and participating in the Argentinean Social Forum in August 2002, we met with one member from Colectivo Situaciones, a self-identified militant research group. After an insightful conversation and seeing how their booklets, zines and other publications were circulating, this explicit practice of 'militant research' provoked our imagination. This Buenos Aires-based collective is a small group of independent researchers that work in collaboration with different sectors of Argentinean social movements: from HIJOS, the sons and daughters of the 'disappeared ones,' to Piqueteros' organizations formed by unemployed workers organizing community-based micro-enterprises also known for their picketing of roads and transportation routes. Notably, the kind of relationship that Situaciones envisions with these groups is based on a firm premise that the research is itself part of the struggle: "Situaciones aims to work as an 'internal' reading of struggles, as a phenomenology (rather, a genealogy) and not as an 'objective' description. The point is to compose situational knowledges able to accompany and strengthen the emergence of new values superior to those of capitalism" (MTD Solano y Situaciones 2001).

One of the methodologies used by Situaciones is the co-production of workshops, where some members of the research collective, together with certain participants from a particular social movement, focus on a shared problematic. After identifying the issue, the problematic becomes the 'third object' to be analyzed by all the participants during a series of workshops. This methodology tries to articulate a subject-to-subject relationship, where both parties share knowledges and listen in order to generate a series of analyses, hypotheses and proposals. These are usually documented in texts that, after being polished, will be published – almost in a "just-in-time production" fashion – in accessible publishing houses to be distributed among grassroots groups and beyond. The last project engaged by Situaciones is an inquiry into recent changes in labor patterns, collaborating with call center workers. In that project they propose the following understanding of "militant research":

Processing what you are living through. Working with others, working with texts. [...] Overcoming the stupidity that distinguishes researchers from researched; [...] Understanding every experience as a living being that dialogues with others, in the present tense or looking towards the past and the future.

They ask:

What does knowledge become when it renounces the comfort of "critical distance" with regards to the "object," when it refuses each and every "evenly balanced evaluation" and adopts a point of view based in struggles? How is the ability to research experienced when it becomes part of the experience of life, when it becomes potential to create? What happens when the discussion is no longer about "who is who:" who is on the inside and who on the outside; who "thinks" and who "acts;" who has the right to speak and who is better off letting others speak on their behalf? When the question who is who is no longer policed, a new possibility emerges: that of producing together. (Situaciones 2006: 18)

Situaciones and several call center workers insisted that social struggles themselves generate research questions and hypothesis, and that it was important to be attentive to those and work through what we experience, without conforming to inherited ideas, but producing updated analyses together. Building upon the methodological discussion by Situaciones, the following examples are systematic ways to pursue activist or militant research.

On Observatories and Laboratories

Observatorio Metropolitano: Understanding Your Territory

More than 20 activists participated in the effort to produce a 700-page book, one of the first serious engagements with the contemporary transformations in Madrid. This exceptional effort is due to the rigorous research behind it, its distinctive authorship, as well as its mode of production and distribution. The collective enterprise is blatant when looking at the authorship of the book, signed by Observatorio Metropolitano. All of these 'experts' are actively engaged in different activist projects and social movements.

The initiative originally emerged as a civil society response to the candidacy of Madrid for the Olympic games. A serious study about this 'event' was necessary in order to denounce the consequences of the upcoming urban restructuring. The project surpassed that initial focus to begin working upon the larger question of how global processes are transforming the city. A bigger group was invited to collaborate in the project, opening participation to more activists 'territorially' (locally) involved in social struggles and engaged in analytical reflections about the current moment. After a series of self-education seminars, and the formation of working groups, the research project took shape, ending with a series of public presentations and internal meetings where the final drafts of each book section were presented with the goal of receiving feedback from the general public, as well as from colleagues.

The book is now circulating among community centers and is used as a tool for understanding previously unexplored problems in Madrid. This book was necessary to reorient the mobilizations in the city and to develop shared visions between participants. Until its publication there had not been any satisfactory language for discussing the current Madrid – the 'left' was caught seemingly unaware.

