

Social Movements as Sites of Knowledge Production:

**Precarious Work, the Fate of Care and
Activist Research in a Globalizing Spain**

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy in the Department of Anthropology.

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ABSTRACT

MARIA ISABEL CASAS-CORTES: Social Movements as Sites of Knowledge Production:
Precarious Work, the Fate of Care and Activist Research in a Globalizing Spain
(Under the direction of Arturo Escobar)

This dissertation centers on the shifting cultures of labor within the European Union due to economic flexibilization, new patterns of feminine work and transformations in immigration. I analyze how civil society efforts are engaging these overlapping processes through the practice of *activist research*. These grassroots projects design, conduct and distribute their own research, influencing public debates and everyday understandings of labor. The study focuses on contemporary european movements engaging transforming notions and practices of work: mainly, the increasing “*precarization*” of labor conditions and everyday life; and the effects generating what these movements call a “*care crisis*” with reference to changes in social reproduction. I focus on Spanish feminist organizations as exemplary of alternative development models stemming from social movements.

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Firstly, I would like to thank and acknowledge Dr. Arturo Escobar as my advisor, intellectual mentor and personal companion. Since I first contacted him in 2003 inspired by his innovative anthropological work and political commitment, he has been a pillar throughout my family's years in North Carolina. His intellectual breadth and openness, his consistent advice to improve my work, his support in navigating institutional labyrinths or financial duress have been constants. I would be hard-pressed to even imagine a better mentor or supervisor. Also, I would like to thank the other members of my doctoral committee: the cutting-edge anthropologists Dorothy Holland and Charles Price; the leading Cultural Studies figure Lawrence Grossberg; and finally, the prolific and generous geographer John Pickles. The four of them have been central in guiding me through the politics of academia with a critical and open perspective, offering personal, financial and political support throughout.

Secondly, this dissertation is the result of the intellectual growth gained in several working groups. My advisor and committee members are active initiators and participants of a series of inter-disciplinary working groups hosted through the University Program in Cultural Studies during the years of my PhD program. Being able to fully participate in these dynamic research groups -especially the *Social Movements Working Group*, the *Cultures of the Economies Working Group*, and the *Autonomous Politics Working Group*-, have provided me a unique intellectual background on politics, economics, and research methodologies. The Duke-UNC collaborative working project on the *Geo-Politics of Knowledge* has also nurtured my intellectual trajectory with questions of post/de-colonial studies. I hope that relevant university administrators are aware of the importance of maintaining these spaces of multi-departmental interdisciplinary work and debate, allowing renown professors from various fields to work in

collaborative projects with graduate students, producing publications and conference presentations on leading issues. Also, I would like to mention the Anthropology Department at UNC, which through faculty, staff and other colleagues has been a great host, intellectually and personally, for me.

Thirdly, a large reason for the project being carried to its conclusion is the long-term relationship with other graduate students, with whom I have developed not only unique friendships, but also collectively produced papers, panels and workshops at UNC, Duke and for several editions of the Anthropological American Association Conference. I am especially thinking of Dana Powell and Michal Osterweill, who have been key during the final stages of the writing process, mainly thanks to a consistent dissertation writing group. This dissertation then bears the stamp of their careful reading and ability to provide critical and constructive feedback.

Furthermore, and very importantly for the production of this work is the inspiration and input provided by different activist groups in Spain, the United States and Argentina. . Anyone who knows Sebastian and myself or has read this/both of our dissertations knows how these groups have been central to much of our political thinking and action in recent years. Colectivo Situaciones in Buenos Aires sparked our imagination about the possibilities of activist research. Emily Forman and Daniel Tucker, companeros from our days in Chicago-Direct Action Network, helped attune our senses to research and mapping practices as sites of political intervention. Their work and militancy continues to provoke and delight us. The *Team Colors* collective, the editors of the *Atlas of Radical Cartography*, *Constituent Imagination* as well as the *Transform/Transversal* journal of the *European Institute of Progressive and Cultural Politics*, all believed that different aspects of the work for this dissertation were relevant enough to current political

struggles, publishing them both online and in print or otherwise helping to push similar debates forward. Finally, our active engagement, development of affinity and practices of mutual aid with two activist research/mapping projects have been key to provide not only inspiration for many of the ideas in this manuscript but many of our own political practices of the last years. These two referential groups are *Precarias a la Deriva*, based in Madrid, and the *Counter Cartographies Collective (3C's)*, based in Chapel Hill. Indeed, this dissertation itself is the result of the powerful impact of *Precarias* in my understanding of politics, research and care practices. In a similar fashion, 3C's has been a great lesson in how to politicize one's own terrains and everyday life in the American university and in how to make the personal political without being heavy handed or self-righteous about any of these. Thanks to Liz Mason-Deese, Tim Stallman, Craig Dalton, Cecilia Durbin, Tu Lan and John Pickles for being such a great team and cohort of solid friends.

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INTRODUCTION

Conocimiento en Movimiento¹ Towards Other Europes

Downtown Madrid, June 2004: 4pm

A hot summer afternoon, waiting at the doors of an old two-story building located in *Embajadores* Street, at the heart of the picturesque neighborhood of *Lavapiés*. Previously a bakery, this building was abandoned for several years when unexpectedly a group of women took it over in 1996. Responding to their call for help in reconstruction, volunteers from various countries as well as some local architects came in to fix the building, the whole squatting operation attracting the attention of neighbors and even national newspapers.²



Figure 1. La Escalera Caracola: Casa Okupada de Mujeres

¹ English translation: Knowledge in Movement

² See El Pais article at : http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/prensa/elpais_campo.htm

The building was named after its old circular stairs as *Eskalera Caracola* (also known as *EKA*), still written in graffiti on the walls of the building. Since it was first squatted, this emblematic physical space has hosted the only occupied feminist social center of Spain and even Europe, open to the public as "espacio feminista autogestionado" whose goal is to “build a living, everyday and autonomous feminism”.³ Self-financed by a bar, a vegan restaurant and a tea-room all in situ, this old building has gathered many activities, including: reading groups; workshops; a social movement’s library and even hosting international events such as parts of the second Zapatista global gathering.⁴ What brought me to this unique place, which a year later, after 10 years of high levels of activity, came under a municipal order of eviction? The reason for standing at its doors on such a hot day, admiring the colorful businesses of this street filled with small call centers, old coffee shops, and migrant-run groceries, was to meet one of the writers of a compelling book.



Figure 2. Cover of the book *A la Deriva por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina*

³ Source: <http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/invitacionsemanafantastica.htm>

⁴ *El Segundo Encuentro Intergalaktico en contra del Neoliberalismo y por la Humanidad* took place in Madrid in 1998, after the first one in Chiapas in 1994. It was in the second one that the People’s Global Action network (PGA) was formed.

This book, *Drifting through the Circuits of Feminine Precarity*, written by the *Precarias a la Deriva* project strongly spoke to me at two different but interrelated registers. On the one hand, their depiction and analysis of the everyday life of young women with atypical jobs in Spain, influenced how I understood my own situation, a young woman studying and working abroad, through the pursuit of a doctoral degree in the United States. It is true that this situation was due to personal/political and intellectual reasons but also because of lack of opportunities in one of the most problematic labor markets in Europe, and especially in my region, Castilla. The book gave me a critical and generational perspective, in that I was able to identify myself as somehow part of the larger circuit of feminine precarity, as a product of several decades of policies of massive free public education, labor market flexibilization, the broader availability of international travel and the ensuing diasporic relationships. As part of the young generation of the recent so called *Spanish Miracle*, I embodied many of the contradictions resulting from the ongoing reconfigurations of Europe and the trials and tribulations of the process of Spain's entrance into the European Union.

On the other hand, this publication on feminist precarity was self-defined as the product of an activist research project. At that time, I was fascinated by the potentialities of combining research and activism, so this visit was particularly meaningful to me. Fatimatta soon arrived and opened the old door with a big antique key to show us the different rooms, the bar and the library. After her welcoming and detailed explanations about *Precarias a la Deriva* as one of the many projects that the EK hosted, she took us to a nearby tapas-bar to continue our enthusiastic conversation. Walking together through the Lavapies Plaza, I was thinking about the fact that since my discovery of the practice of *investigacion militante* in 2002 when I met the Argentine

group *Colectivo Situaciones*, I had been looking for more similar initiatives; this search in fact took me to a book review of *A la Deriva* at the end of 2003. Just a few months later, in early 2004, the first International Conference on activist research was held in one of the many squatted buildings in Barcelona. Now, in the summer of 2004, I was visiting the authors of *A la Deriva* in person. What I did not know at the time of our walk in Lavapies was how the practice of activist research would grow and spread in the years to come. Barely half a year after this walk, a round of international workshops on activist research was held for the first time at the 5th edition of the World Social Forum in 2005 in Porto Alegre. The diverse origins of the participants at these workshops reflected the spread of activist research practices at that moment, for example: from South Africa, United Kingdom, Argentina, Brazil, Italy and the United States. In addition to physical encounters, edited volumes compiling examples of activist research began to appear (e.g. *Nociones Comunes* 2004, Spain; *Constituent Imagination* 2007, United States). The diffusion of activist research boomeranged back to my home campus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, making an impact on the research group we had created the year before, the *Social Movements Working Group*, and fostering the creation of our own activist research collective, also at the university, the *Counter Cartographies Collective*.

This dissertation examines *activist research* as a growing practice within contemporary social movements. I investigate the intellectual, political and social implications of this specific *practice* of activist knowledge production. I do so through archival and ethnographic engagement with a particular women's project based in Madrid, whose work focuses on the conflicting transformations afoot in Spain under the current reconfigurations of the European Union. The relevance of this case of social mobilization is based on the premise that without

taking activist-produced knowledges into account, not only are we failing to fully understand recent processes of collective action, but, and perhaps even more importantly, we are missing key analytical and theoretical insights into current world transformations and possible interventions in them.

The specific empirical contribution of this dissertation consists in pointing out and analyzing how social movements themselves are engaging in processes of ‘in-house research’ or inquiry in their own terms. Rather than delegating this task to recognized sites of expertise, social movements are re-appropriating the practice of research for their own ends. Sustained by ethnographic and archival research, this tenet splits into three main contentions: 1) Social movements’ research results in the *development of concepts* that enable strategic intervention on issues of public concern in specific contexts. This conceptual production by social movements provides important challenges to current forms of studying collective action in the social movements research field. 2) Social movements are advancing their own set of research methodologies, infrastructures and epistemologies. 55With regards to the movements engaged in this dissertation this innovative research is based on a particular political logic, that of *autonomy*. In this way, and via the articulation of decentralized networks, *a distinct and growing community of research practice* is forming. 3) The practices involved in activist research production, distribution and reception contribute to *processes of re-subjectification* and are conducive to re-generating instances of *collective agency*, bringing about an innovative sense of political participation and re-energizing political imaginaries. These three contentions are further developed after situating this dissertation in a series of disciplinary concerns and highlighting its specific relevance.

Interdisciplinary Contributions
Rethinking Social Movements, Europe and Knowledge

Studies of Collective Action and Anthropology of Social Movements

The production of knowledge by social movements has been a widely neglected practice, despite the fact that it has been embedded in many social struggles for a long time. As the ethnographic opening about my personal encounters with activist research suggest, there is a reinvigorated interest in systematic knowledge production by contemporary movements, particularly those working outside of party-based politics, and especially the more anti-systemic and self-organized side of the global justice movements, those identifying with the political “area of *autonomy*”.⁵ While there is growing scholarly attention towards the “movement of movements”, there are few accounts of the analyses, concepts, theories and knowledge production practices of those organizing within and against current global political-economic shifts. My work builds on a nascent approach within the anthropology of social movements that posits social movements as important sites of knowledge production (see Escobar 1998; Casas-Cortés 2005; Conway 2006; Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell 2008; Cobarrubias and Pickles 2009; Juris and Khasnabish forthcoming). My dissertation contributes to this emerging literature by focusing on the production of knowledge by social movements through practices that involve not only protest mobilizations and advocacy—the usual, recognized components of collective action- but also explicit practices of research as central to their strategies and self-definitions.

⁵ Briefly stated, for the sake of this dissertation, since a fully engagement would go beyond the scope of this work, *autonomy* refers to a political vision and modus operandi defined by key words such as direct democracy, pre-figurative politics, horizontality, self-organization, within and against, antagonism, direct action, self-representation and counter-power. See *Cuadernos de Autonomia* (2001). Autonomous practices have a long trajectory among anti-systemic movements in many countries. Today, it is associated with youth groups, mainly those deeply influenced by global justice movements and the Zapatistas, such as social centers, free software/copyleft projects and recuperated factories.

Decentralized and networked, working on the margins of institutional settings, these heterodox activist research communities are emerging in different countries, generating and putting distinct bodies of knowledge into circulation about burning contemporary social transformations. Albeit small in size, there is nevertheless a growing trend among social movements to engage with the practice of activist research. Their analytical and political developments are inserted into particular historical contexts. In the case of this dissertation these developments intervene, interact and compete with the official depictions and dominant political cultures of the transforming European Union. Their explicit, self-reflexive and systematic production of knowledge is taking place in a particular conjuncture, that of a globalizing Europe, where flexible modes of production are introducing cognitive elements such as information management, communication skills, intellectual creativity and cooperation, as part of the desired knowledge economy in Europe. In this geographical historical context, the unfolding of activist research –where knowledge production is re-appropriated and subverted in intentional, playful and non-market oriented ways by social movements–, could be of significant relevance in the processes of depicting (and possibly disrupting) the current configurations of the European Union.

Europe, Anthropology and Cultural Studies

These activist research projects are carried out in specific historical contexts, in this case I focus on a research collective based principally in Madrid, yet they are highly networked with groups throughout the country and abroad. Their research attends to the consequences produced by the process of a Europeanizing and globalizing Spain. By engaging its own research findings and its own context of interaction, this dissertation ultimately addresses the question of *Europe*.

My engagement with the current configuration of Europe as an anthropological object attempts to embrace the complexity and contradictions presented by the unfolding process of the European Union's construction and its national variations. This type of multifaceted engagement has been facilitated by an ethnographic approach that is attentive to "the commitment to complexity, contingency, contestation, and multiplicity" which according to Grossberg, is "the hallmark of Cultural Studies" (2006: 6). Much of the official literature on the European Union I encountered has been criticized for being propagandistic, and thus falling into different forms of reductionism (DiMauro 2006). More refined academic analyses of the EU have also been characterized by its excessive focus on institutions, especially those coming from Political Science and Sociology. In striking contrast with this legacy, a growing body of anthropological studies is calling attention to the complexity of this ill-defined entity called the EU and the concomitant methodological challenges for studying it, advocating for new ways of approaching the multiple realities inhabiting the European territory:

"In addressing the EU, anthropologists must define new approaches to studying the complex relationships between institutions, identities, cultures and societies. Among these approaches are the analysis of official discourses and languages and the ways they map new territories for political action" (Beller and Willson 2000:8, emphasis mine)

This dissertation contributes to this emerging anthropology of the EU through an "analysis of *non-official* discourses and languages and the ways they map new territories for political action". During my research, language and practices of institutional and official actors, - from state agents and EU officials, to national policies and EU legislation-, have been taken into account, and tracked down when necessary. Nevertheless the attention focuses on actors, concretely social movements outside bureaucratic structures (e.g. movements not constituted as NGOS, unions, or political parties). Despite this explicit claim to focus on non-official sites of

making Europe, this study does not entertain the practices and discourses of grassroots social movements for the sake of it, isolating and dissecting them as objects in a laboratory. Rather social movements are taken as active, thoughtful and influential subjects as they relate to concrete questions of power, place and culture within the process of building the EU. As such, their own discourses have been looked at from a context-driven analysis, going back and forth between institutional and non-institutional events, actors, and texts. It has been a back and forth process between the macro-official-statistical portraits of Europe *and* these non institutional, at times underground, ways of experiencing and enacting “Europe”.

This double movement of zooming in and out of the context introduces two key kinds of information to the analysis. On the one hand, official political and economic data as well as self-representational discourses by known establishment figures and institutions (e.g. national and EU-wide statistical agencies, official EU documents, media accounts, statements by national and EU politicians). On the other hand, accounts of a controversial and problematic experiences of Europe as well as instances of contention by anonymous inhabitants of Europe, including but not limited to those organized in or linked to social movements networks. This back and forth approach to the building process of the EU is based on the notion that a particular context, a concrete territory, a distinct situation matters: not only to understand the emergence of an activist practice, but also to frame the context-actor relationship as an open-ended process of interaction and mutual influence. This could resemble to what a contextualist analysis *à la* Cultural Studies might look like:

“contextualism aims to understand any event relationally, as a condensation of multiple determinations and effects and embodies the commitment to the openness and contingency of social reality where change is the given or norm” (Grossberg 2006: 4)⁶

Trying to develop a contextualist analysis of the EU based on the premise of “radical historical specificity” (Grossberg 2006: 3) is not an intellectual luxury. It has been historically the case, that the adjective ‘European’ implied a universal and global connotation *versus* the rest of populations representing the partial and the local. When talking about Europe it is important to be mindful of the ongoing *coloniality* of the “geo-politics of knowledge” (Mignolo 2000) that make concepts coming from Europe –even those emerging from social movements- the source of universal, generalizable and totalizing explanations. “Provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty 2000) is a must in order to avoid such temptations. How to escape from the curse of “*King Midas*” that condemns analyses that “touch” the question of Europe (about or from Europe) to inevitably become generalizable? Approaches that boost the historical specificity of the current happenings in Europe could be of great help here. Cultural Studies calls for radical contextualism. This dissertation attempts to develop such a contextualist analysis of Europe, emphasizing its specificity and disclaiming any kind of universalist temptation. Moreover, it suggests that some of the inhabitants of Europe are themselves doing analysis *à la* Cultural Studies. Certain European social movements are dealing themselves with the particular reconfigurations of their own socio-economic-cultural landscapes, engaging in processes of analytical, political and subjective re-invention. I argue that these engagements have been aware of the specificity of their own context and conjunctures without trying to advance universal political agendas or articulate homogenous political identities valid across geographies and time.