We would like to reflect briefly on the kind of political action that results from the sort of research referenced above. The goal of this research was to better understand major political-economic processes in a city. In order to accomplish this, macro-analysis with solid historical and statistical data was needed. The book also includes ethnographic chapters about everyday living and resistances. These analyses constitute great political tools: this kind of data can appear more objective and sharable, as findings are easier to communicate and circulate. This allows one to call institutional actors and public opinion into question through examples such as court cases, mainstream media, and mass campaigns. Normally, this kind of research is considered empirical with a sociological touch and filled with statistical data.

There are numerous successful examples of this kind of research by social movements. Such examples include all kinds of watchdog-based projects (Observatori del Deute en la Globalització, Corporate Europe Observatory, CorpWatch). The U.S. is well known for many institutes conducting high quality research on corporate activities (from NGO's doing research and distributing key information about IMF and World Bank, to organizations working on GMO's and food sovereignty, to groups focusing on free trade). One of our first experiences combining research and activism occurred in Chicago through a project of the Mexico Solidarity Network that studied the effects of NAFTA and the future consequences of the proposed Plan Puebla Panama. We also encountered an excellent example of grassroots corporate research when we met the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW).

Coalition of Immokalee Workers: Grassroots Research targeting Corporations

Haitian, Guatemalan, Southern Mexican and U.S. day laborers decided to investigate the complicated system of the agro-industry in the U.S. in order to target their political enemies, since the contractors that they met everyday in the fields did not actually have the power in the chain of corporate decision making. They developed an analysis of the agri-food business and organized a campaign without precedent in the fight against multinational corporations.

This independent and low-resource organization of farm workers launched a national boycott of Taco Bell in 2001. Taco Bell is part of the largest fast food corporation in the world: YUM Foods Inc. This national boycott is part of a long history of struggle against the labor conditions in the fields. Behind the decision to target Taco Bell there is a process of what we could call 'situated grassroots research.' Some of the activities that could be included in this research process are the following:

- 1) Conjunctural analysis through popular education exercises to evaluate conditions and struggles, the chain of action-reflection-action;
 - 2) Mutual exchange of militant experiences among different sectors – including anti-sweatshop students, engaged churches, MST members, art-activists, catholic grassroots communities and ex-guerrilla members from Central America, and so on – to gather information from decentralized yet networked local organizing;
 - 3) Internet and business journal research on the agro-industry structure and on chains working in Florida.
- Thanks to this process, CIW found that Taco Bell was one of the main buyers of the produce they were

picking. Taco Bell's ability to establish very low prices for those tomatoes drove the salaries of the farmworkers below the poverty line. Given the system of subcontracting, the company was invisible at the production site, avoiding any responsibility in terms of setting acceptable labor conditions or environmental standards. By identifying how the company operated at different scales, the CIW elaborated an organizing strategy based on decentralization in which consumers, workers and solidarity groups were able to participate in this anti-corporate campaign.

Several local groups formed after the call to boycott Taco Bell at the national level. One of these was the Chicago Taco Bell Boycott Committee, formed by activists from the Mexican neighborhood of Pilsen and other groups, including United Students Against Sweatshops, Mexico Solidarity Network, and the Chicago Direct Action Network. As members of this committee, we publicized the finding of the corporate research made by the coalition through a popular education workshop called "Fast food, Farm work and You;" street-art; weekly pickets to Taco Bell restaurants; and an intense campaign against the Taco Bell restaurant at the University of Chicago, which ended up closing down. CIW's solid strategies of research, logo-busting and boycott campaigns have led them to exceptional victories against Taco Bell, McDonalds and Burger King, and have been covered by major international media.

Precarias a la Deriva: Researching the Commons

Despite significant successes, there are risks associated with this kind of "macro-research:" the major risk being the possibility of generating a paralyzing kind of knowledge. By providing such overarching presentations of these macro processes – such as the overall functioning of a metropolis or a major corporation – a strong sense of inevitability seems to be inscribed. On one hand, the power of the data provides indispensable and strategic utensils to put together solid political campaigns supported by empirical arguments. On the other hand, that macro point of departure may not only lose some of those mini-realities that fractalize the one reality of the city or the productive chain, but might additionally convey a sense of impotence.