⁶ Following this approach, I contend that a contextualist analysis of the different aspects that make up a particular social formation would include also the role and analyses put forward by social movements. Theirs would be a situated reading of a particular context as well.

As such, the approach and arguments of this dissertation on the practice of activist research among European social movements can be seen as developing from, and contributing to, the Anthropology and Cultural Studies of Europe.

Contextual-Theoretical discussion: Engaging the Knowledge Turn

This dissertation situates activist research in the broader theoretical shift afoot in several fields towards a new understanding of knowledge production. This significant shift in the way knowledge is conceived led me to speak in terms of a “Knowledge Turn”. This shift highlights the material, networked and situated character of knowledge-making, and its role played in power relations and geo-political fields. This turn in the understanding of knowledge away from the dominant Cartesian framework has been taking place at the grand theory level at least for the last two decades. Active epistemological and ontological debates have been carried out from a wide variety of fields including biology, phenomenology, science and technology studies, feminism, pedagogy and post-colonial studies. Nonetheless, these debates have informed and resonated beyond those fields. This is the case of social movements’ studies *and* social movements’ practice.

In regards to studies of collective action, this knowledge turn provides a distinctive notion of knowledge granting a sharper analytical approach to apprehend the intricacies and contributions of social movements. Recent scholarly work on collective action, especially from the subfield of anthropology of social movements, is defending social movements as knowledge producers on their own right. Within this line of argumentation, the *Social Movements Working Group* at University of North Carolina has been one of the pioneers in advancing theoretical and ethnographical material to support and further elaborate such a claim. Nurtured by the

participation in this interdisciplinary group and the intellectual cross-pollination among similar working groups at UNC and Duke, some of us propose the concept of “knowledge-practices” to capture this distinctive notion that emphasizes the material, situated and political nature of cognition, especially in relation to collective action (Casas, Powell and Osterweil 2008).⁷ By this we mean knowledge that counters abstract and monolithic notions of Knowledge with a capital K, particularly those in the Cartesian, positivistic tradition. “Knowledge-practices” is a way to articulate what Gibson-Graham describes as “doing-thinking”:

“Our common sense posits a separation -or even an opposition- between thought, understood as cerebral reflection, and action, understood as embodied engagement with the world. This makes it hard to see thinking itself as a kind of action –that we are *doing thinking*, in other words, touching the world and being touched by it and in the process things (and we) are changing” (2006: XXiX)

Advancing a knowledge turn in Social Movements’ Studies is a call to scholars of collective action to acknowledge, engage with and theorize social movements as producers of knowledge, understanding knowledge in this post-Cartesian sense. This shifting perspective on social movements implies attention to the epistemological *and* ontological transformations implied by such a knowledge turn, as well as its concomitant methodological consequences: in what ways does the notion of social movements as knowledge producers transform our understanding of movements? Even more, how will the normally well defined boundary between movements and researchers be affected? Finally, how does this knowledge turn push us to rethink our own practices of research on and with movements?

In terms of how this knowledge turn is also manifested in social movements’ own practice, it is important to recall that social movements have historically been active sites for

⁷ In the process, we realized this very term was being also used by others thinking through the intersection of knowledge and social movements (Sousa Santos 2007; Conway 2007).

rethinking the social. While constituting knowledge producers in their own right, they have nonetheless being largely neglected as such by scholars, and often disregarded by activist themselves and society at large. This production of knowledge has taken different forms and results according to specific geo-historical contexts and articulations. In the case of certain contemporary movements, the question of knowledge becomes a primary feature of their identities and strategies. More concretely, the current wave of activist research might be engaging in a more explicit, systemic and less-vanguardist practice of knowledge production than previous movements of the past. This dissertation posits the practice of activist research as an instantiation of this turn to a knowledge production which is more aware and overt about its material, embodied, networked, situated and political nature. In other words, the “knowledge turn” –advanced by a series of scholarly debates problematizing Cartesian notions of knowledge leading towards different epistemologies and ontologies– is being enacted by social movements conducting activist research.

An Ethnography of Knowledge Production Practices The case of Activist Research

Specific Focus & Research Questions

This dissertation pays particular attention to activist research initiatives among European movements working on the question of *precarity*, one of the most active sites of struggle at present within the restructuring spaces of the European Union. Concretely, it centers on a prolific activist research community called *Precarias a la Deriva (PD)*, a women’s collective whose analyses, methodologies and strategies addressing current economic transformations have gained significant notoriety transnationally among social movements and beyond. My dissertation is

guided by three main sets of empirical research questions concerning 1) context; 2) practices and 3) contents, all in relation to this particular research group.

1) *Contexts of Interaction*. Considering the specific terrain where *Precarias* is located, what are the main restructurings and transformations under way in the European Union affecting Spain? How are those restructurings altering key public issues -for *Precarias* and society at large- such as labor laws, the informal economy, migratory policies, the university, and housing? What changes are taking place in civil society and social movement activity in this context? Importantly, what is it about the present historical period that brings the call to research within social movements to the fore?

2) *The Practices of Activist Research*. What are the concrete research practices and methodological procedures carried out by *Precarias*? What are the epistemological foundations of those practices? In terms of antecedents, are traditional social science methodologies being used for this kind of activist analysis? To the extent that there is innovation, how do the new practices diverge from more established ones and what makes them distinct? Do they engage in collaboration and exchange with similar contemporary initiatives? Is their work circulating, if so, how and among whom?

3) *The Analytical and Conceptual Productions*. What is the specific focus of this research collective? How does *Precarias* analyze and conceive of changes in a globalizing and Europeanizing Spain? What are the readings made by *Precarias*, and the broader networks in which it is inserted, of the current transformations in the European Union under globalization processes? Do they advance any conceptual contributions to the understanding of the current conjuncture? If so, what are those findings and concepts? Finally, what kind of *work* are these

concepts *doing*, in terms of having any social and political effects in a given context? if so, how is their research being used, by whom, and for what purposes? Are these concepts and research results transforming political identities, and resituating positions of political action?

By examining these three aspects of a particular activist research group, this dissertation shows the extent and the particular ways in which social movements are indeed engaging in systematic analysis of current social transformations, generating distinctive research practices as well as crafting modes of self-representation and political interventions in the context of the European Union.

Main Contentions

These principal research questions guided my fieldwork period, and led to a series of empirical findings that sustain my three main contentions about *Precarias* itself and the practice of research among social movements more broadly.⁸

1st Contention: Developing Concepts about the N.U. rope & the Spanish Miracle

Albeit small in size, it is my contention that these research projects are contributing relevant analyses to complex problems, engaging questions of increasing relevance both for social movements and civil society as well as for anthropology and other social sciences. In other words, they are *developing concepts* that are pertinent to, and illuminate, the very social worlds with which they interact, in this case the transforming territories of the European Union. Thanks to productive archival and ethnographic work, I identify how *Precarias* has worked mainly through two major concepts: *Precarity* and *Care*. Both of them are presented as lenses to interpret and intervene in the context of a Europeanizing and globalizing Spain.

⁸ Here I develop the three contentions advanced at the beginning of this introduction (p.3).

Precarias' focus on these two concepts responds to pertinent concerns felt by a population grappling with a series of sudden transformations in their country such as: a) the transition from a highly organized industrial working class agglomerated in large production facilities to a mostly temporary, part-time and highly educated labor force in emerging industries related to services and creative work; b) the shift from being considered a semi-peripheral country, especially during Franco's dictatorship –closer to Africa than to Europe according to a popular saying- to becoming a key player in European and global markets as well as a leading model of democratization; c) the current displacement of a tradition of state involvement in the provision of social services towards an increasing role for the private sector in public affairs such as health, education and housing; d) the changing notions of femininity and domestic labor moving away from the historical pattern of women at home to fully embrace the image and the consequences of women at 'real' work, both in terms of statistical numbers and what is considered desirable; and e) the rapid conversion from being a country of 'emigrants' to a land of massive immigration. All these shifts, caused by the opening of the Pandora's Box that constitutes the entrance of Spain into the European Union and current processes often understood through the rubric of globalization, entail a series of contradictions, at times negative repercussions as well as new possibilities.

It is this ambivalent nature of the current conjuncture that *Precarias a la Deriva* fully embraces. Although their analysis is critical of the negative consequences of some of these shifts, their conceptual contributions, aim at a constructive criticism able to rearticulate fractured identities, reinvent roles and reinvigorate collective action.

a. Rethinking Precarity

The current transformations of the labor regime have been the object of attention by many social struggles worldwide. In Europe, this process named by economists and politicians as “flexibility”, has been re-baptized by social movements as “precarity”. Struggles around precarity have prompted a rich debate about the changing nature of labor, its effects on workers’ conditions and the necessary rethinking or updating of labor and social rights. *Precarias* is located within this increasing politicization of the tendency towards part-time, temporary, and insecure jobs both in traditional sectors as well as in the growing knowledge and service based sectors of the economy. While nurtured by these debates, *Precarias* advances its own articulation of precarity emphasizing a more multi-faceted understanding of labor changes, one more attentive to the overall conjuncture, mainly by addressing questions of transformations in reproductive spaces and global migration. *Precarias* calls attention to these other spheres neglected by Marxist-inspired understandings, by using the term “feminine precarity”.

Precarias’ work is inserted in a rich trajectory of the concept of precarity itself, a trajectory I develop further in the dissertation through a cartographic genealogy. I identify four waves of conceptualizations of the notion of precarity, each of them advanced by different actors contributing nuances through diverse struggles and analyses. Precarity own’s genealogical development keeps expanding to include different kinds of labor, questions of migration and questions of everyday sustenance. Contributing to this expansion of the concept, critical of the excessively production-centered understandings advanced by many precarious struggles, *Precarias* talks about current socio-economic transformations in Europe in terms of a “precarization of existence”.

b. Introducing Care:

While precarity was the main ‘object’ of *Precarias*’ first research project, an unexpected finding caught their attention and led their next research and organizing phase: the question of care seemed to be the missing piece of the puzzle in the contemporary transformations. While informed by feminist economics on the connections between global migration and care work, they coined their own series of concepts on the question of care. They referred to processes normally under the radar (or not made explicit) for both activists and society at large. For instance, they use the term “care crisis” to refer to the imminent inability of current family and social structures to conduct the invisible tasks that support a notable portion of the economy and sustain most social activity. This crisis is due to the emergent tensions between: 1) the increasing inclusion of female Spanish citizens into the labor market and the absence of ‘in-family’ permanent care givers; 2) an aging population requiring more and more care work; 3) a public sector subtracting itself from some forms of traditional welfare provision; 4) and massive immigration where female migrants are heavily channeled into an increasingly semi-legal care labor market. This crisis is taken as an opportunity to call for “the re-organization of reproductive tasks” and to rethinking old socio-economic rights. New rights should not be solely based on the fact of laboring, deserving rights as “productive” workers. Rather, they advance the notion of “*cuidadania*”, a playful word compound made out of care and citizenship⁹, to acknowledge the socio-economic relevance of care work, and call for a more inclusive legal framework not based on nationality but on care related tasks, including both care givers and receivers.

⁹ See chapter 8 on Care for Glossary of terms.

Even if the concept of care is emerging in several fields, mainly feminist economics, *Precarias*' unique contribution stem from their focus on the intersection between care and precarity. The result was an innovative politicization of the *care-precarity* complex. *Precarias*' current interest centers around the possibility of “care struggles”, articulating alliances between different care givers and care receivers, and posing innovative political proposals such as a *care strike*, *careticipancy*, and new *care rights*. These conceptual developments speak of a different kind of analysis and politics not always at ease with traditional actors from the ‘left’, including unions and political parties.

Through an engagement with *Precarias* as a source of analyses and concepts, this dissertation then presents a portrait of Europe not regularly available, as if we were looking at the EU from the social movements' point of view. It is an explicitly *situated* description of the current process of EU building as depicted by social movements themselves. Their writings, debates and actions are taken as *situated sources* to reveal certain aspects of a given reality otherwise not apparent from conventional analyses.

Furthermore, my engagement with Europe is doubly situated because it also brings along with it auto-biographical information: from childhood memories to auto-ethnographic material. I say *situated*, rather than reflexive, building on the feminist epistemological principle of “situated knowledge”, to emphasize that this rendering of Europe is product of particular locations and experiences. Following Haraway's “partial objectivity” allows for a rendering of reality that, explicitly coming from a particular site of enunciation, accepts its non totalizing character, and the existence of other valid renderings coming from diverse locations (1997). As such, rather than pretending to convey a ‘neutral’ or ‘critical distance-based’ description of the EU, it

acknowledges the partiality and circumscribed pertinence of both social movements' and my own analyses.

2nd Contention: Becoming a Distinct Community of Research Practice

This more empirical section is based on the compilation and careful engagement of texts being produced by these exemplary “writing machines” (Marcus 1995) as well as *auto-ethnographic itineraries* through my work and research with different activist research initiatives. The various materialities that constitute the practice of AR range from its most basic cultural artifact –published texts- to personal encounters among and with practitioners and the larger international gatherings on the question of AR. As some practitioners of AR would argue, personal relations, as much as writing, is raw material for the production of research, to emphasize the material and inter-subjective aspect of research. Ethnographic engagements with those materialities led me to appreciate a series of traits, arguably distinct from other action-research traditions. These traits emphasize the different treatment of the object/subject divide, their unique site of practice, and overall, their particular understanding of the political, one that is deeply influenced by the principles of *autonomy*. The singularity of activist research is also justified by the advancement of innovative research methodologies such as the picket survey, or the feminist drift. There are also practices of collaboration and distribution that may not be as frequent among conventional researchers, such as an explicit politics of contagion and the use of legal mechanisms such as copy-left and Creative Commons licenses.

Furthermore I contend that activist research initiatives are not entrenched in isolated ghettos, but are rather articulated through an explicit politics of building networks and exchange, forming a sense of belonging towards a diffuse community of practice. This community is made

of out networks that are both global and yet deeply place-based, *rooted* in specific contexts, thinking and speaking from particular locations and addressing their own problematics seriously. This is why it is possible to speak of a community made out of *rooted networks* (Rocheleau and Roth 2007). Rejecting the Cartesian icon of a solitary man relying on abstract and universal thinking, the very practitioners would emphasize this dual character of research as grounded on both *material* practices and *rooted* webs. This would have methodological consequences for ethnographic work, re-conceptualizing the field as a *trans/local field*, as explained in the methods chapter.

3rd Contention: Contributing to Processes of Re-subjectification and Collective Agency

A careful and long-term engagement with activist research led me to conclude that both the conceptual contributions as well as the research practices themselves are conducive to transforming the subjectivities of those involved in the overall process of research development, from the moment of design to the moment of reception. In the particular case of *Precarias*, I conclude that research is conceived as an ongoing process of collective “re-subjectification”¹⁰ in contemporary conditions of dispersion. One of the main reasons that led *Precarias* to engage in the practice of research was to address an increasing sense of fragmentation, in part due to the crumbling of conventional social roles in a shifting terrain that demanded alternative references to established figures such as the 9am to 5pm worker, the business woman or the militant unionist. None of these roles were appropriate for the new context and for a generation filled with other inspirations. The research process led to a series of realizations about the new

¹⁰ What PD refers as a “process of re-subjectification” might have similarities with the notion of *subjetivation* advanced by Gibson-Graham (2006: XXXVI). As will become more apparent, it is also related to the anthropological debates of identity formation and transformation. Aware of these affinities, I use the term more frequently adopted by the social movements that have been engaged in this dissertation.

conditions and possibilities to rethink one's own situation in that picture. This provided the basis for an individual re-composition as well as a more collective sense of belonging. Under the name of "precarias", both researchers and many readers, were empowered to engage in initiatives for alternative collective action, where before there was a sense of isolation or simply a lack of identification with mainstream politics. This leads me to claim that the research process is conducive to re-generate instances of *collective agency*, bringing about an innovative sense of political participation and re-invigorating political imaginations.