Other research strategies could help out in that regards. By attending to the micro and to everyday life, by speaking in the first person and by capturing mundane conversations, the research material can connect directly with people's experiences, allowing for mutual recognition and the discovery of previously unthinkable combinations/possibilities. When the Situationists described the city through their unconventional wanderings, the monolithic rhythm of 'metro-bureau-do do' was broken. The findings were suggestive of other ways of inhabiting the city, provoking the creation of a new and other sense of collectivity. Also, by engaging methodologies that acknowledge the limits of the observer and embrace the incompleteness of the data, a constituent imagination aimed at processes of re-subjectification and the generation of solidarities becomes possible.

An example of this kind of research is the work of Laboratorio de Trabajadoras (that later become Precarias a la Deriva). Even if their impact at the public level was minimal, the empowering effect and level of resonance among young people was very high. This group was quite successful in creating resonances and unusual alliances, effectively addressing the common question of precarity from different specificities. Finding collective ways of struggling was one of the main challenges to be addressed, as the project focused on the possibilities of articulation among women who shared the common experience of precariousness, yet were employed in extremely different types of work and holding different social status. In order to identify commonalities, they needed research methodologies that would fit their circumstances and be relevant to opening up conflicts. Looking for a procedure that would be able to capture their mobile and contingent everyday lives, they found inspiration in the Situationist technique of "drifting." Situationist researchers wander in the city, allowing for encounters, interactions and micro-events to be the guide of their urban itineraries. The result was a psycho-geography based on haphazard coincidences. This version though is seen as appropriate for a "bourgeois male individual without commitments," and not satisfactory for a precaria. Instead of an exotic itinerary, the precarias version of drifting consists of a situated and directed trajectory through everyday life settings (Precarias a la Deriva 2004:26).

Situationists create unexpected spatial situations generating realities worth exploring. Precarias method pursues an intentional model of the drift where spaces normally perceived as unconnected are linked. This allows everyday itineraries to become the line to follow, making realities that are normally off the radar of regular discourse visible. This type of drift presented a technique that was attentive to the spatial-temporal

continuum that they were experiencing as women under the new labor conditions.

This project contributes a methodology that can be understood as a feminist version of drifting, a kind of 'derive a la femme.' This innovative research methodology generates a political-economic analysis. Going back and forth between a variety of theoretical sources and their actual lived experience allowed them to develop a situated investigation about the material conditions they held in common, and the radical differences they lived through. These feminist drifts act as circuits articulating fragmented spaces. These experimental tours were able to re-imagine the political as collective interventions in everyday life. They produce participatory cartographies through their collective itineraries, where the "field research" is the temporary expedition following the space-time continuum of singular experiences. Precarias' project is about searching for commonalities, and at the same time fostering singularities. They are thinking of ways to articulate "lo común singular" (the singular in common) (Precarias a la Deriva 2004: 42).

The Mapping Revolution

Our point here isn't to give an exhaustive list of methods or experiences of research as something internal to social movements. Dozens of methods have been and are being used. As we've suggested, they can take a more macro-type approach, or a more situated one based on one's own conditions. Our main point was in asserting the value of producing knowledge as social movements, about 'socializing' that knowledge with others, and keeping a record of it. The goal is to overcome frozen categories in order to create an adequate and useful analysis of the current situation in order to intervene within it. Being fed up of old discourses of struggle, many groups decided to include a component of research in their organizing: We have never accepted the disjuncture between dedicating ourselves to knowledge and research about reality, or a simple form of activism based on revolutionary rhetoric and discourses inherited [a-critically] from the past. It's impossible to try and transform society while looking through an ideological prism that's situated outside the very social magma of knowledges that are secreted by emergent processes of social self-organization." (Toret and Sguiglia 2006: 107) .