Informed by methodological debates during my PhD training, with special regards to the politics of ethnographic practice and writing, as well as being attentive to the discussions on the politics of research taking place in Science and Technology Studies, Community Development and Cultural Studies, I gathered the following basic principle: any kind of research design and procedure is grounded in a particular notion of 'the political'. It is my contention that the practice of activist research as conducted by *Precarias* involves a notion of *the political*, based on *autonomous* theories of self-organization and world-making from below, bracketing conventional state- and science-centered strategies. This conceptual insight runs through the different chapters of the dissertation.

Structure

The development of my main argument and contentions is carried out throughout the seven chapters that compose the main body of this dissertation. These are organized under two thematic parts: Part I "*The Predicament of Knowledge: Engaging a Knowledge Turn*" contains four interrelated chapters elaborating upon the theoretical, methodological and empirical underpinnings of a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of knowledge and how it influences

the study of social movements. Part II “*Europe Adrift: Conceptual and Political Transformations by Social Movements*” is formed by three chapters focused on specific contributions by social movements in the context of a changing European Union. A detailed review of each chapter follows.

Chapter 1 starts with a literature review of social movements’ studies, in particular those works pertinent to engaging the current movement of activist research. These works include literature on social movements as culture and meaning makers as well as networking actors. Also I draw from those studies focused on the specific case of global justice movements. Furthermore, in order to address the contextual-theoretical discussion where this dissertation is inserted, this chapter offers a synthetic review of the literatures that have been advancing a “knowledge turn”. These literatures emphasize (or rescue) a series of traits that were usually ignored (and even denied) by the dominant Cartesian framework. Among those I identify five crucial characteristics of knowledge, redefining it as 1) embodied, 2) networked, 3) situated, 4) political and 5) plural. Having this theoretical background in mind, I look at how this knowledge turn is informing social movement studies, briefly addressing the emerging scholarly work attentive to the novel production of knowledge in the engagement with collective action.

Chapter 2 explains the specific methods used for this research, signaling a series of dilemmas posed during the development of fieldwork resulting in a series of methodological arrangements such as mutual interviewing, immanent reading, observant participation, ‘different’ archival research, etc. The substantive part of this chapter refers back to the impact of the knowledge turn on the study of social movements, especially focusing on the methodological consequences of embracing such a paradigmatic shift. As possible responses to the

epistemological and ontological transformations advanced by the knowledge turn, I suggest to rethink the ethnographic endeavor as a process of *translation* (Latour 1999a; Santos 2006) and *connection* (Haraway 1991; Latour 1999b¹¹), emphasizing its potential as articulator among distinct knowledges. To help me in this re-conceptualization I draw from yet a new literature, mainly authors from anthropology of modernity or the contemporary. Building on some of their specific contributions, such as *writing machines* and *multi-situated ethnographies*, and based on the research trajectory behind this dissertation, I present two possible methodological propositions. First, aiming at redefining the conventional object/subject relationship, I reformulate social movements, the ones to be studied, as *situated sources* with *rich archival practices*. Second, being constrained by traditional notions of the ethnographic field, both in temporal and spatial terms, and especially when dealing with a global social movement dedicated to place-based inquiry, I suggest the notion of a *trans/local field*.

Chapter 3 engages activist research, positing it as an instantiation of the knowledge turn in social movements' practice. Starting by situating the current wave of *investigacion militante* (to use the Spanish term), as part of a broader family of engaged research traditions, the purpose of this chapter is to identify what makes the contemporary expressions of activist research distinct from previous and other contemporary initiatives. I advance a series of constitutive traits of activist research building on self-reflexive theoretical material developed by the practitioners themselves. Therefore, most of the chapter is made up of direct quotations with dense explanations about the practice of activist research, many of them coming from one of the most prolific and referential initiatives: the Argentinean experience of *Colectivo Situaciones*. This

¹¹ In Latour's words, "ANT researchers cannot exactly be said to 'study' the other social actors", but "connecting with them through some research protocol" (1999b: 20)

material led me to the argument that activist research's singularity comes from the notion of the political embedded in its practices, that is, the political logic of *autonomy*. The growing number of projects sharing this understanding of *autonomous research*, and specific procedures, being progressively more interconnected among themselves through a variety of networking initiatives, led me to the second contention of this dissertation about the formation of a broad *community of research practice*.

Chapter 4 further engages the practice of activist research by focusing on the concrete example of *Precarias a la Deriva*. This chapter zooms in on the specific context of emergence, research procedures, organizing goals, and theoretical inspirations of a particular activist research project. It shows how the variety of knowledge-practices being put to work and their notion of the political has strong resonances with the logic of autonomy advanced in the previous chapter as constitutive of the current wave of activist research. My analysis of *Precarias* is the product of weaving ethnographic material from interviews and fieldwork as well as careful engagement with their texts. By explaining the projects' trajectory and the repercussions of its unexpected popularity, *Precarias* becomes an exemplary case of social movements as knowledge producers. The chapter explores some of the consequences of this condition, by pointing how *Precarias* becomes the increasing object of scholarly attention as a source of analytical and theoretical contributions.

Chapter 5 engages the current conjuncture of a Europeanizing Spain. The goal is to provide recent historical background to understand the current developments of social movements. The focus centers around transformations of labor relations, since this is one of the main questions of concern for the struggles around *precarity*. By looking at the history of

Spanish labor reforms, EU policies in support of flexibilization, as well as the development of traditional union organizing, I attempt to provide a contextual background for understanding the trajectory of the concept of *precarity*. While focusing on the case of Spain, the European Union is also constitutive part of my contextual analysis. I do so by looking at the processes of economic integration afoot in the EU and introducing some of its institutional composition and decision making processes. Finally, I also bring more cultural readings of the European construction being put forward by the burgeoning field of the Anthropology of Europe. This overall discussion on the EU and the contesting visions of the Spanish Economic Miracle constitute the background that makes *Precarias* and the broader precarity struggles, understandable; contextualizing their conceptual and political contributions.

Chapter 6 examines the development of the concept of precarity as it is being understood and politically applied in many European social movements. I propose that the analysis of the conceptual production of precarity might benefit from Deleuzian notions of *nomad thinking* and *concepts as toolboxes*, given how precarity is morphing and adapting itself to changing circumstances and being constantly put to work. In order to apprehend this morphing conceptual development, I develop a genealogy of precarity with the aid of a cartographic visualization of the emergence, growth and multiplicity of precarity. This cartographic genealogy situates *Precarias*' specific contributions to the concept, which consists mainly of a de-centering the excessive analytical weight placed on capitalist production implicit in many of the precarity discussions. The genealogy, including the specific contributions advanced by *Precarias*, speak directly to my first contention: that these activist research projects are developing analyses relevant to issues of immediate public concern and debate.

Chapter 7 maps the transformation in *Precarias*' activist research practice at two levels. First, in terms of conceptual production, they shift attention from precarity toward care. Second, in regards to the research practice itself, they become more focused on local issues and alliance building. This transformation is linked to the third contention of the dissertation, namely, the place of knowledge production in the creation of new subjectivities and world-making practices. The chapter makes extensive use of ethnographic material, particularly in order to exemplify this transformation on the part of *Precarias* through an account of workshop practices with a particular group. Along the way, the chapter outlines *Precarias*' theory of care, on the one hand; and on the other, the role of care itself in the research process. Care in this sense becomes the foundation for an ethics of knowledge production, an ethics of research that links knowing, being, and doing.

PART I.

The Predicament of Knowledge

Engaging a “Knowledge Turn”

Chapter 1

*Mas allá del Giro Cultural*¹

The Anthropological Engagement with Social Movements

Introduction

Cyberspace, January 2004

I could only participate via the web. It was a real bummer; I had everything ready to attend, even funding support from my research group at UNC, the Social Movement Working Group, which was sending me as a group representative. Where? to the first International Conference on Activist Research held at one of the many squatted buildings of the city of Barcelona. I was not the only one that missed the opportunity among the international list of participants, who were coming from different parts of Europe, North and South America. However, it was exciting to know about and tele-participate in such a convergence of activists interested in conducting quite a particular kind of research. As one of the definitions that came out of that encounter reads: "Militant research is simultaneously the production of knowledge, subjectivity, cooperation and political self-organization. It is an investigation for and inside political actions and social conflicts". Thanks to this encounter and all the freely-distributed papers online, I was able to start a unique archive on the global movement of activist research.

This dissertation investigates the production of knowledge by social movements through practices that involve not only action, –the commonly recognized components of collective action- but also place great emphasis on the practice of research itself as central to movements' modes of organizing and self-definition. Conventional social movements' theory and research have made practices of knowledge production within processes of collective action invisible. Nonetheless, simultaneous to this overt articulation of knowledge production and resistance on the ground, scholarly debates on social movements are calling for a necessary epistemological

¹ English translation: Beyond the Cultural Turn

shift where the traditional object of study starts to be symmetrically treated as a subject, as a knowledge producer of complex and worthwhile interpretations of the world. Thus, this dissertation puts the intersection between social movements and knowledge creation under investigation, positing this claim in the field of social movements' studies. This chapter reviews the bodies of literature most relevant to address such a significant yet under-examined crossroads.

The first part, *Collective Action under Inquiry: Culture, Networks and Global Justice*, engages the field of social movements' studies (SMS), exploring the debates that emphasize the process of cultural politics and meaning making within collective action. This is considered the precursory step towards the claim advanced principally by the anthropology of social movements about how movements themselves constitute knowledge producers in their own right. Within the field of SMS, I tackle the question of transnational activist networks and global justice movements given the international nature of the activist research trend under examination. Furthermore, in order to address the theoretical discussion where this dissertation is inserted, the following part, *Anthropology of Knowledge*, offers a synthetic review of the literatures that have been advancing a *knowledge turn* for the last two decades. Building on those contributions, I identify five distinctive traits of knowledge that were usually ignored under the Cartesian paradigm. Synthesizing the points made by a broad and interdisciplinary set of literatures, this five fold working understanding of knowledge speaks to the important epistemological and ontological changes involved in this turn, especially as it relates to collective action. Having this theoretical background in mind, *A Knowledge Turn in Social Movements Studies*, looks at how these debates are informing scholarly engagement with collective action, briefly addressing the

emerging works, coming from Anthropology and beyond, attentive to the novel production of knowledge from processes of social struggle. The three sections that compose this chapter are opened by ethnographic anecdotes that speak to the topic at hand.

1.1. Collective Action under Inquiry: Culture, Networks and Global Justice

We were tired of being the object of study, of being treated as an ‘issue’ instead of allowing us to speak by ourselves. (Conversation among activist feminists at Eskalera Karakola, Madrid February 9, 2008)

Despite the fact that the canon of social movement literature has been based mainly in North American and European Political Science and Sociology (the two primary streams being *Resource Mobilization theory* (McAdam, McCarthy, Zald 1996; Tarrow, McAdam, Tilly 2001) and *Identity-centered Social Movements theory* (Touraine 1981; Melucci 1989), the current state of the field of social movements’ studies is very fragmented and dispersed through diverse, although limited number of disciplines and world-wide locations. Working through thematic clusters –such as meaning and culture making, transnational networking, knowledge production– rather than disciplinary boundaries would help to overcome the current bounded pockets of debates on social movements research. For this dissertation, several questions need to be addressed by examining the scholarly debates around them: 1) the cultural turn in social movements research; 2) the phenomenon of transnational movements; and within those 3) the contemporary wave of global justice movements. In all of them, I will try to show how the emerging field of an Anthropology of Social Movements proper, participates in each of these debates with relevant contributions that will inform my research.

A series of interdisciplinary interventions in the field, in which Anthropology and Cultural Studies have figured prominently, pointed out the political character of culture, re-

thinking social movements beyond the institutional political framework defended by dominant paradigms. From taking movements as strategic rational actors in relation to the state, a different conceptualization developed where movements are seen as sites for the elaboration of collective identities, innovative meanings, social relations and cultural practices, all of which become important sources of counter-hegemonic formations (Comaroff 1985; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 1988; Melucci 1989, 1996; Alvarez and Escobar 1992; Nelson 1996; Alvarez, Escobar, Dagnino 1998; Warren 1998; Casas-Cortés 2000). This re-conceptualization has been coined the “cultural turn” in social movements’ research. Anthropology was one of the main contributors to this move towards ‘culture’ in the analysis of collective action. The specific contribution by Anthropology in the study of social movements *vis a vis* other disciplines has been recently elaborated by Salman and Assies (2007). They signal the relevance of “the participant’s vantage point and *culture*, at the micro-level of lived and shared daily life”, factors missing or underdeveloped in other approaches (2007: 205). Anthropological engagement with movements, specifically the ethnographic approach to resistance, has a noticeable trajectory (as reviewed by Escobar 1992 and Ortner 1995). The focus has usually been rather constricted, mainly working on peasant protests and localized instances of resistance (Wolf 1969; Taussig 1980; Scott 1985; Ong 1987; Fox and Starn 1997; Starn 1999). However, some anthropologists have been pushing the paradigm of “rituals of resistance” beyond isolated moments of disruption within totalizing systems, towards an engagement with broader organized forms of collective action, which are conceptualized as active, creative meaning makers of “alternative worlds” and “transformed selves” (Holland et al 2001). It is through these efforts that an ‘Anthropology of Social Movements’ proper has begun to gain visibility and momentum (Escobar 1992; Edelman 2001;

Graeber 2002; Juris 2004; Nash 2005; Hess 2007a&b). As Nash suggests, “anthropologists [...] are now among the principal observers of social movements”(2005: 22). Unfortunately this anthropological research has been largely “neglected” by mainstream social movements’ studies (Nonini and Price 2008). My project seeks to contribute to the consolidation of this exciting and largely new field, namely, the Anthropology of Social Movements

Within this cultural framework, current work has been addressing the increasing transnational character of collective action. Preliminary research as well as dissertation fieldwork showed that the particular group under investigation, *Precarias a la Deriva*, is not an isolated community organization, but rather demonstrates many of the multi-sited and transnational networking practices described in the literature on globalizing social movements. Recent scholarly work has demonstrated the transnational scope of civil society efforts, emphasizing how movements are “going global” and “crossing borders” (Alvarez 1998; Keck and Sikkink 1998). These works have explored the modes of transnational organizing highlighting how these globalizing movements structure themselves through “networks”, “webs” or “discursive fields of action” (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Escobar 2000; Leyva-Solano 2001; Diani and McAdam 2003; Juris 2004; Edelman 2005; Alvarez forthcoming; Juris and Khasnabish forthcoming). By linking globalization and resistance this literature has contributed to seeing social movements as veritable “global flows,” going beyond the frameworks on “global scapes” of the 1990s, which tended to ignore globalizing social movements (Appadurai 1996; Inda and Rosaldo 2002). The work on transnational social movements is thus enriching the field of Anthropology of Globalization and Global Studies more broadly.

Among those transnational studies, some of the recent approaches focus on what have been popularized by the media as “anti globalization movements”. The articulation of these “global justice/global resistance movements” (names used more often by the actors themselves), with transnational processes is twofold: on the one hand, they target corporate-driven globalization and neo-liberal policies at the international scale as new forms of “empire” or “empires” (Hardt & Negri 2000, 2005; Aronowitz and Gautney 2003; Sen, Anand, Escobar and Watterman 2004). On the other hand, by organizing against hegemonic forms of global integration, movements themselves constitute a “globalization from below” or “grassroots globalization” (Falk 1993; Brecher, Costello and Smith 2000; Appadurai 2000; Gils 2000; Graeber 2002; Mayo 2005; Juris 2008). Among those efforts at constituting another kind of globalization, the World Social Forum is one of the most clearly articulated expressions, raising notable scholarly attention (Sen, Anand, Escobar and Watterman 2004; Santos 2004; Conway 2006; Osterweil 2004). My dissertation focus fits well within this work on transnational movements that are engaging globalization on those two fronts. In the case of activist research communities such as *Precarias*, they are immersed in transnational networks themselves, networks that explicitly criticize one type of global integration and try to put forward alternative globalization processes. In this regard, there is now growing work on the transnational movement of activist research, which has tended to be invisible thus far (see Malo 2004; Shukhaitis, Graeber and Biddle and 2007; Casas-Cortés & Cobarrubias 2006).

In addition to these three thematic clusters (cultural politics; transnational networking; and global justice movements), a fourth area is being crafted by a diverse but as of yet not consolidated literature, that is, social movements and knowledge production. The following

section traces some of the theoretical background behind that approach, looking at the emerging understanding of knowledge and its importance to understand social movements' practices.

1.2. Anthropology of Knowledge

A black t-shirt, worn in a hip-hop concert by a long-time activist in Terrasa and adjunct professor at the University Autònoma de Barcelona, read: "Knowledge is Power – Act Up Paris". Being asked about it, he simply replied: "I really like this group and the work they do. About the saying, I know it is a very obvious thing, but sometimes we need to remind ourselves, that we –like Act Up– are fighting with the weapon of knowledge".²

This incident speaks to the basic premise of this dissertation, that is, how ordinary people, through processes of collective action, engage and generate different kinds of knowledge. In order to further elaborate this argument, it is important not to take for granted what is meant by knowledge. In order to fully address the intricacies of knowledge, several types of literatures have been brought into a common orbit. I build upon preliminary research on relevant works focusing on the intersections of knowledge and politics.³ Exploring furthering this link, I identify additional literatures in order to offer a more refined sense of the current understanding of knowledge and its repercussions for the domain of studies of collective action.