In other words, you can't even begin an activist process unless you're attuned to what's going on around you. The previous quote is from a collective research project that included the use of cartography and maps. It can sound strange initially (to use cartography as a means of activist research), but if you consider the fact that we live in a super mapped era and the Department of Defense has developed a special Geo-Spatial Intelligence division to focus on map making and the use of new cartographic technologies, then using maps to further social struggle just becomes a way of re-appropriating the tools of our time in social movements (in the same way we do with internet or radio).

Why Mapping? What is Movement Mapping?

"Because power, impotence, and resistance take place in space and assume specific forms within it, maps can lend a spatial perspective to [our] political analysis...". AnArkitetur

"It is time to draw new maps, maps of resistance that can be used to attack the visible and invisible fences and walls, to tear them down or sail around them quietly, to hollow them out and to undermine them"

NoLager

A wave of cartographic practices is spreading among various social movements in Spain, other parts of Europe and beyond. At a basic level these mapping projects help us navigate the shifting territories of globalization. In the cases we've seen in Spain, this is applied to the European Union, the new European border regime, and other such macro-transformations. This resonates with Fredric Jameson's call to initiate a project of "global cognitive mapping" in order to reorient subjects in a postmodern world. Yet beyond this initial "way-finding" role, there are other reasons for using cartography. As the Car-Tac (or 'Tactical Cartography') collective writes, Even though the map is not the territory, to make maps is to organize oneself, to generate new connections and to be able to transform the material and immaterial conditions in which we find ourselves immersed. It isn't the territory but it definitely produces territory (2006: 157).

With this in mind, activist mappings can serve as organizing nodes. They suggest new relations that aid not only in organizing a reconception of the territory, but in recreating it as well. Thus, a subversive map of the

border helps to create a subversive border. Maps can be understood as agents that help to assemble distinct subjects into new joint processes – a form of radical bricolage.

These maps are often part of the sorts of militant or activist research projects that we've described above.

Hackitectura writes of radical cartography within this frame:

Cartography as not knowing, as permanent research, as a survey of the composition of the social and the interstices of reality [...], a survey of social processes in conflict. A cartography that connects knowledges and subjects. A cartography of the points of attack of the imperial enemy and the forms of attack of the movement. To map is to resist- capitalist territorialization –it is to create – spaces of mutual contagion of the post-national multitude (2006: 138).

We continue with two examples of cartography projects from Andalusia, Spain. One grapples with rapid urban transformations in their city as they relate to processes of globalization, the other tries to tackle the emergence of the 'Fortress Europe' border in their own backyard.

Otra Malaga

2004 – the Social Forum of Malaga was going to take place that year. It seemed that quite a bit was at stake. The entire Spanish state was coming out of a period of large mobilizations, including the anti-EU campaign of 2002, large movements against ecological disasters, and educational reform bills (Prestige and LOU), as well as the anti-war movement and the general elections. A lot of transformations were also occurring locally – lots of construction for the tourist sector (hotels, golf courses, high-speed trains), the growth of services industries (also connected to tourist growth), and a rapid influx of immigration in a short period. The Social Forum was to capitalize on this momentum as a way to intervene in what was happening locally – but there was the possibility that the event could remain a series of interesting workshops and panels with little to say for itself (as has happened with so many Social Forum events).

An in-depth mapping project that combined a process of Participatory Action Research with a re-mapping of the territory began to form with the goal of understanding the connections between the transformations taking place. The result included a book and DVD to accompany the map. The map itself allowed one to see different things happening simultaneously while trying to figure out the possible links between speculation on land to build tourist infrastructure, the growth of temp labor, and the ways that new migrants were being channeled into certain jobs and areas.

Beyond the product of the book and the map, the whole process intensified relations between unrelated collectives, mixing populations that are usually not at the same table.

Hackitectura, Indymedia Estrecho and others: Cartographies of the Straits of Gibraltar

The Straits map was made by a network based in Andalusia, Spain and throughout parts of northern Morocco, including groups such as Hackitectura and Indymedia Estrecho. This network of activist hackers, artists, and architects created a map that rethinks the border between Spain and North Africa. Instead of accepting the border as a fixed entity that separates 'us' from 'them,' this map conveys border relationships. This includes "geographies of empire" – capital flows, police networks and jurisdiction; and "geographies of the multitude" – migrant-flows and social networks. The map ignores the geopolitical and epistemological borders that had been naturalized by the dividing line of the sea. Instead, a particular flow is followed across the Mediterranean, between Spain and Morocco, Europe and Africa. Human flows of migrants, police agents, and capital flows in the form of the Moroccan government's foreign debt repayments, immigrant remittances (to family members), or European corporate investment (i.e. factory relocation) are constantly in flux. Cell phone and internet coverage span the Straits of Gibraltar facilitating ever-denser nodes of contact and coordination between social movements on both sides. The resulting map does not reproduce the border as a space of separation, but invokes it as a site of connection and reciprocal flows that traverse the Mediterranean.

Why Maps?

Through our experience with the Counter-Cartographies Collective in Chapel Hill, we found an unexpected

attraction towards maps. We tried to come up with some ideas to explain its growing use among social movements: mapping, as compared to writing is non-textual and non-grammatical, so a reader is not forced to follow a linear thought pattern; maps are easier to produce or build on in a participatory and collective manner; maps can act as excellent tools for teach-ins and workshops; and maps never need to be considered "finished," that is to say, they are constantly open to interaction and re-appropriation by the reader.

Activist maps have already been used in many different ways. Sometimes they look more like cartoons meant to communicate a point, a form of agitprop or 'propaganda map' – like an octopus crawling over the earth. Other activist maps are more like street maps for particular protests that designate things like targets, safe zones and tactical areas. The maps that we describe above go even a step further. They are made explicitly with the intent to apply movement politics to the map-making process, such that the form they take may be pretty funky and non-orthodox. The goals are to understand what forms of power we are up against, as well as counter-powers we may be able to create.

In the way of understanding maps discussed here, cartography becomes a tool for understanding and navigating changing territories and a means to create new territories – or at least to articulate new ways of inhabiting and subverting them. They are a form of continuous inquiry and research into, among other things, strategies of the powers that be, and forms of resistance to those same structures. Seen together, these maps can create a richer and denser picture of a reality and a possible lines of flight into, underneath and against it.

Translation III: Queering Our Categories of Struggle

What examples of new ways of thinking of categories have resulted from militant research experiments? We'll now briefly mention two examples of how processes of activist inquiry and radical mapping have lead to new concepts and tools. These are the queered notions of precarity and edu-factory.

Challenging the monolithic idealized working class: what about precarious people?

Returning to the discussion on privilege, it is worthwhile to mention here how movements elsewhere do not always work with such pre-defined categories ("privileged" vs. "oppressed") and some are actively trying to articulate identities of struggle more prone to finding affinities amongst each other. This is the case of many movements working on "precarity" in the European Union. A "precarious" person would be the one who is dealing with living conditions associated with current economic measures such as temporary contracts, less labor protections, day-labor by a largely undocumented workforce; as well as neoliberal approaches to social services and housing. Under this broad category, domestic workers, Teaching Assistants and immigrant families are finding a niche. Despite the differences and asymmetries among the populations, certain common experiences are being identified and allowing them to come together in struggles and mobilizations.

Madrid May 2008

Since the end of the 19th century, on May 1st we celebrate Workers' Day. But...

Are those of us who care for dependent members of our families and don't get paid for it-workers? Are those of us with functional diversity/handicap (physical-mental-intellectual) and who don't even have the recognized right to lead an autonomous/independent life, workers? Are those of us who sell pirated compact-discs in the street as the only way to earn a living – while the "Foreigners' Law" condemns us to second-tier citizenship as the 'undocumented' –workers? Are those of us employed in domestic work whose labor regime legalizes a situation of de facto slavery, workers? Are those of us who translate, teach classes, do research – but our "work life" doesn't count for the archives of the state because we work under the table and we don't chip into Social Security – workers? Are any of us for whom a regular if only minimum wage, decent housing, labor rights are unreachable dreams because we make pizzas, hamburgers or conduct surveys, but we've never had a contract for more than two or three months, workers?