My synthesis of these literatures points to a five-fold approach to knowledge. First, following some of the recent trends in Cognitive Science and Phenomenology, knowledge, rather than the result of an abstract mechanism, comes from *material, and even embodied* processes.

² Act Up, a social movement born out of the struggles in the 70s against the stigmatization of AIDS, was one of the first struggles to openly engage the question of expert knowledge. Its uniqueness mainly resides in challenging medical authority to be more democratic and less pharmaceutical-driven. Thus, the movement has invested in getting to know the medical jargon as well as important medical arguments in order to be able to discuss on the same plane as "experts" and successfully ask for feasible demands that were not available before (Collins and Pinch 1998). Also it is interesting because it shows how Act Up is now being evoked as a reference by participants of this current trend of activist research. Later I found out that is not just a mythical reference but there are also important connections and collaborations underway.

³ This work has been conducted mainly for the fourth semester paper, requirement of the anthropology PhD program at UNC-CH, as well as for my doctoral research proposal and the collective publication in *Anthropology Quarterly* co-authored with D. Powell and M. Osterweil.

Second, as the growing field of Science and Technology Studies points out, this materiality is enacted through concrete and traceable practices conducted by many actors, articulating *networked* processes of knowledge production. Third, as several voices from Feminist Epistemologies defend, knowledge is *situated*, marked, coming from specific positionalities. Fourth, consequently, as the traditions of Participatory Action Research and Freirean Pedagogy have extensively written about and put into practice through concrete projects worldwide, knowledge is *political*, and entails processes of empowerment or disempowerment. Finally, building on those contributions, according to the Modernity/Coloniality school, an uneven “geopolitics of knowledge” has prompted an historical and current cartography of unequal knowledges, ranking those according to changing geo-referenced hierarchies based on relationships of coloniality. Despite the many historical attempts at establishing one canon, they posit knowledge as *plural*. These five traits are further developed in the following subsections, after briefly pointing their connection with Foucault’s own understanding of knowledge as an historical and material practice intimately related to power.

My own work is based upon the notion that the question of knowledge production is at the heart of issues of domination as well as resistance. This centrality of knowledge to contemporary definitions of power was perhaps made most famously in the work of Michel Foucault and his conceptual pairing of “power/knowledge” (1980). According to Foucault, much of reality is maintained through discursive formations and the relative power of certain regimes of truth. These regimes of truth —very often scientific or expert discourses—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 enables and constrains our actions in the world. This intricate connection between knowledge and particular configurations of reality, is based upon his notion of power as productive, multiple, "omnipresent", "relational", from above and "from below", "both intentional and non subjective" (Foucault, 1978: 92-96). Bringing the question of knowledge to the front, shows the capacity of generating certain regimes of truth, and thus power. These regimes of truth are sanctioned by institutions of knowledge putting them to work and producing those truth-effects. Many contemporary studies of scientific production have been strongly inspired by this Foucaultian understanding of truth making.

Foucaultian legacy of knowledge/power has then emphasized the materiality of knowledge, and thus its concomitant political underpinnings, challenging the philosophical tradition of knowledge as an abstract and neutral mechanism. On top of this Foucaultian theorization, other traditions will further develop the intricacies of knowledge, contributing with a complex understanding of what has historically been granted as an unproblematic question, and thus making knowledge the very subject under investigation. The following review focuses on those literatures that have worked on the question of knowledge under new lenses, in order to assess its relationship with the question at hand of social movements.⁴

1.2.1. Knowledge as Material and Embodied Practice

As a mundane part of everyday life, knowledge making is a material activity. That is, knowledge is enacted by various people, institutions, and organizations in particular times and

⁴ This is an appraisal of some of the main debates on the question of knowledge, however it does not pretend to cover the whole ground and richness of these debates and other related literatures. For the sake of this dissertation, these traditions have been helpful for articulating a notion of knowledge in order to support and enrich the claim of social movements as knowledge producers.

places. This is also the case for people involved in social movements. However, such an understanding of knowledge has not been the common one. Cartesian notions of knowledge as detached from the body and everyday life have had a strong impact on mainstream notions of knowledge as an abstract activity in search for universals. Luckily, a variety of quite distant fields contend for a different understanding of knowledge, fields from biology and phenomenology to some traditions in the social sciences. Fighting against the well entrenched tradition of abstraction, knowledge is reclaimed as something very different as we will see in this section. According to Varela, a phenomenological biologist working on cognition:

“When we reexamine our understanding of knowledge and cognition, I find that the best expression to use for our tradition is *abstract*: nothing characterizes better the units of knowledge that have been deemed most “natural”. {...} However, there are strong indications that within the loose federation of sciences dealing with knowledge and cognition –the cognitive sciences- the conviction is slowly growing that this picture is upside down and that a radical paradigm shift is imminent”(Varela 1999: 6, 7).

This emerging view, building on empirical studies of cognitive processes, conceives of units of knowledge as concrete and bodily actions: “cognition is grounded in concrete activity of the whole organism, that is, in sensor motor coupling” (Piaget in Varela 1999:8). Instead of mind-based processes of deliberation, the way cognition works is through a sense of “immediacy” and “a readiness-for-action”. This changes classical notions of perception and reality, according to Varela:

“The world is not something that is given to us, but something we engage in by moving, touching, breathing, eating. This is what I call *cognition as enaction* since enaction connotes this bringing forth by concrete handling” (1999:8)

The concreteness of knowledge brings a distinct understanding of the word that is neither simply realism nor relativism. The enactive approach to cognition stands in contradiction with:

“the received view that perception is fundamentally the truthful reconstruction of a portion of the physical world through a registering of existing environmental information. In the enactive approach reality is not a given: it is perceiver-dependent, not because the perceiver “constructs” it as he or she pleases, but because what *counts* as a relevant world is inseparable from the structure of the perceiver” (1999:13).

This re-conceptualization of cognition not as representation of a world outside but as *embodied action* (Varela 1999:17) emphasizes the materiality of knowing as situated, relational, embodied and enactive. This goes in line with the phenomenology of “embodied knowledge” *à la* Merleau-Ponty. The body itself knows how to do things. Through routines, habits, conventions, rules, we both gain access and intervene in our world. Recent studies have focused on reflecting on the logics of the quotidian know-hows building towards a phenomenology of “skillful actions” (Dreyfus in Varela 79). Those context-based mundane activities shape both our own selves and our micro-worlds. Terence Evans also discusses the epistemology of practice as embodied knowledge exploring how the body knows and its challenges to rational thinking (2004; 1997: 353-356). Building on the sustained work of the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, Brian Goodwin in his book *Nature’s Due* (2007) concludes that “to live is to know”. Goodwin takes this observation and some developments in embodied theories of cognition as points of departure to challenge the dualist trap of splitting mind from matter, thoughts and feelings. By reviewing Goodwin’s new book, Escobar brings together a series of works sharing a similar understanding of knowledge that intimately connect identity, action and cognition:

“Goodwin’s notion of biology based on the fundamental embodiment of all knowledge, [is similar to] what Maturana and Varela call the “unbroken coincidence of our being, our doing, and our knowing” (1987: 25)”. (in Escobar 2008)

Thus if knowing is doing, Ethics is also a part of this discussion. In some Ethic's debates, this embodied approach to knowledge breaking apart clear cut entities such as individual-collective, mind-reality, translates into a situated and contextual sense of good life. This understanding refuses an absolutist and abstract morality of good will and deliberate intentions completely blind to the singular specificities. This more context-sensitive notion of ethics is present among some Communitarian philosophers. Charles Taylor in particular rescues the original sense of individual autonomy not as a self-sufficient and self-centered subject, but as a participant of a shared code of norms and habits, both able to get out of him/er self and able to admit, admire and open up to transcendental aspects such as community, nature, gods, the others, etc. Morality is then a source of connection, not something imposed that people want to escape from. Ethics is rather conceived as a collective cartography –always flexible and context-based-of possible ways to live peacefully together (Taylor 1989; 1999)

This is just a brief outline of some trends both in natural sciences and philosophy that are working with an emerging understanding of knowledge as material, immediate and embodied intervention in the world. These are not the dominant genealogies of modern science, philosophy and ethics (“indeed, they represent the existence of an alternative, less Eurocentric and colonialist West”). All of them address how to go beyond the two most deadening aspects of modern eurocentrism, which according to Escobar are pervasive binarisms and simplification of complexity. Joining his diagnosis then, let's explore “the epistemological-cum-ontological struggle that is being fought” (Escobar 2008). The shift towards a more messy understanding of knowledge growing in the hard-to-grasp field of Cognitive Sciences, –as well as in those phenomenological and ethical discussions–, is also present in some critical trends of the Social

Sciences and Humanities broadly speaking. Knowledge is not anymore just an abstract occurrence, but it seen as something so concrete and practice-based that it has become an object of investigation itself as a social activity worthwhile of scholarly attention. I explore now how these different fields have critically engaged the question of objectivity, entering in an intense epistemological battle rendering concrete consequences.

1.2.2. Network-Knowledge: Exploring the webs of beings behind Objectivity

The materiality of knowledge is also posited by and thoroughly explored within the heterogeneous field of Science and Technology Studies (STS). Certain STS authors focus on the construction of claims to truth and expertise, emphasizing the centrality of practice and multiple actors in the making of knowledge. STS scholars have studied assemblages of human and non-human actors that act, collectively, to produce scientific and technological knowledge and distinctly networked worlds. STS has thus dismantled some of the unquestioned legitimacy and black-boxing of knowledge production, and brought to light the intricate work, trials and errors of scientific genius and artifacts (Latour 1988, Callon 1986, Law 1999). Notably, STS often uses ethnographic approaches to reveal the material, particular, and historical contingencies that play a part in making things appear to bear truth or authority. In this sense, these studies make the heterogeneous networks of knowledge-production and practices visible, including processes of enrollment, translation, and coordination among distinct actors involved in making scientific theories into facts, that can hold and endure (see Callon 1986, Latour 1986; Law 1999a, Raffles 2002, Star and Griesemer 1989). A few STS authors have begun to turn their gaze toward the work of social movements (see Hess 2007a&b; Woodhouse et. al 2002, Redfield 2005), though it is unclear that this turn is having reciprocal effects among mainstream Social Movement Studies.

Insofar as knowledge production is forged in fields of power, to claim social movements as knowledge-makers has political significance. Movements' theoretical practice is generated in relation to epistemic and ontological regimes they are striving to transform. In this sense, the importance of knowledge-practices rests on the one hand on the unique sites of enunciation -- their situatedness -- and on the other, in their engagement with dominant (even repressive) regimes of truth (Foucault 1980) or hegemonies (Gramsci 1971). Whether through direct and explicit contestation of "expert" discourses, or through proliferating a variety of alternative ways of knowing and being, including alternative economic, social and cultural models, the production of knowledges by movements intervenes in important operations of power.⁵

Actor Network Theory is one of the main representatives of the epistemological-ontological battle engaged by STS scholars. Delving into Latour's work⁶ can help us to grasp some of the key STS concepts that contribute to reinvigorate the notion of knowledge.⁷

Reclaiming Reality: Other Realisms are Possible

Latour's engaging chapter "Do you believe in Reality" in Pandora's Hope explains the genealogies of dominant ways of understanding reality, and some of the given responses. Despite the nuances among the levels of certainty expected from Science by Descartes, the British

⁵ Movements' practices such as *Precarias*' drifting through the city to investigate the everyday forms of new types of work, should not only be understood as knowledge in and of itself, but knowledge intervening in a complex and contentious, political field.

⁶ I will focus on Latour's version of actor-network theory. Addressing the whole body of ANT theorists and their internal nuances is beyond the scope of this work.

⁷ It is pertinent to note that Latour's work does not stand on its own. Rather, Latour's work is based on a large theoretical body (mainly Deleuze & Guattari as well as Foucault), although usually without explicit acknowledgement. The focus on Latour's work is due to its clarity of statements and fresh way to look at previous ideas. That being said, this focus does not intend to ignore the multiple schools of thought working with parallel concepts such as networks, fluids, interconnected knowledges (Complexity Theory, Post-Structuralist Political Ecology, Feminist STS)

empiricists, and Kant they are all accused of assuming the knowledge subject as “a mind-in-a-vat” (1999a:4). This mind away from the world, even from the body, set up an irreparable prison system between “an outside reality” and “an inside me”. This rupture inaugurates the era of the enclosure of minds. It established a regime of objectivity based on subjects as “prisoners” in their own minds, disconnected from the world and just able to *look* at it from the distance.⁸ This cognitive prison-system was then inherited in different versions by social and cultural constructivists that went beyond the individual mind to think of “a series of minds-in-a-vat” (1999a: 7). In addition, Latour mentioned deconstruction and mainstream phenomenology as unsuccessful challengers of this ‘Bastille of objectivity’. The first one surrendered itself to the total disconnection to the world and the loss of certainty. The second one admits that yes, one part of the mind is connected to the world, but this is the one who lives, not the one in charge of producing knowledge (1999a: 8, 9). Latour will present an alternative solution to break those cognitive chains in the knowledge production process, calling for recognition of how one is totally connected to the world, opening the possibility to know and communicate about it, and even to intervene on it through research. This does not mean a return to older forms of empiricism as we shall see.

The only venue of relating to an outside world left for an isolated mind is *mediation* – either by universal categories, socialized ones, culturally specific ones, or those structurally given-. Kant was one of the main culprits responsible for the victory of the modern logic of mediation (Grossberg 1998). Without aiming at a conclusive portrait, the logic of mediation is based on a conceptualization of the world through mechanisms of representation, providing

⁸ For a further development of the visual metaphor and the scientific gaze see *Pandora’s Hope* (1999: 138)

meaning to reality by *a priori* categories. This way of abstraction, or appropriating the world, of experiencing reality, constitutes the grounds for “a philosophy of distance” (1998:11). Against the solitary logic of mediation, Latour proposes the relational practice of *translation* (1983: 162). For example, in order to understand scientific objectivity, one has to look at the translation processes among scientists, ‘objects’ and ‘audiences’ of a given research.⁹ Thanks to translation, objectivity is then redefined as a practice of articulation rather than a disengaged act of observation. ‘Forget the mind-in-a-vat and make it part of nature’ seems to be the proposal for another notion of objectivity:

“And why burden this solitary mind with the impossible task of finding absolute certainty instead of plugging it into the connections that would provide it with all the relative certainties it needed to know and to act?” (1999a: 12)

Latour’s call against a ‘mind-in-a-vat’ does not surrender to relativism, however. This call rescues certainty, but within a relational framework. Following one of his aphorisms from *Irreductions*: “The principle of reality is other people” (1988:166). Latour seems to reclaim reality, but not like an outside entity only accessible by enlightened minds. What are then, the conceptualizations of reality necessary for Latour’s project of building a “more realistic realism”? (1999a: 15)

Reality as rhizome: a more realistic reality

First of all, in order to imagine the world according to Latour, let’s think of change, change, change. This ontology requires motion and transformation as protagonist elements of reality, conceiving the world as constant circulation:

⁹ For a historical case of how the concept of translation operates in scientific work see *The Pasteurization of France* (1988), where Latour shows how this scientific invention is attributed to Pasteur as a product of multiple chains of translation. Pasteur is presented as a ‘translator’ that connects with real circulations of human and non-human actors, rather than as a solitary ‘mediator’ that discovers a piece of reality.

“To transform the social from what was a surface, a territory, a province of reality, into a circulation, is what I think has been the most useful contribution of ANT” (1999b:19)

Reality regains its self-transformative properties always in constant movement, although this maybe imperceptible at first. Like the development of a complex and interconnected root, reality is represented as a rhizome.¹⁰ By advocating for a connected and transformative notion of reality, he inscribes himself in a thread of intellectual work that has been calling for the end of essences. It is time to overcome thinking of discrete entities entitled with fixed properties that freeze the complexity and dynamism of reality:

“It is a theory that says that by following circulations we can get more than by defining entities, essence or provinces. In that sense, ANT is merely one of the many anti-essentialist movements that seem to characterize the end of the century” (1999b: 20).

Actor-network theory has called into question the modern formula of ‘out there’ nature, ‘in there’ subjectivity, ‘down there’ politics, ‘up there’ theology’ (1999b: 22). The ‘moderns’ have claimed this division of reality in theory, ignoring and denying its interconnections. Although in practice, they have inhabited a kingdom of networks and hybrids.¹¹ Against a modern engrained division, actor network theory is presented as a ‘non-modern’ methodological and theoretical alternative:

¹⁰ Latour in his piece “On Recalling Actor-Network Theory” clarifies and rearticulate each notion of the term ANT into what he calls “actant-rhizome ontology” (1999b:19). I want to insist upon the rhizomatic character of networks that Latour defends. He differentiates it from other sociological approaches: networks are not conceived as technical metaphors, but more as a series of transformations à la Deleuze & Guattari (1999b: 15).