The only thing we're sure about is that we're not those types of "workers" that the big labor union confederations refer to and claim to represent on the 1st of May. But then what are we? What do we have in common? Can we join forces and dreams for change from such different legal, labor and life situations? For several years now, some of us, and as time passes more and more of us, have been talking about "precarity" as a common name that touches all those supposedly "atypical" labor and life realities – but which we know are currently the majority type of situation. We've been thinking about how we are all affected (though to different degrees) by the fact that productivity continues to be understood as the production of profit and not the production of more livable lives. We've been experimenting with ways of

organizing ourselves to respond to situations of injustice and exploitation from spaces of encounter that are no longer spaces of work. We've been asking what might be that idea of thinking in common when the forms taken by the neoliberal economy and its new border regimes push us to isolate ourselves into an increasingly individualized "everyone for themselves".

This call for a MayDay picnic in 2008 by the Agencia de Asuntos Precarios/Precarias a la Deriva captures the feeling of what many collectives call precarity, resulting from a process of questioning our own situations and movements. Faced with changing conditions of labor, new sectors and new populations in constant flux (from around the country and the world)- the ideal of the "worker" clocking in at a factory and their combativeness (hard hat on, bandana on face, firing off metal nuts from the factory via slingshot at the cops) no longer jived.

Not that those figures don't still exist, but they are no longer as prevalent in Spain, especially in the 1980's and 1990's, or in the United States. That image of "the worker" was something people had an increasingly hard time identifying with. Newer tools and languages had to be found that spoke more to the multiple conditions many people were encountering.

At first precarity was a way to speak about worsening conditions within the same idealized image of a working class and of linking questions of increasing unemployment (especially in the early 1990's). Different groups began to inquire how to link new struggles that were emerging and that escaped models of factory or mine-based strikes without homogenizing such diverse populations. What was new (and what wasn't) about these situations? Could they be coordinated in any way?

We've mentioned the notion of "precarity" in this trilogy several times. Emma Cosse has brought up "precarity" to help understand the struggles of cultural workers (movie & television crews, museum workers) the revolts of the banlieues, fights for papers and citizenship rights, or struggles against "youth" labor laws. Precarity is not a panacea and is not meant to be a 'perfect' concept - it is (currently) unfixed and mobile - the idea (for most) being to avoid a fixed ideal of the "precariat." Precarity is used as a way of understanding a sort of trend occurring in many places with many populations stretching beyond the workplace, into questions of social services, public spaces, and housework.

The looseness of the category reflects:

- 1) The inspirations from the global resistance movements, and their attempts to link disparate struggles and
- 2) A deeper understanding of class and class struggle that goes beyond the gates of the workplace.

Actually, the variety of ways of engaging and re-appropriating the concept of precarity is shown by the quantity of movements related to it: from housing movements to migrants' struggles and from university movements to 'copy-left' claims.

Paris Spring 2008: Towards a Precarity Map

A dozen participants from various European countries gathered for an intensive working weekend at the Act Up headquarters in downtown Paris. The goal was to work on an ongoing cartographic project that involves both research about groups, events and processes of social unrest dealing with precarity, as well as how to visually represent them, including their discourses, practices, targets, etc. The process of assembling such a huge archive of social movements and conflicts related in one way or another to precarity has been long and challenging because of the very number and complexity of struggles around precarity. Also because the project has no funding at all and it is hard to coordinate among the dispersed and overworked participants. Even without a final map yet, the process itself has produced some interesting insights that helps to illustrate the queering character of this concept. The long list of struggles was classified based on a color-coded legend depending on the degree of explicitness in relation to the discourse of precarity. Some, such as the struggles around the border, maybe did not use the term, however their analysis and practices were clearly influenced by it. Others, such as the sans-papier struggles, do not relate at all at the discursive level, however there were many arguments in favor of considering them as part of the map of precarity struggles. These lively discussions show just how slippery the concept could be. Those processes of struggles -represented as volcanos, dotted lines, atoms...depending on their level of social impact, and a series of other criteria- are located above a base of bio power fields. These were represented by bubbles, going from the body to state regulation. We tried to be as broad as possible in thinking of power assuming that precarity was addressing a large variety of oppressions. However, most of the struggles that explicitly engaged the notion of precarity were situated in the bubble of labor and social services...The cartographic project then showed both the

potentials and shortcomings of the concept. The map's relevance though came not so much from the success or failure to pin down what precarity is or isn't, but from how to think new and different struggles together.

As one participant said:

Sometimes you are working from a very concrete and focused perspective of precarity, isolating yourself in your niche, you concrete local struggle,... and any kind of specialization has the risk of losing the ability to grasp an overarching set of conditions, a particular conjuncture,... a more global picture. Having something like a cartography of the movements working on precarity would provide a larger understanding of what we're doing and a more realistic sense of connectivity with other struggles that could otherwise seem distant.

Instead of just accepting a series of atomized struggles and strategies that may not work (classic union strategies often subject to limits by labor legislation that often doesn't respond to new conditions) – precarity has become a struggle to search for something common – something that doesn't try to homogenize conditions. Steps have been taken to link struggles and think them together. At times this is wishful thinking (hackers and migrant rights for example), but it's a far cry from solidarity struggles with the "poorest of the poor" or with "real workers" from a position of assumed superiority that we often can see in the United States.

The introduction of precarity as a new concept from which to think, live and fight among certain European movements has led to a politicization of current conditions, generating a common language and building another kind of subjectivity. As much as it is discursively amazing and aesthetically brilliant, often times the actual organizing results can seem far off. Besides some large mobilization and explosive moments (such as the EuroMayDay events in Italy or the anti CPE struggles in France) there are only a few concrete organizing efforts that are very focused in their work around precarity – such as the emergent Oficinas de Derechos Sociales in Spain (Offices of Social Rights), but they are still quite small.

This slow pick-up contrasts with much of the on the groundwork happening in the United States, focusing on issues beyond the traditional factory-workers' identity and problems. We are referring to the organizing done through the device of Workers Centers and their work with all sorts of non-traditional, non-factory types of work. Often Workers' Centers link working conditions to other axes of exclusion around race and migration. Contemporary extra/non-union efforts at day labor organizing, domestic workers, taxi drivers, and Korea-town workers are just a few examples of this vast array of experiments. Actually, many of the contemporary efforts in European organizing around precarious issues are curious about the experiences of Workers Centers on the ground.

The discourse used by Workers Centers is often not so radically new: "workers, the poor, people of colour..." and at times may be sufficient; but we know there are many challenges facing these efforts. Some of those challenges run along the lines of professionalization and re-presentation – linked to questions of the "non-profit industrial" machine. One of the main challenges is the separation between those supposedly affected by oppression, and those that professionally (and/or informally) work for improving that situation. This structural barrier talks about the impossibility of linking subjectivities and thus struggles: it seems that it is a form of solidarity of ones that are 'ok' with others that are 'very oppressed.' However, couldn't this framework produce ghettoised struggles, with no creation of affinities, as in "those are just the problems of the 'real' poor/black/jornalero"? What if the goal were to recognize those specificities, and also identify those common problems, common dreams, and common tactics. What kinds of spirals of struggle could emerge from that? Perhaps precarity or another queering concept could help in that search? Challenging the ivory tower: what about the edu-factory or the knowledge machine?

There is a myth that the academy functions as an independent ivory tower that is privileged and isolated, untouched by historical dynamics and free from possible turmoil. Contrary to this well-established myth, the university can be seen as a gridded space crisscrossed by intense relations of power instead of a privileged bounded ghetto. Both the conditions of current academic knowledge production as well as the possibilities of resistance within it relay into broader networks.

One of the main taboos of the university is the labor and life condition of its workers, which seeks to erase the bodies and the materiality involved in knowledge production. Service and infrastructural sectors of the university, in addition to academic work itself, are going through parallel processes of outsourcing, temporary contracting, self-managerial approaches and other 'treats' from flexible labor markets. What other ways of looking at and intervening in the university beyond the ivory tower are emerging?