¹¹ This is one of the main theses of *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993); if by modern we mean the one who dictates a total division between nature and society; things-in-themselves and subjects-among-them; facts and culture. This modern definition of reality was imposed in a world of hybrids and non-separated entities. However, these hybrids were ignored or accommodated as exceptions, giving the impression of a total triumph of modernity’s definition of reality. Emerging proliferations of hybrids though are revealing the weakness of this assumed separation pretended by moderns.

“ANT is not a theory of the social, any more than it is a theory of the subject, or a theory of God, or a theory of nature. It is a theory of the space or fluids circulating in a non-modern situation” (1999b:22).

The relation of Latour *vis à vis* Modernity is not one of direct antagonism. Latour does not propose an anti or post-modern response, but a bypassing strategy that unveils the procedures of success and failure of the modern denial of networks and total affirmation of separation. Modernity loses its centrality; Latour’s provocation is a call to be simply a non-modern. The non-modern notion of reality as fluid is sensitive to its transformative and circulating character (1999b: 22). Circulation, rhizomes, fluids, they are all graphic expressions of networks, the main defining element of Latour’s ontology. Latour in his provocative book *We Have Never Been Modern* reclaims the proliferation of networks and hybrids (negated by the moderns) as the norm –rather than the exception-. Reality is then constituted by networks, “fibrous, thread-like, wiry, stringy, ropy, and capillary” ones (1996: 370). According to Latour, this ontological reformulation might be able to bypass some of the obstacles posed by previous research paradigms. Without pretending that this ontological regime will solve those endless problems, Latour is optimistic in presenting ANT as a step forward from older debates in social research:

“If ANT can be credited with something, it is to have developed a science studies that entirely bypasses the question of ‘social constructivism’ and the ‘realist/relativist debate’” (1999b: 22).

Instead of succumbing to the pessimism shown by deconstruction and relativism that announced the impossibility of accessing reality, leaving it outside of the realm of knowledge and communication, Latour will try to bring the possibility of knowledge back: “Positivists don’t own objectivity [...] The name of the game is to get back to empiricism” (2004: 3). He will try to pursue an alternative empiricism that reclaims certainty, but without pretending a totalizing one:

“We will not longer try to imitate Titan and carry the world on our shoulders, crushed by the infinite tasks of understanding, establishing, justifying, and explaining everything”(1988: 189).

This alternative empiricism recovers the materiality of reality (1988: 156-17). The material world though is not a given, it is under unpredictable construction. The analysis of a self-constructing world would demand, not freezing reality into categories, but following flows and networks. This kind of analysis has its antecedents in the linguistic or semiotic turn: “ANT sorts out from this [semiotic] toolbox what is useful to understand the construction of entities” (1996:373). If semiotics debunked the dominant structuralist understanding of meaning making, obtaining a more constructivist approach to social issues, actor network theory will bring the contingent and radical historical approach of semiotics all the way down: “semiotics of things [...], breaking the absolute distinction between representations and things” (1996: 375).

Previous analytical efforts, such as semiotics –despite its radical constructivist spirit– used to leave ‘nature’ intact in the outside land of the non-humans. In an ANT framework, the constructivist approach is brought beyond the limits of the social world, to the natural world. However this is not a move towards total socialization or textualization of nature, stating that reality is fabricated by humans’s power or discourse. It is the realization of constructivist properties in and by nature itself. What ANT is advocating for is an approach that engages reality as “simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society” (1993: 6). It is an approach that challenges previous exclusivist understandings of reality such as the following: the naturalization approach stated that everything is about facts, socialization put all the weight on society and power, and finally textualization or deconstruction advocated for everything as discourse. ANT includes facts, power and discourse in its understanding of a

networked reality.¹² Latour defines reality as simultaneously factual, made and discursive.¹³ Under this ontological regime, things are vulnerable, non permanent, contingent, although at certain points -after trial and error- could gain a stable and unquestionable character.

By bringing in the material, processual and relational side of reality, the enterprise of knowledge production is touched as well. Research becomes an activity of plugging into and co-constituting a reality in circulation. Through this engagement, research gets to know some of the specificities of a particular process, and simultaneously to participate in the flowing, in the making of it, intervening within it. This realism that allows research to be extending and transforming the networks themselves opens possibilities to rethink the relationship between knowledge production and action.

The Political Latour? Authoritarian & Horizontal Knowledges

Latour makes an explicit link between claims to knowledge of reality and its political underpinnings. Each model of scientific research can be said to be defined by certain kinds of “ontology, topology and politics” (1996:370). In *Pandora’s Hope*, Latour describes in great detail how Socrates’ intervention in the *Gorgias* dialogue was putting forward cognitive and political proposals simultaneously. Socrates defended a natural world ‘out there’, only transparent through geometrical rules, which were exclusively known by a few. This ontological and epistemological regime based on an “impersonal, transcendent natural law” had direct consequences for the political:

¹² For further engagement of this question see *We have Never Been Modern*.

¹³ This is similar to Haraway’s notion of “material-semiotic actor”

“It is a great power to which Socrates appeals, [...] since it can enslave all the other forms of expertise and know-how [...]. Truth enters and the agora is emptied” (1999a: 225).

Latour presents Socrates as a kind of ‘scientific-dictator’ that establishes the basis for a profoundly hierarchical model of both science and politics. This elitist understanding of knowledge has direct political consequences: it undermines the inclusive, decentralized, participatory assemblage of activities being performed by the mob or demos of Athens. Thus Latour is not ambivalent when it is about pointing to the connections between exclusive objectivity and authoritative politics. Appeals to expertise guarantee centralized politics, speaking in the name of ‘Reason’ brings with it totalizing positions (1993: 125, 126). This expert based model is counter-posed by the knowledge production generated by the internal dynamics of the demos:

“the assembled Body Politic, in order to make decisions, *cannot* rely on expert knowledge alone, given the constraints of number, totality, urgency, and priority that politics impose. Reaching a decision without appealing to a natural impersonal law in the hands of experts requires a disseminated knowledge as multifarious as the multitude itself”(1999a:228).

The multitude generates its own knowledge and by allowing its flow and recognizing its contributions –based on trial and error- is how a more democratic system takes shape. Latour seems to use *democratic* in its descriptive sense again, beyond modern abstractions about ‘the power of the people’. The adjective *democratic* implies a diffuse and inclusive participation of many, instead of the exclusivity of the few; and non-authoritarian relations between knowledge producers instead of the hierarchies expected by experts. Latour insists in that an inclusive and horizontal politics of knowledge requires cognitive participation from many, emphasizing: “the knowledge of the whole needs the whole, not the few” (1999a: 229). This non-authoritarian

understanding of knowledge has a direct correlation with political action. In order to achieve a democratic fermentation, it is essential to go beyond exclusivist notions of expertise. It is in that sense that Latour expresses his *hope* in “a politics freed from science” as the title of chapter eight of *Pandora’s Hope* suggestively states.

Latour then tries to fight against “the excess of reason” (1999a: 236) that has subordinated politics in the name of expert knowledge. Instead he advocates for the “distributed knowledge” (1999a: 237) that emerges from the crowd, able to address the shared concerns of the crowd. Latour shows confidence in a kind of ‘network-like intelligence’ developed by heterogeneous and transforming sets of knowledge producers. This intelligence is generated through “our much-treasured ability to deal with one another” (1999a: 237) and putting diverse know-hows into co-operation. There is a shift from a hierarchical or authoritarian politics of knowledge to a horizontal or disseminate one. Scientific research has been examined under this lens by STS scholars, producing a vast literature that investigates the diffused and contested sets of agents that have made a remarkable- one genius-invention possible.¹⁴

Through this discussion of authoritarian versus horizontal knowledges, a particular understanding of knowledge is being put forward: it brings its materiality back, but also, speaks to the political underpinnings of expertise and knowledge production. In fact, in addition to STS and ANT, a number of literatures have addressed more fully the political nature and significance of knowledge. They refine and push the argument of the political even further. In what follows three traditions particularly strong for this argument are briefly reviewed: Feminist Epistemology, Participatory Action Research and the Modernity/Coloniality paradigm.

¹⁴ A critical engagement of Latour and Actor-Network Theory would be appropriate here. However, due to the lengthy review of literatures it seems that such a task would be out of the scope of this work.

1.2.3. A Situated Practice: a Feminist Contribution

Feminist theorists working at the intersection of science, technology, and epistemology have made the argument that knowledge is always *situated*, partial and incomplete, challenging conventional understandings of what constitutes “theory” and “expertise” (Haraway 1991, Harding 1988, Lutz 1995, Smith 2004, Stengers 2000, Strathern 1985, Puig 2005). Feminist epistemology and philosophy of science have pointed how all knowledge is linked to divisions and demarcations in the social field. This lens has long questioned hegemonies of authority that lay claim to universal truths. At the same time that feminist epistemologists point out the non-neutral or situated character of both science and expertise, they also argue for the possibility of different standards of “knowledge,” “theory,” and “objectivity”. They defend the epistemic relevance and validity of knowledges coming from “marked” locations (women, people of color, people of the Global South, etc.) and point out that all knowledge is in a sense “marked,” in that it is located historically, geographically, and produced through the work of specific, “local” individuals. This shift moves away from the “God tricks” performed by a large amount of theorizing, which portends to emanate from nowhere, and everywhere at once. The goal is to move toward an appreciation of all knowledges, perhaps especially scientific knowledges, as a “located and heterogenous practice ... [as a] fragile, human achievement” (Haraway 1997: 137-138).

Reclaiming the Political Potential of Objectivity

Conceptualizations of knowledge have been normally associated with ethics of scientific detachment. These dominant understandings of research are thought to further the processes of reification of reality, the establishment of hierarchies according to levels of accuracy, and the

development of authoritative representations of people's bodies, voices, worlds. Yet, there are efforts to invert those logics, exploring other political possibilities emerging ironically from those same scientific positions. Haraway has an explicit political goal in her rethinking of science, calling for the end of the 'politics of subjugation', and through the development of alternative notions of knowledge, move towards a politics of liberation.

Donna Haraway has articulated one of the most influential arguments in regards to opening up possibilities for thinking and practicing knowledge in political ways. From her famous piece on *Situated Knowledges* (1991), I will focus on Haraway's contribution to move critical approaches to science forward by reclaiming an alternative theory of objectivity. Against totalizing, unmarked and universalizing goals of science, two tendencies are identified: radical constructivism and feminist empiricism. The first one has provided an understanding of knowledge as practice, persuasion and power field. By pointing out historical specificities, it is possible to dismantle abstract truths. By deconstructing those truths, reality appears as a series of conventions or codes. However, Haraway reminds us that this kind of "world as a text" approach is not enough and in many instances, disempowering. As she expressively says: "textualized postmodern worlds are scary" (1991: 189). Reducing the world to a text can be a first step, yet if it stops there, reality and politics may be taken away. As a response to this apolitical confinement, feminist empiricism is introduced as a more hopeful critical alternative. Feminist empiricism calls for a usable doctrine of objectivity. Within this line, Haraway reclaims vision as a metaphor for this kind of feminist objectivity (1991: 188-189). 'Hacking' standard notions of vision as a detached gaze from nowhere by a knowing subject distant from the world, Haraway appropriates vision as embodied objectivity. Through this version of objectivity, the situated and

partial location of the viewer allows for a more accurate and in fact better knowledge. “Objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment, and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility. The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision” (1991: 190).

These partial perspectives are named *situated knowledges*. This move towards located and embodied objectivities opens possibilities for rethinking research, politics and the world. It is possible to identify at least these three spheres of transformations enunciated throughout the text: epistemological, political and ontological transformations. First, the consequences in the realm of epistemology are linked to the pluralizing process of ‘Knowledge’ into a radical multiplicity of multiple ‘knowledges’ (1991: 186). This opens a venue to develop conversations where before there was a monologue. This requires a redefinition of the subject-object relationship in the research process. The limited location rejects the transcendent gaze and the splitting of subject and object (1991: 190). Situated perspectives, far from being isolated, have the possibility to connect between each other, generating webbed accounts instead of a master theory.

Second, some of the political possibilities opened by situated knowledges -that I see in resonance with some contemporary global movements- are the following: the potential for *de-centralized networks* instead of the politics of vanguardism, when she advocates that “partial, locatable knowledges sustain the possibility of webs of connections” (1991: 191) or “we do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of connections” (1991: 196); the basis of a *horizontal solidarity* when she call for “joining with another, to see together without claiming to be the other” (1991: 193); and finally, this interpretation of objectivity may provide the foundations for *politics of hope*, and we could add, politics of love. This is because such kind of

feminist science is conceived as reinventing worlds less organized by axes of domination, but rather of justice, thanks to the “fantastic element of hope for transformative knowledge” (1991: 192).

Third, even if it is not said explicitly, the realm of ontology is linked to those spheres and thus affected by this rethinking of objectivity. Reality is not an outside, waiting to be discovered by an individual, but something embodied and product of interconnectivity, with no dualistic borders. On top of that, situated knowledges require the world to be taken as “an active entity” (1991:198, 199). Within this understanding of reality, knowledge becomes a part of the world-making process more than a descriptive device: “accounts of the ‘real’ world do not, then, depend on the logic of discovery, but on a power-charged social relation of ‘conversation’ (1991: 198).

Haraway’s contribution, on *situated knowledges*, becomes one of the most powerful foundations for reclaiming knowledge production as a site of politics. This notion could be said to reinvigorate a feminist movement within and beyond the academy that calls for the democratization of science. Interestingly enough, we could speak of a different knowledge paradigm formed by the work of various feminist thinkers, who are developing a constellation of related notions such as: *mutated modest witness*, *diffraction*, *yearning* (Haraway 1997); *standpoint epistemology* (Harding 1998); *experience as scientific method and weapon* (Sarachild 1978, in Malo 2004); *science as social knowledge* (Longino 1990); *thinking with care* (Puig 2008). All these notions are pushing forward a new understanding of objectivity, building towards a ‘situated knowledge paradigm’ able to replace old and disempowering notions of

knowledge. Many –including Precarias a la Deriva- are already putting in practice this alternate vision of knowledge as the basis for a politics of horizontal solidarity, networking, and hope.

1.2.4. A Political Practice: Lessons from Freire and Participatory Action Research

Despite the different terminologies, geographical locations and theoretical genealogies of the tradition of Participatory Action Research, it is possible to identify a series of epistemological contributions of this tradition as a whole.¹⁵ First, an attempt to break the monopoly over knowledge production by academic expertise (Borda 1985; Sohng 1995; Bennet 2004). Second, the defense of “community or popular knowledges” as “living knowledge” more accurate and better positioned for specific and practical goals (Borda 1985; Malo 2004; Sohng 1995; Sims and Bentley 2002). Third, a need to develop a methodology that takes “grassroots knowledges” as a point of departure embracing a collaborative process (Borda 1985; Bennet 2004; Sohng 1995). Fourth, a substitution of the submissive relationship of subject-object in research for a dialogue among two subjects, each of them holding specific knowledges, in a symmetrical partnership (Borda 1985; Malo 2004). Finally, a rethinking of knowledge production as no neutral or carried out just for the sake of it, but as valued oriented and dedicated to processes of social transformation and peoples’ empowerment, recognizing the inseparability of theory and practice (Borda 1985; Oquist 1977; Sohng 1995).

PAR traditions then make a theoretical and practical call to acknowledge, listen to and engage *popular, community or grassroots knowledges*. Following Fals Borda, these knowledges coming from affected communities characterized mainly as experiential and practical, are put in dialogue with academic knowledge. Combining these two rationalities, on the one hand,

¹⁵ The epistemological question of PAR is especially developed in Borda, O.F. (1985) *Knowledge and People's Power: Lesson's from Nicaragua, Mexico and Colombia*. New Dehli: Indian Social Institute.

“people’s science” with its own empirical methods, and on the other hand, “universal science” with its academic principles-, it is possible to obtain a “better” knowledge (1985: 76, 88, 93). The goal of achieving a more accurate picture of reality is linked to the possibilities to transform it.

The Freirean principle of “knowledge as power” will be present in most of the PAR literature and informal adult education assuming that people’s knowledge is central to social change (Bannet 2004: 22,24). The kind of power produced by people’s knowledge together with academic knowledge is a “countervailing power”, an articulation and reinforcement of independent political, civic and cultural movements and non-party political mechanisms such as action groups, committees, cooperatives, civic brigades, assemblies, forums, theater ensembles, sport groups, cultural groups, community boards, and base communities (Fals Borda, 1985:10, 38). The political possibilities of PAR cognitive power based on the alliance between committed scholars with grass-roots communities have been related to what Foucault called “the insurrection of subjugated knowledges” (Escobar 1985).

The “marked” location inhabited by social movements engaged in issues of social and environmental justice is, in conventional terms, a location of exclusion and subalternity. These exclusions vary from the most obvious material deprivations, to less glaring cultural and epistemic exclusions, where one’s way of being, values, and lifeworld are denied by the dominant culture or political system. The initiatives of Participatory Action Research (PAR) born out of decolonization and campesino movements of the 1960’s and 70’s, as well as Freirian Pedagogy, point precisely to how marginal and exploited communities produce emancipatory knowledge through their processes of collective struggle. The uniqueness of knowledge

produced by subaltern groups organized for social transformation resided in its potential to offer “better” analyses and responses to situations of exploitation and exclusion because those situations were the *lived experiences* of those producing the knowledge. If scientific knowledge aspires to develop generalizeable theoretical and methodological models, “peoples’ knowledge” is based on grounded experience that can actually enhance particular processes of social emancipation (see Fals-Borda 1985; Fals Borda & Rahmann 1991). While the contributions made by PAR are important precursors to the argument linking knowledge and social movements, some shortcomings (in the view of this research) should be pointed out: the ontological separation between scientific knowledge and people’s knowledge without interrogating the validity or social-situatedness of science itself; and second, the tendency towards essentializing or romanticizing the knowledge of certain groups as necessarily and naturally “better” than all others.

1.2.5. Plural Practice: Ecology of Knowledges under Hierarchies of Coloniality

Coming from a different tradition, in this case Indian historiography, *Subaltern Studies* have denounced cognitive relations of power within knowledge production exposing its politics of “counter-insurgency”, “empire-driven colonialist knowledge”, “epistemic violence” and “inequality of ignorance” (Guha 1994; Spivak 1994, 1996; Chakrabarty 2000). Also the framework of *Decolonial theory* being worked out by the Latin American Modernity/Coloniality working group has called attention to the geo-coded hierarchies in claiming expertise. These “geopolitics of knowledge” are built upon persistent relations of cognitive supremacy between metropolis/colony, institutionalizing canons with thinkers originating only from the colonizers’ side (Mignolo 2000a; Quijano 2000; Dussel 2000). Also, one representative loosely affiliated to

the M/C group is Boaventura de Sousa Santos.¹⁶ He shares the critique of the Eurocentric and colonial character of science, the cognitive uneven relationships between North and South, and the importance of recognition of contextualized knowledges that have been historically ignored. He argues for forming a new alternative common sense, promoting a more diverse and plural understanding of science, what he names as an “ecology of knowledges” (2007). Based on their redefinition of modernity as inseparable from the colonial experience, the decolonial approach embraced by the Modernity/Coloniality group denounces the subalternization of other local histories and knowledges other than a certain European one. Rethinking Modernity in this way allows alternative ways of being and thinking other than modernity to be made present, calling them “subaltern knowledges” or “worlds and knowledges otherwise” (Mignolo 2000a, 2000b; Mignolo and Nouzeilles 2003; Escobar 2003).

In order to attack the figure of the mono and overarching Knowledge with capital K, the M/C scholars develop theoretical frameworks based on a situated critique of colonialism. For them, this requires understanding the unique knowledges that particular experiences of, and geographically-specific encounters with, *coloniality* concede. With their notion of “sites of enunciation,” they argue that the place from which one speaks is both historically and geopolitically significant. Moreover, they argue that there are certain locations that are worth considering as “epistemically different,” especially in relation to certain issues, such as the colonization of the Americas. Whereas PAR’s notion of subaltern, exploited, or marginalized people was defined mainly in terms of class, the Modernity/Coloniality approach focuses on

¹⁶ This scholar from Portugal has been working on questions of epistemology and power since he found out that the legal system of the *favelas* in Brasil, despite its richness and efficiency, was not recognized by the formal legal system, calling for a juridically plural system in modern societies. Since then, he has published an extensive scholarly work on questions of knowledge, with concepts such as cognitive justice, ecology of knowledges, or epistemologies of the south. See *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*. Londres: Verso 1997

those positions marked by the experience of “coloniality.” Many social movements emerge from such a position of difference, working under a rigid power structure to provide alternatives to hegemonic forms. Such proposed alternatives are often different ways of knowing. The efforts at collective action and organizing coming from those locations are engaged then as sites that produce distinct knowledges. Notably, inspired by this theoretical argument, a series of studies of social movements as generators of these alternative knowledges have sprung forth: studies of Colombian afro-decedents movements (Escobar 1998, 2000, 2001); Latin-American indigenous movements (Mignolo and Schiwy 2003; Walsh 2005; De la Cadena 2006; Blasser forthcoming); anti-prison and direct action activists in the US (Hames-Garcia 2004; Casas-Cortés 2005); as well as the broader global justice movement (Escobar 2004a, 2004b), including its public sites of convergence such as the World Social Forum (Santos 2004; Conway 2007).

Specific concepts and theories developed by each of the above mentioned movements are studied and considered as legitimate knowledges by the M/C approach. By engaging movements in this way, these case-studies subvert the entrenchment between the two different roles assigned by the PAR perspective (well intended researchers vs. the people), as well as traditional modes of engagements in the study of social movements, where the scientific researcher is always well differentiated from the experienced organizer. Rather, they transform the relationship into a much more horizontal one, where the different actors are peers in a theoretical or analytical discussion about a concrete problematic. This mode of epistemological flattening of well-established hierarchies, –resulting from the M/C argument on “other knowledges and knowledge

otherwise”–, could definitely be a point of inspiration for a different social movements research.¹⁷

Recapitulating

The traditions reviewed in this section clustered on five distinct and interrelated traits bring fresh light into the question of knowledge. It is important to note how their treatment is not purely epistemological. Rather, in their rethinking knowledge is possible to identify an explicit awareness about the continuum between epistemology, ontology and politics. In this way, each trait brings along a rethinking of reality as we have seen in their developments of other realisms. In terms of politics, each of these unrecognized traits of knowledge bring along a series of political consequences Briefly stated, these are some apparent ones: the notion of *embodied knowledge* advanced by Cognitive Sciences and Phenomenology speaks to the possibility of intervention in the world. Knowing is doing, and this implies transformation. Such an interventionist logic is definitely key in social movements oriented to direct action and processes of self-organization such as the activist research wave this dissertation engages with. In reference to the *networked* character of knowledge, this allows for flattening well established hierarchies leading to non-authoritarian or vanguardist notions of expertise. Engaging the material processes of knowledge production allows going beyond the myth of the genius, and the realization of a more networked functioning. This more democratic politics is also consequence of being a *situated* knowledge. By recognizing this trait, the notion of universal and neutral knowledge is surpassed. Rather than monolithic accounts of reality, objectivity becomes more accurate when is made out of alliances among diverse situated knowledges, each one speaking from marked sites

¹⁷ We also would like to express our reservations in terms of the overall argument, being aware of the potential risks about essentializing certain locations as distinct or ‘better’ knowledge producers, in and of themselves. Elena Yehia further develops this critique (2006).

of enunciation. This is seconded by the ones who defend the *plurality* of knowledges from the perspective of coloniality. After identifying the geo-politics of knowledge and denouncing its asymmetrical ranking of modes of knowing, it is time for an ethics of listening and politics of translation. Finally, and as overall consequence, it is the question of knowledge being extremely *political* and linked to questions of power. This link between power and knowledge is without direct guarantees: it could facilitate process of domination and control, or in other instances, processes of liberation and empowerment.

This synthetic review of these literatures points to a veritable paradigmatic revolution in the understanding of knowledge, which led me to speak in terms of a “knowledge turn”. These literatures advance (or rescue) a series of traits that were usually negated by the dominant Cartesian framework. Among those I identify five crucial characteristics of knowledge, redefining it as 1) embodied, 2) networked, 3) situated, 4) political and 5) plural. Through this review, I try to signal how such a rethinking of knowledge would imply not only epistemological consequences, but also substantive ontological and political transformations. The goal of this synthetic review is to illuminate the scholarly engagement with social movements as knowledge producers, especially in the case of those that are claiming themselves as such.

1.3. Towards a *Knowledge Turn* in Social Movements Studies

Road trip from Chapel Hill to Miami, 2003.

As some of our colleagues from the first year of the PhD program, we were also eager to protest the meeting where ministers of the Western Hemisphere would try one more time sign the FTAA. We joined a van with five homeless people from Baltimore, friends of an old friend. The van-on-the-road became a special site for unusual conversations: after listening to Martin Luther King's speeches... "where do we go from here" rise from lethargy! a series of hard to forget comments arose during the long road ride: the old African-American guy, who used to take public libraries as shelter and his personal archive, was talking about “how the US comfort and consumption surplus was a

devastating source of de-politicization". To what the younger African-American guy responded, "this country's history is one of riots though...this is according to my grandmother, an authority over the past. However, a struggle needs of various pieces, and today we are missing some. A struggle is like a complex machine, each piece is different and necessary, wherever you come from you will bring a piece of knowledge that other might not have it". The man of indigenous descent in the van added, "a struggle indeed could be like a set of intertwined bamboos or slices in a delicious cake. In both cases, everybody brings along a different piece of knowledge. In our case, you put the media analysis, the oratory, the cinema critic...; you, the respect for grandparents, the oral history, the ability to listening; you, the camera skills and the ability of keeping records; and finally, you, the driving, the concentration, the organizing skills...And the result, because of being in struggle, becomes more than merely the sum of the parts (Members of the United Workers Association from Baltimore, November 20, 2003)."

Despite many instances where knowledge and struggle are thought together by movements' participants, conventional social movement studies have largely neglected such a link. However, social movements have been defended as knowledge producers in their own right by a growing number of scholars. In fact, this is becoming a relatively well-established claim by now:

"Struggles over hegemonic knowledge and the production of critical, oppositional knowledges are central to the politics of emancipatory social movements. Social movements produce knowledge. Through their everyday practices of survival, resistance, and solidarity, progressive social movements are producing new and distinct knowledges about the world as it is and as it might be, and how to produce conditions of possibility of other possible futures. (Conway 2007: 1)

The claim of social movements as knowledge producers has been engaged in a variety of studies with distinct approaches, many of them inspired by the very same literatures described in this chapter as artifices of what a proposed *knowledge turn*. Somehow, the post-Cartesian understanding of knowledge and its profound reformulation and de-centering of expertise is trickling down to the subfield of social movements' studies. By pluralizing knowledge makers, social movements become a possible and indeed legitimate site of knowledge production, understanding knowledge as material, networked, situated, political and plural. What follows is

then a literature review of social movements' studies directly addressing the question of knowledge production by and for actors of collective action.

Some of the academic literature has focused on the way social movements produce knowledge and information in competition with “expert knowledges” of their opponents, such as the state, the World Bank, and other institutions (Paley 2001; Conway 2004; Powell 2006). Some defend the importance of social movements' actors in advancing expert knowledge on questions of technology, such as the case of Navajo's extractive industries, and its concomitant notion of development (Powell and Curley 2008). Actually, the link between the field of social movements studies and STS has been worked out by anthropologists such as David Hess (2005, 2007a&b). Within the STS tradition itself, recent calls and studies have engaged with emergent cultural formations generated under late and post modernities, including the complex work and expert representations produced not only by actors such as lawyers, corporate officials, scientists, and media journalists, but also by contemporary social movements (Collins and Pinch 1998; Marcus 1999; Fisher 2003; Redfield 2005; Kirch 2005; Hess 2006). A few shorter pieces have discussed the production of evaluative or strategic knowledges (Grueso 2005; Wainwright 1994). Others focused on the political importance of knowledge in the generation of critical subjects (Horton, Freire et al 1990; Giroux 1997; Casas-Cortés 2005; Conway 2006). Parallel to these developments, the decoloniality paradigm has given rise to a series of engagements with social movements as generators of alternative theories, such as of *biodiversity* (Escobar 1998); *justice* (Hames-Garcia 2004); *multiculturalism* (De la Cadena 2006); *translation* (Mignolo 2003); *coalition building* (Conway 2007). The cognitive approach to social movements advanced by Jamison and Eyerman (1991), which is based on a critique of the dominant field of social

movement research, calls on similar social-theoretical frameworks (including STS) and comes quite close to the argument forwarded.

Many studies on global justice movements also see knowledge at the forefront of what movements do: such as Chester and Welsh's work (2005) on complexity in activist organizing and the centrality of communicative and sense-making practices; Escobar's engagement with swarming techniques (2000) ; many of the growing literature on the World Social Forum as a site of knowledge production (Santos 2004; Conway 2007); and Juris' development of the theory and practice of networks behind the organizing by Barcelona-based global justice activists (2008) . The upcoming edited volume on *Ethnographies of Transnational Networks*, also brings along the question of knowledge as one of the main axes that traverses a new ethnographic approach to social movements (Juris and Khasnabish, forthcoming).

Particularly relevant has been the work by the interdisciplinary, international, and praxis-oriented research group called The *Social Movement Working Group*. Based at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, this research group has been pioneer in pointing to the question of knowledge in the realm of collective action, challenging assumptions about the "object" and "fieldsite" of ethnography and anthropological social movements' research, more broadly.¹⁸ Working since 2003, through monthly meetings, the several and changing members have engaged a large and diverse array of readings giving birth to renovated insights to the study of social movements. Some of their arguments have been published in the *Anthropological*

¹⁸ This emphasis on social movements as knowledge makers has given rise to a series of institutional initiatives at supporting those within the academy, through university programs and projects striving to highlight and advance knowledge production between scholars and/or activists. This is the case of the Center for Integrating Research and Action (CIRA) at UNC-CH, and the Activist Anthropology program at the University of Texas at Austin, and the Programa de la Academia-Activismo at CIESAS-Sureste, Chiapas, Mexico.

Quarterly special issue focused on “Meaning Making by Social Movements” (2008: 8 (1)).

According to the introduction to the issue,

“Social movements may be a particularly conducive site to privilege meaning-making, because their activities foreground resistance to the dominant norms and institutions of society. They raise questions about the possibility of alternative world-views and alternative dispensations, and in so doing they challenge participants and observers to re-think meanings that are too often taken for granted. Social movements actively make meaning, challenging established meanings” (Kurzman 2008: 6)

In that same issue, a series of papers co-authored by some of the SMWG participants ethnographically engage the argument of meaning making and knowledge production in social movements. Aparicio and Blasser speak of the emergence of knowledges in Latin-America that bypass the project of Modernity and are thus reinvigorating the Left. Social movements then are claimed to be challenging the regime of power/knowledge inherited from colonial times (2008: 59-94). In another contribution, Holland, Fox and Daro, stem from the conceptualization of identity production as a process of meaning making. The authors develop a finer understanding of social movements by introducing a contention-sensitive approach to the study of identity formation (2008: 95-126). The paper by Price, Nonini and Fox Tree brings to light a kind of social movements that have been usually marginalized in mainstream social movements studies. These movements do not seek recognition either from capitalist institutions or modern nation-states, but are rather set out to establish different ways of living generating unique alternative solutions (2008: 127-159). In the piece by Powell, Osterweill and myself we second the overall approach of the working group through the notion of *knowledge-practices*. This hyphenated term is due to an explicit emphasis on knowledge as “material, situated and political praxis”:

“Notably, these knowledge-practices range from things we are more classically trained to define as knowledge, such as research practices and critiques that engage, augment, and sometimes challenge the knowledge of scientists or policy experts, to micro-political and

cultural interventions that have more to do with “know how” or the “cognitive praxis that informs all social activity” and which vie with the most basic social institutions that teach us how to be in the world (see Varela 1999; Eyerman and Jamison 1991: 49)” (2008: 26)

While conducting research for this piece we encountered that similar engagements with social movements were using the same hyphenated term of “knowledge-practices” in order to emphasize the shift in the understanding of knowledge, also when referring to social movements’ activity. This is the case of Santos, when he contents that:

“The ecology of knowledge does not conceive knowledges in abstraction; it conceives of them as *knowledge practices* and the interventions they enable or impede in the real world” (Santos 2007: 35, my italics).¹⁹

Far from mere coincidence, we felt that the simultaneous use of the same term (knowledge-practices) is an exciting indication of an emerging common-sense among those who are working to engage and make sense of contemporary social movements. Though avoiding the use of this hyphenated term for easier reading, my work embraces this practice-based notion of knowledge. When the term *knowledge* appears in the following chapters then, it should be understood along the implications brought about by the *knowledge turn* for the field of social movements. These implications can be synthesized by the term *knowledge-practice*.

1.4. Conclusion

The disparate yet interrelated literatures reviewed in this chapter emphasize the crucial connection between politics and knowledge. Building on those literatures, I add a contribution to strengthen the argument of social movements as knowledge producers. My argument is that

¹⁹ Around the year of this publication, other works were using “knowledge-practices” as a term to talk about social movements activity (Osterweil dissertation draft; Powell dissertation draft; Conway 2007). Even if not using that very same term, a similar practice-based understanding of knowledge is displayed in many of the activist research writing: “To treat practices as forms of knowing, and knowledges as forms of doing, means rejecting the idea that theory and practice can ever truly be separated: they are always interconnected and woven through each other. [However] all too often and easily, the understanding embodied in organizing is not appreciated for the forms of knowledge it contains; likewise theorization often becomes detached from the location of its own production and circulation” (Shukaitis, Graeber and Biddle 2007: 37,38)

studies of collective action would greatly benefit from the epistemological and ontological debates advanced by those traditions working towards a *knowledge turn* and the embracement of a Post-Cartesian understanding of knowledge. The origins of this approach to collective action might be found in the *cultural turn*, when social movements were posited as producers of meanings, identities, and cultural politics (Alvarez, Escobar and Dagnino 1998). Drawing from this crucial contribution, the subfield of social movements studies might be moving towards a *knowledge turn*, where movements are seen as generators of distinct concepts, analyses, theories and inquiries about the current world through their everyday knowledge practices enacting not only cultural but also *epistemic and ontological politics*. The subfield of Anthropology of Social movements is leading this fascinating track of investigating the material practices of these knowledge productions, engaging with the analyses, concepts, terms, and worlds being developed by social movements in the best symmetrical tradition of Anthropology. My dissertation pursues a study of social movements informed by this *knowledge turn*. The embracing of the epistemological and ontological transformations brought by this turn had important methodological consequences. This is the topic of the method's chapter focusing on a series of ethnographic dilemmas and propositions.