Italy 2000s

Intense street barricades were erected in downtown Rome. University students and professors went on strike in order to protest the menace of privatization of higher public education. After these struggles, a process of

analysis among student movements of the current role of the university as a main economic actor led some of them to begin thinking of the university form and its current transformations as a shifting terrain of struggle. After conducting initial research amongst their colleagues, they concluded that the university has become a laboratory of unique forms of labor, and also an entity that is transforming and feeding off of the cities and towns where they exist – not just in the sense of resources and real estate (though that's a part of it) but as a non-market resource pool of creative energy and ideas. They started to develop the notion of an 'edu-factory' and the "university-metropolis," leading to the start of a process of national and international discussions of this analysis (see <http://www.edu-factory.org>).

Debates in Europe are contributing to the process of queering the university by insisting that places of institutional knowledge production are unique labor pools and are harnessing new forms of capital accumulation— from the famed 'immaterial work' to creative communities, financial speculation, and more – that need updated political discourses and strategies. All of this is happening in the context of an EU proposal to create a unitary and general framework for the whole European university system –the Bologna Process. In response to this, many student and researchers' movements are beginning to network in a transnational fashion.

Chapel Hill, 2006

Thousands of UNC DisOrientation Guides were distributed through the University of North Carolina (UNC) campus and surroundings. The 3Cs collective compiled a large quantity of complex information about the university that normally would be hard to access and considered unattractive. This information was compiled and placed into a pocket-size map version. One side of the map displayed a variety of diagrams and maps in order to show the university as: a factory; a functioning body; and a machine producing your view of the world. The other side situated UNC as a historical site of activism, also providing tools, contacts and concepts to re-inhabit, intervene in or subvert the university.

Despite the small scale of this cartographic intervention, the process of investigating and mapping academic territory opened the possibility of rethinking the university in challenging and empowering ways. 3Cs wanted to emphasize the economic role played by the university – particularly of UNC, which is located at the apex of Research Triangle Park, one of the largest science research parks in the United States. Also, the map shows other aspects of the university, beyond its labor and investor roles: for example, the urban restructuring and gentrification it prompts; its ecological footprint; the labor force both within the university and in the maquiladoras that are the production sites of university garments; the international relationship with other universities and its north-to-north focus.

This is just an example of the kind of rethinking of categories, reconceiving the isolated ivory tower as a meshwork site of knowledge production – a kind of knowledge machine.

Towards a Conclusion

After these examples and discussions of knowledge, research, maps- precarity, edu-factories and so on, we want to return to our original point. Queering older notions of privilege, class, and the university with experiential understandings of our surroundings provides a different way to look at and act upon the world. In order to be effective and imaginative in this process of re-shaping categories into useful analytical frameworks, engagement with experiments on militant research could be of a great help.

When we get stuck organizing alliances that can't grow into mutual solidarity and are faced with what may seem like grave issues affecting lots of people but which people won't move on, when we're not even sure what to protest or how to protest it, it becomes time to check ourselves – retrace steps and start building a 'counter' knowledge base to reorganize.

One thing we can be sure about: police forces, expansive multinational corporations, think-tanks and militaries all engage in their own forms of knowledge production. How many of us remember encountering the RAND corporation's analysis of the Seattle protests and finding it to be one of the better analyses out there, to the point that many activists were using them! These actors have internalized the adage "knowledge is power" – they've already got lots of power and want to keep it or grow it – so they've gotten serious about recording, producing, and funding knowledge.

It should be clear by now that the types of knowledge we're talking about are not just a copy of things like the RAND corporation, or a Pentagon study. The activist research and cartographic examples we've mentioned try to take very seriously the idea of infusing the entire research and mapping process with movement politics – not just in outlook, but also in the way a project is conceived and carried out. It could seem like we're calling for a new version of the "battle of ideas" – but our point is not specifically about having "convincing arguments for a soundbite" to win hearts and minds. Rather our point is about how

movements grow, or get stuck repeating strategies that don't work; how to understand our movements not as quick knee-flex response (i.e. "Bush is coming to town in two weeks! Quick let's do a demo!"), but as long processes that outlive many collectives' terms of existence and even outlive the retiring, burnout (or jailing) of many activists.