Chapter 2

*Traduciendo Conocimientos y Tejiendo Redes*¹

Ethnographies of Knowledge-Practices, Networks and Social Movements

To my mind, the alternative to a general theory is the work of translation. Translation is the procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility among the experiences [and knowledges] of the world without jeopardizing their identity and autonomy, without, in other words, reducing them to homogenous entities.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos,
The Rise of the Global Left

We do not seek partiality for its sake, but for the sake of connections.

Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women.

"Both "us" and "them" (whoever we are, whoever they are) are all always situated in this same virtual geography. There's no outside. So in terms of method, we proceed empirically, inductively, within this material immersion. There is nothing outside the vector. There's no way to separate us from them. No "intellectuals" versus "masses", other than as a fantasy" [...the masses, it turns out, are not homogeneous...]

Geert Lovink. Uncanny Networks:
Dialogues with the Virtual Intelligentsia.

Introduction

The claim that social movements must be understood as knowledge producers is gaining popularity in both academic and activist circles. This claim is informed by the debates on the nature of knowledge in several disciplines over the past two decades that are positing a *knowledge turn* towards a post-Cartesian thinking. This chapter explores some of the consequences of this apparently straightforward statement –social movements produce

¹ English translation: Translating Knowledges and Weaving Webs

knowledge- for the theory and practice of ethnography². I build on the premise of a concurrent *knowledge turn* afoot both in research about social movements *and* activist practice. This shift in the understanding of knowledge is especially visible and significant among those movement initiatives at conducting their own research, particularly those within the global justice networks. This turn requires rethinking both the nature of social movements as knowledge producers, as well as re-conceptualizing the relationship between social science and social movements.

The knowledge turn reveals a series of epistemological and ontological transformations. At the epistemological level, the idea that social movements should be seen as spaces of knowledge production arises from a de-centering of expert knowledge and the fact that activists increasingly engage in their own research and analysis as part of their practice. This trend leads to new research encounters with particular movements, many of whom engage with issues of relevance for Anthropology and other Social Sciences, and in turn work to shift the common sense about various key issues and problems—including questions of precarity, care and politics. Ontologically, activist knowledge production, along with certain trends in Social Theory, point at the passage from dualist to relational ontologies and to the flattening of the consequent hierarchical relationships established between clearly bounded entities. While chapter one is largely synthetic, identifying a series of related points from several literatures pointing to a knowledge turn, chapter two extends the discussions on knowledge in an original manner to draw a number of implications for research and ethnography with movements.

² Fragments of this chapter will be part of the collaborative piece “Transformations in Engaged Ethnography: Knowledge, Networks and Social Movements” co-authored by Maribel Casas, Arturo Escobar, Michal Osterweil and Dana Powell, all members of the Social Movement Working Group, UNC Chapel Hill. The co-authored piece will appear as a chapter of the volume *Ethnographies of Transnational Activist Networks* edited by Jeff Juris and Alex Khasnabish, published by Duke University Press.

Concretely, this chapter explores some of the potential transformations in ethnographic practice when fully engaging this *knowledge turn*, including the following two interrelated registers:

1) *At the epistemological level*, the explicit turn by activist research initiatives to practices of analyses-making, writing and publishing, makes them exemplary of the complex objects that Marcus proposes as the new focus for Anthropology. He calls for entertaining “writing machines” (1995) as objects of ethnographic attention. Although social movements were not in Marcus’ list of instances of complex systems, I propose to consider movements as such, in particular the image of writing machines fits well the current wave of activist research. This in turn, I argue, involves a transformation in the mode of engagement with collective action where movements’ practices, instead of being studied as “cases”, become “situated sources” of analyses and concepts. The methodological consequences imply heterodox forms of archival research as well as textual strategies such as “immanent reading” (engaging the material produced by them on their own terms). This is the initial phase of a dense project of identifying and exploring their concepts and analyses, putting them in tandem with anthropological knowledge and developing my own analyses of particular problematics. I suggest that this form of research be understood as a process of *translation*.

2) *At a more ontological register*, the new realism embraced by the knowledge turn entails a blurring and flattening of the object/subject binary, the critical foundation of modern scientific research. The resulting relational ontology opens possibilities for renovating the ethnographic endeavor. Within this framework, it is possible to envision a new role of the ethnographer acting as a *connective node* “knitting broader nets”, in this case of engaged knowledge producers; as

well as “becoming weaved into denser webs” him/herself. Conceiving research as a knitting process has concrete impacts on spatial considerations upon traditional as well more contemporary notions of the field. These movements, globally articulated while maintaining strong local commitments, require both multi-sited and place-based approaches. The embracing of networks as sites of enunciation and practice helps to advance the second methodological proposal, ethnography as a *weaving technology*.

These methodological approaches inspired in the notions of *translation* (Latour 1983; Sousa Santos 2006) and *connection* (Haraway 1991) are further elaborated upon in this chapter. Nevertheless, it is not my intention to exhaust the multiple consequences that the knowledge turn might entail. Here I address the ones I encountered during my research process. The first sections lay out the contours of the research process and methodologies. In ***Research Trajectory*** I briefly introduce the origins of this research and try to re-articulate a notion of the “field” attuned to a multi-sited and quite auto-ethnographic fieldwork experience. This section also accounts for the interdisciplinary teamwork behind this dissertation. In ***Methods***, I offer an overview of the primary qualitative methods being used for data collection during my formal fieldwork period. I then discuss a series of ethnographic challenges and dilemmas born out of taking a Knowledge Turn approach in the study of social movements. This main section, ***Ethnographic Transformations***, also advances the two methodological proposals concerning the epistemological and ontological registers: *translation* and *weaving* as forms of novel albeit rigorous research. Both may improve ethnographic research on knowledge producing objects, in line with the recent direction of Anthropology towards complex and emergent phenomena.

2.1. Research Trajectory

A Transnational Research Process

My engagement and interest in activist research began in 2001 while working for two different actors of the broad global justice movement. The first one was the *Third World Network*, a coordinating organization made out of different civil society initiatives in Asia, Africa and Latin America with independent research institutes based in Malaysia, Ghana and Uruguay.³ I worked at the Montevideo office for one of their main publications, *The World Guide*, an alternative encyclopedia which according to the editors emphasizes “the point of view from the South”.⁴ Updating the information for a then upcoming edition, I learned about the intersection of rigorous research and political engagement. Right after this internship, I worked for a small NGO based in Chicago. *Mexico Solidarity Network* was one of the main coordinators of Zapatista support-groups in the US. One of my main tasks was to design and implement popular education workshops on global economics for different audiences.⁵ This process involved both research and teaching, doing so from a critical standpoint. These two experiences, while not explicitly using the term “activist research” allowed a glance of the possibilities of combining inquiry and politics.

After these initial experiences combining research and politics, we encountered a series of initiatives that were more overt and devoted to this practice. Self-identified as “militant or activist researchers”, these initiatives were working in a variety of places, including Argentina, Spain, Italy, France, South Africa and the US. Rather than structured as NGOs, they functioned

³ See <http://www.redtercermundo.org.uy/about.php>

⁴ See <http://www.guiadelmundo.org.uy/cd/>

⁵ Workshops on different issues of the global economy, for instance: the logic and mechanisms of a free market economy; the infrastructures of food production and distribution by corporate chains; or the political-economic project of *Plan Puebla Panama* in Mexico.

outside institutional arrangements using multiple and inventive sources of self-financing. While being part of the global justice movement, this trend is located on the more *autonomous* wing, inspired by the Zapatistas' proposals of organization and politics. These autonomous initiatives, infused by an emergent political imaginary, have been described by Gibson-Graham as:

It seems that the making of a new political imaginary is under way, or at the very least a remapping of the political terrain. Coming into being over the past few decades and into visibility and self-awareness through the Internet, independent media, and most recently the World Social Forums, this emergent imaginary confounds the timeworn oppositions between global and local, revolution and reform, opposition and experiment, institutional and individual transformation. This conceptual interpenetration is radically altering the established spatiotemporal frame of progressive politics, reconfiguring the position and role of the subject, as well as shifting the grounds for assessing the efficacy of political movements and initiatives (2006: xix)

The rich work advanced by these groups combined with their foundation on renewed notions of the political, led me to identify this trend of activist research as a topic and tool worthy of a deeper engagement. Among the many initiatives, *Precarias* was the one that appealed the most to me. Besides their alignment with autonomous politics, I was drawn by their distinct *modus operandi*, advancing novel research practices and approaches based on feminist and post-structuralist theories. Furthermore, upon engaging their first book, I felt a series of existential affinities with the experiences being addressed in their research project. Not all, but many of the examples of precarity narrated through life-stories, fieldtrips, and dialogues, spoke to my own trajectory. This is due, as I later realized, to the fact that many of the *precarias* (at least those participants of Spanish origin) and myself, are somehow product of a similar socio-political configuration: born in the 70s in a country that was just coming out of forty years of dictatorship. We are all children of the “Democratic Transition” as it is called. Despite diverse regional origins, we were raised with a strong emphasis on the need for democratic culture in all

spheres. Although achieving such a goal was not always fulfilled, the discourse on becoming democratic citizens able to embrace a promising era of a new Spain was very present. Also, most of us went through our adolescence during the crisis of the 90s, witnessing how family members and friends suffered unemployment. The expectations raised by the entrance of the country to the European Union began to diminish. Our early adulthood, was marked by what has been celebrated as the “Spanish economic miracle” which entailed a series of transformations in the country leading to several years of remarkable economic growth. Yet, this was also the period when the term *precarity* became widely used. I even remember my mom wearing a t-shirt with the word emblazoned on it. I was familiar with the discourse of precarity well before embarking on this formal research process. My generation experienced a series of ambivalences. On the one hand this was the first generation in the country able to have access to higher education on a such massive scale and gain exposure to international recreational or educational travel. At the same time many of the employment securities and professional prospects of our parents were being eroded, leading to the coining of the term *los precarios* or “the precarious generation”.

Recognizing this triple empathy at the level of politics, theoretical inspiration and existential conditions, led me to visit *Precarias a la Deriva* in the summer of 2004.⁶ A following preliminary research trip in 2005 allowed me to meet several participants and visit the new *Eskalera Karakola*, their new location after being evicted from their previously squatted building. These two encounters opened the possibility to join their main list-serves, exchange emails but also writings, pictures and videos about their ongoing activities. I also sent them material gathered at the university (eg. literature on feminist economics), from social movements

⁶ This first encounter is narrated in the ethnographic opening of the dissertation

in the US as well as updates about our own nascent experiment on activist research on campus, which itself was partly born out of the inspiration from *Precarias'* own work (Mason-Deese and Dalton, forthcoming). This exchange of materials allowed me to collect a great archive of documents by *Precarias*. After this first phase of document collection, I began a phase of careful reading and analyses of their texts, preparing several papers and conference presentations based on their first book. This was followed by a phase of translation of some of their materials into English for different publication venues. Finally, it made sense to come back to my home country, after several years abroad working for NGOs, engaged in transnational activism and pursuing the first phase of my PhD studies, to conduct the formal fieldwork. The fieldwork took place primarily in Madrid, Spain from January 2007 through July 2008⁷. Our apartment was located in *Lavapiés*, the same neighborhood as the Eskalera Karokola, the main hub of *Precarias'* activities. *Lavapiés* is known for its intense dynamics of migration, urban reform and political activism, becoming an icon of multiculturalism, conflict and activism beyond Madrid. Living at the core of this social laboratory exposed me, on an everyday basis, to many of the movements' dynamics as well as questions of precarity and care economies to which this dissertation attends.

Re-conceptualizations of fieldwork: Locating the Research Site

While having a permanent base in Madrid (a second floor apartment in Luis Velez de Guevara Street), the networked character and spread of activist research practices, led me to conduct several research related trips, including trips to Barcelona, Terrasa, Sevilla, Paris, and Rome. Other research sites *prior* to the official fieldwork phase where I encountered groups

⁷ Going back to live in Spain for an extended period of time made my family very happy, who was eager to be closer and also was looking forward to enjoy the new member of the family.

conducting or discussing the practice of activist research included places such as Porto Alegre, Buenos Aires, New York City, *and* Chapel Hill. In a way, this ethnography of the practice of activist research is product of a years-long multi-sited engagement with emerging transnational movements.⁸ In this chain of actors and locations that formed my diffused research trajectory, *Precarias* and its main headquarters placed in the *Lavapiés* neighborhood, is one more node of a broader network composed by similar initiatives, related struggles, interested scholars, and collaborations. These networks, increasingly global, are simultaneously committed to work locally on specific place-based problems. My research engagement was called to be both multi-sited *and* place-based. This spatial dimension is addressed in this dissertation by engaging activist research via transnational encounters and through a longer-term involvement with a particular locally based research project.

This trajectory of the research process speaks to a temporal extension and spatial ubiquity of the field. The temporal consideration in this case integrates certain auto-biographical itineraries that have had a direct impact on the research, even if they occurred long before the fieldwork or even the PhD program. In regards to the spatial re-conceptualization, the research site becomes both transnational and place-based: *a trans/local field* being increasingly global but

⁸ During that diffused research period -pre, during and post formal fieldwork- I have been able to personally meet many actors participating in the trend of activist research (starting with Colectivo Situaciones to finish with the Counter Cartographies Collective). This trajectory provided me the opportunity to participate in the broader movement where activist research is inserted, the autonomous side of the global justice movement, mainly in the US and Europe. In the US as part of the *Chicago Direct Action Network* I was able to personally meet and participate with many global justice groups in the country (eg. *Department of Land and Space Reclamation, Art and Revolution, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, the Pink Bloc, the Ruckus Society, Students Against Sweatshops, Infernal Noise Brigade Street Band*). The most visible inheritors of the global justice wave in Europe are the current contemporary struggles against precarity. I have personally met many of the active groups, including the co-founders of the Italian *Chainworkers*, the ex-president of Act Up Paris, members of the cartographic projects *MigreEurope* and *Hackitectura*, the artifices of *YoMango* and *NextGeneration*, as well as participants in the new experiments at biopolitical unionism, such as the emerging *Oficinas de Derechos Sociales*. Finally, I also developed relationships with two key node institutions of alternative knowledge production in Spain: the *Universidad Nomada* and *Traficantes de Suenos* publishing house.

“local at all its points”, as Latour would say speaking on certain kinds of networks (1993). In this way, Madrid, Chapel Hill, and all those locations where previous and future encounters with the practice of activist research would take place, have been considered fieldsites on their own accord. The temporal and spatial configuration of a bounded and single field is fractalized into multiple locations, across time, including ones’ own ‘locations’, calling also for a more auto-ethnographic multi-sited approach.

Intimate Interdisciplinary Teamwork: Notes on collaborative fieldwork and writing

There is yet another level where more traditional notions of ethnographic fieldwork are challenged. In this case I am referring to the figure of the lone ethnographer and single authorship. The research for this dissertation was carried out with a research partner, my husband Sebastian Cobarrubias, who at the time was also conducting his own fieldwork for his doctoral thesis in Geography. The experience of research teamwork is more than coincidental though. Both of us were working on parallel movements, addressing similar problematics, mainly questions of precarity, migration, and globalization in the EU. While I focused on activist research, Sebastian Cobarrubias centered on activist cartography. As research progressed we found our mutual research topics increasingly intermingling. We knew that both trends were connected, yet during the field research we saw that activist research and cartography were actually linked and superimposed with one another. This is true to such a degree that some activist research projects see themselves as cartographic and that most cartographic projects see themselves as forms of research.⁹ Cooperating and participating mutually in research related activities became not only a matter of personal preference but something almost dictated by the

⁹This also became apparent when we encountered members of an activist research project working on a mapping project and vice versa. To a significant degree these can be understood as parallel and interrelated trends.

field itself. This in addition to our shared interests made for permanent and insightful feedback and commentary throughout the process (making the research much less of a ‘lone wolf’ endeavor). In addition, I would like to state that our situation in two different departments and disciplines also provided for fruitful back and forth, as well as an intermingling of references, paradigms and styles. Very often these were not explicit attempts to produce interdisciplinary experiments, but rather the influence of proximity, discussion, and the learning of new methodological practices.

Thus this thinking in the plural, yet coming from different departmental backgrounds, led to insights and questions that have had direct effects on both theses. Can we write ethnographies of cartography? Can we conduct anthropological research cartographically? In the case of this dissertation, the resulting attention towards spatial considerations has contributed to the subfield of Anthropology of Social Movements, particularly addressing the spatial thinking advanced and enacted by movements. Also, this geographic impulse led me to use cartographic representations in order to narrate the genealogy of the concept of precarity (chapter 7). It is important to make a note on style, particularly to clarify the *use of first person* in this dissertation. While the pronoun “I” is the one chosen for institutional purposes, the first person in plural would be more faithful to the shared fieldwork experience. “We” would refer to the research team, formed by a geographer and an anthropologist couple.

2.2. Research Methods

The research for this dissertation is based on a multi-sited engagement with the topic under consideration, using mixed qualitative methods for data collection, primarily archival research and ethnographic fieldwork.

2.2.1. “Archival Research”

Becoming member of “*La Biblioteca Nacional*” (the National Library) gave me access to a grandiloquent historical building in *La Castellana* Avenue filled with a great variety of sources about the country. However, most of the data necessary for this dissertation was lying outside the walls of this institution. The information needed was often at the margins of official archives. In this sense, I had to re-invent my own set of libraries, gathering a series of primary data from different sources about the current conjuncture and constituting my own archive on activist research. These two components of the archival research were designed to gather the necessary data for two of my guiding research questions: one of them, concerning the particular context of emergence and interaction; and the other, focused on the conceptual production by movements.

2.2.1.A. Primary data collection

To address context-related questions, besides reviewing the required scholarly literatures coming mainly from the anthropology and geography of Europe, I gathered different primary data sources. In order to gain more depth into some aspects of the contemporary political economy of Spain and the European Union (eg. labor reforms, domestic work and migration), I collected statistical data from different sources including official databases such as the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* or *EURLife database*. I also reviewed a set of sociological and historical information produced by different social actors as independent studies sponsored by institutions such as labor unions or banks. For the most up-to-date debates on current affairs I followed the national press closely (in particular *El País* and *El Mundo*) as well as social movement press (in particular *Diagonal*). In relation to social movements’ histories and current activities in Spain

and Europe I encountered a set of literatures internal to movements' networks. By internal, I mean that these studies were often published by movement-related publishing houses or obtained via activist distribution points.¹⁰ Also, Precarias provided a series of research publications on the question of care work and migration financed by the European Union providing historical and statistical data on this issue.

2.2.1.B. *Social Movements' Own Archives*

This refers to the critical amount of textual production advanced by many contemporary activist collectives. Groups engaged in activist research are especially attuned to practices of “self-registering” and “self-archiving”. Both in published format and in-progress documents, this written material constitutes the basis to address one the main concerns of this dissertation: the conceptual and analytical production by movements. The interaction with these texts included the following phases:

- a) *Search and compilation*: being both online and printed, the search was conducted in cyber space and alternative libraries. Some of the documents required direct contact with participants in order to access them. This compilation resulted in a veritable archive on activist research materials.
- b) *Textual exploration*: engaging texts on their own terms, without attempting to fit the notions contained in their work into a pre-selected theoretical framework is a mode of reading used and referred to as “immanent reading”.¹¹ Taking distance from mainstream social movements research, instead of fitting *case* studies of social movements into

¹⁰ Key in this regard was time spent in *Traficantes de Suenos*, an alternative publishing house and library space, and *El Rastro Politico*, an open-air book market taking place once a week in one the most popular plazas of Lavapies. These two points were important in gaining access to both very recent as well as difficult to obtain or out of print sources on movement dynamics.

¹¹ See Cobarrubias and Pickles 2006

existing frameworks or conceptual orders of how collective action is or ought to be organized and deployed¹², I aim to work with social movements' own intellectual production as *source*.

c) *Translation*: in the literal sense (in this case), mainly from Spanish to English.

The careful exploration of this written material might be called a *textual approach* to collective action, where the main goal is locating theoretical questions being raised and identifying concepts developed in movements' documents. This more textual-based approach is combined with a more *ethnographic approach* explained in the following section.

2.2.2. *Ethnographic fieldwork*:

The personal encounter with participants of different collectives as well as the active participation in *Precarias* via list-serves, meetings and actions, was critical to fully understand the intricacies of the practice of activist research. The ethnographic approach not only directly addressed the remaining research question on the *modus operandi* and procedures of activist research; it also provided important insights to the other two research questions. The following data collection techniques were used:

2.2.2.A. *Interviews*

Ethnographic interviews were conducted with different practitioners of activist research as well as social movements' participants associated to related struggles. Interviewees were mostly young, in the range of twenty to forty years old; and represented a wide range of nationalities, including Spain, France, Italy, Germany, UK, Morocco, Argentina, Brasil, Ecuador,

¹² For more on this specific critique of mainstream social movements studies see Casas-Cortés, Osterweil and Powell (2008)

Colombia, South Africa, and the US. Some individuals were interviewed once while others several times in either individual or small group settings. While some interviews were held at coffee places and restaurants, most of the interviews were conducted in sites of social movements' activity: from large public gatherings (eg. activist conferences or street protests) to the regular meeting places of different collectives. The interview types used included:

- a) *Open-ended unstructured interviews*: casual, spontaneous, yet purposive conversation in terms of providing data relevant to the research goals. In particular, gathering life stories and groups' trajectories to understand why the turn to research was occurring among social movements.
- b) *Semi-structured interviews*: designed to acquire information on specific domains, mainly how their own research projects were conceived and carried out, asking questions about certain specificities not fully addressed in their texts (eg. design, goals, procedures, theoretical foundations, etc.). The interview process allowed enough flexibility to explore outside of an interview's planned focus and reframe the questions building on the new information gathered.
- c) *Small-group interviews*: attended by several participants, the goal of this kind of setting was to hold a focused conversation about a particular topic relevant for the research in a collective fashion. The various interventions from different participants provide a much richer depiction of a particular problematic that thus far had remained unclear. This kind of arrangement had the goal of clarifying questions about the role and explicit presence of research in their political organizing.

“Mutual Interviewing”

The interviews conducted during and beyond the fieldwork period, regardless of the specific type, were carried out in a rigorous yet relaxed manner, without formal protocol but with a special qualification. Usually, the interview moment was laid out rather as an *ethnographic conversation* inviting for a back and forth process where every interlocutor was able to both ask and respond. This format was considered more appropriate to the participatory political culture of these activist circles. At certain times, these ethnographic conversations effectively became spaces of exchange, reciprocally asking questions about respective projects, since as researcher I was also involved in activist research and broader social movements' networks. This led to a reformulation of the uni-directionality of the classical interview towards a more relational mode of engagement, facilitating processes of back and forth and reciprocal learning.

2.2.2.B. Observant participation

During my time in Madrid, I was able to actively take part in Precarias a la Deriva. My previous relationship with the group, based on visits, exchanges of material as well as translation work, was sustained by personal communication with some of the members and boosted by an unexpected visit by one them to Chapel Hill just prior to the formal fieldwork.¹³ The relationship with *Precarias* was started not only for strictly research purposes but also due to an intense sense of affinity towards their way of doing politics and a strong identification with the participants' stories about their strategies for economic support and life expectations. In a way, this political affinity and personal identification turned out to be mutual. They were intrigued by my accounts of social movements in the US (including direct action groups, workers centers, 3Cs and university activism), as well as feeling quite at ease with a young woman, with similar

¹³ Maggie Smith, from Precarias a la Deriva, participated in different activities on and off campus, which included public presentations, mutual interviewing with 3Cs as well as collaborative drift-explorations and some draft mapping activities about the university and the area.

educational background, quite internationally traveled, though also in comparable ‘precarious’ conditions as part of a couple of university students/researchers living off grants in a big metropolis with a baby.

I arrived to Madrid during a transitory moment for the collective, when *Precarias* was entering into a distinct phase. This is common among many contemporary political aggregations that dissolve and morph at a more accelerated pace than political parties or traditional unions. Also, many contemporary activist collectives are accustomed to dealing with highly mobile participants, constantly coming and going, articulating a diffused network of related individuals, some participating more than others at different times. Rather than a formal notion of membership, as in having an ID card, or a specific entrance requirement, the sense of belonging is built upon one’s own involvement and enthusiasm. Having those traits in mind, as well as the considerations on a mutual sense of affinity, it is not difficult to imagine that my participation in *Precarias* was not disruptive, strange or polemical. Since the first meeting I attended, they tried to put me up to date with current developments of the group, and I was immediately encouraged to join their regular activities, such as: participating in the internal list-serve, attending internal monthly meetings, facilitating discussions, taking meeting minutes, preparing food for meetings, organizing workshops and actions, designing posters, writing up reflection notes on research expeditions, etc.

Thanks to this active participation, I generated a series of thematically and chronologically organized fieldnotes. My notes focus on the regular activities that make up the life of a particular activist research collective, in this case, registering and reflecting upon 1) monthly meetings, 2) drifts or urban research expeditions, 3) workshops as well as 4) the intense

circulation of email in the group's related list-serves. My fieldnotes also catalog the series of gatherings or collective processes where *Precarias* and similar actors inserted into broader networks temporarily coalesce in a given place or a given project for different purposes, either for discussion, action or collaboration. Specifically, during the formal fieldwork period I was able to participate in the organizing of a series of those moments of convergence/coalescence. These include the *MayDay 2008* process in Madrid; the trans-European cartographic project *Precarity Webring_Map*, with rotating meetings in Paris, Rome and Madrid; the Conference on Precarity, Welfare State and Social Rights in Sevilla; a series of migrant solidarity actions in Madrid; and the national encounter of social rights offices in Terrassa.

The generation of fieldnotes was based on my primary mode of engagement, which rather than the standard qualitative method of participatory observation it would be more appropriate to call it *observant participation*, as some “dissident anthropologists” in Spain claim:

Where is the border between observant participation and participant observation? Why is intervening, implicating oneself, returning, and manipulating the environment by using anthropological tools counterproductive for “scientific” knowledge? In what deontological code is it written that the anthropologist should absorb the information that they find but hide their interaction [and their dedication]? Why this modesty or shame to expose our [political] traces?¹⁴ (Elizabeth Lorenzi, email communication in *AnthroLab* list-serve, October 11, 2008)

Observant participation attempts to re-draw the firm line between scientific knowledge and activist engagement. It allows the researcher to speak from a situated voice without invalidating its accuracy. It tolerates the researcher as an active participant of a given collective,

¹⁴ Spanish translation: *¿Donde está la frontera de la observación participante y la participación observante? ¿Por qué intervenir, implicarse, devolver, manipular el entorno desde las herramientas antropológicas es contraproducente para el reconocimiento "científico"? ¿En qué código deontológico está escrito que el antropólogo debe absorber la información que encuentra, pero debe ocultar su interacción [y su compromiso]? ¿Porqué ese pudor a dar cuenta de nuestras huellas [políticas]?*

a given process, a given network. This participation does not mean equivalence, especially given the multiplicity and diverse backgrounds that usually characterize those aggregations. Too often, internal homogeneity has been the assumption uncritically ascribed to rural villages, urban ghettos, and indigenous tribes. In this research I challenge the notion that there is a singular ‘other’ about which a singular ‘I’ is conducting research. Instead part of myself is inserted as one more node into a collective that is itself aware of the similarities and difference that compose it. Besides a series of commonalities, in terms of age range, certain notions of the political, and income level, there are disparities in terms of professions, status, ethnic backgrounds, legal status (i.e. citizenship and visas), etc. The group is actually aware and explicit about the danger of reducing those singularities into a flat and single identity, working for the exposure and not the erasure of differences.

In light of the realization that social movements produce analyses relevant to shared concerns, even compelling the researchers’ own concerns, clearly a new ethos of research is required for those of us working with/on/about “writing machines” or in this case “research machines”.

2.3. Transformations in Ethnographic Theory and Practice

Both the archival and ethnographic research components gain a slightly distinctive touch under the premise of a knowledge turn. The claim that social movements are knowledge producers reformulates some of the postulates and practices of these two methodological approaches:

- *Towards another kind of archival research.* This dissertation is inserted in the larger body of anthropology of modernity, and its recent trends to engage the contemporary and the

complex, including expert knowledge producers, mainly advanced by ethnographies in the field of STS. Marcus and Fisher advocate for a mode of engagement aware of the complexity and possible affinities with these new objects, which are able to constitute “writing machines” in themselves, as “producers of powerful and sometimes authoritative representations” (1999: 24, 25). Studying movements as these emergent and complex writing machines poses a series of methodological challenges to previous approaches in SMS. When one recognizes that s/he is dealing with “writing machines”, the act of digging into social movements’ own documents is not in order to justify others’ theories or come up with universal laws. Rather, one encounters authorities in their own right on specific domains. This challenges traditional notions of the ethnographic endeavor: what is the role of the ethnographer at this point?

- *Towards a more relational and involved ethnographic engagement:* research during fieldwork, mainly based on mutual interviewing and observant participation, becomes an opportunity for mutual learning and joint struggles. If one recognizes the object as legitimate subject, generator of its own knowledges, then exchange -rather than a one-way transfer of information-, becomes the required practice. The epistemological claim of this knowledge turn, also has an ontological flip-side: the break down of the rigid binarism of self/others. Rather than discrete entities, things begin to look weblike, much more interrelated, recognizing the possibility of learning from each other, sharing intellectual antecedents and political affinities. The researcher is not just an observer any more, there is a process of involvement. By reading their material, by actively

participating in their activities, s/he discovers discrepancies but also affinities with the ideas advanced by the group. What might be the positionality adapted by the ethnographer then? What is the relationship between this acquired knowledge and his/her own training in anthropological knowledge?

2.3.1. Translators

A number of recent trends in Anthropology recognize the need to develop new ethnographic practices in order to apprehend increasingly complex, dynamic, recursive, and even knowledge producing “objects.” The field of anthropology has developed a rich rubric of concepts and methods with which to read these complex and emergent objects of inquiry, including anthropologies of the contemporary (Rabinow 2003), emergences (Fischer 2003), assemblages (Ong and Collier 2005), complexity (Knorr-Cetina 1997), networks (Latour 1993; Strathern 1991, 1996), and writing machines (Marcus 1995), among others. These approaches are offering crucial methodological and epistemological insights into the nature of objects of inquiry. However, as of yet, the field of anthropology has paid relatively little attention to social movements (and other explicitly political phenomena) as exemplary complex objects, dynamic, rich sites for the further elaboration of these ethnographies of the contemporary and of expertise. There is a recognition that academicians have a responsibility to move beyond a focus on science and technology and other privileged sites of truth-making to lend their conceptual, theoretical and methodological tools to the study of *other* truth-making/knowledge producing sites, or risk colluding or reinforcing current power/knowledge hierarchies (Law 1999; Hess 2001).¹⁵ In this

¹⁵ This is the beginning of a call for papers for a AAA 2009 panel on “*Knowledge Objects*”: *Transformations in Ethnographies of the Complex*, organized by Dana Powell, Michal Osterweil, and myself.

section I tried to build upon the contributions made by this field, mainly the concept of “writing machines” in order to think social movements under the lens of expert knowledge producers.

Expertise Otherwise

In the highly self-reflexive environment of activist research groups, attuned to refined practices of “self-representation”, many participants are conducting similar tasks as the figure of the ‘official’ researcher, in terms of observing and taking good notes about what is happening for later reflection and analysis. Although observation and note-taking clearly defines the ethnographic practice, this analytical writing task is not exclusive to the ethnographer, especially when dealing with populations such as these, engaged in the production of research. These collectives’ intellectual training is often the product of massive expansion in higher education programs in their respective countries, as well as the fact that some of the participants are actually pursuing university related careers. Many have engaged for long years in the self-education culture that takes place in ‘social centers’ where there is an explicit effort to foment interdisciplinary educational series –ranging from philosophy to hand-crafts, from computer management (Universidad Hacker en Madrid) to political economy.

In this social center called *Miles de Viviendas*, situated in the Barceloneta neighborhood of the city of Barcelona, we are using the building and infrastructures of an abandoned barracks of the Civil Guard in order to develop numerous activities that are otherwise impossible to find in the city. The goal is to foment anti-capitalist practices and relationships, and in the process, generate self-taught individuals empowered to engage in a diverse array of fields outside of the market logic. This is the founding idea of our next project: *La Universidad Pirata*. Some of our ongoing workshops that will continue in the next phase are the following: fashion design, Western and Eastern philosophy, plastic management, radio and satellite programming (Interview with member of Miles de Vivienda, Barcelona 2005)

The research projects emerging from this kind of hyper-educated context, are filled with theoretical insights and dense reflections on lived experiences, linking issues such as economics,

politics, gender, or migration. In light of the quality of those analytical productions and conceptual developments, it is not appropriate to treat these movements as simply *case-studies*. However, I do not mean that they should be considered as *absolute sources* of authoritative knowledge. Rather, my understanding builds on the feminist epistemological notions of “partial objectivity” and “situated knowledges”. Activist knowledges are proposed then as *situated sources*, acknowledging their contribution while being aware of their partiality and critical with their actual conceptual production.¹⁶

Under the premise of social movements as situated sources, what is left for the ethnographer to do? At this juncture the conventional researcher’s task of piecing together a chaotic jigsaw puzzle of data in order to explain what “the natives” are saying is not valid, since they are able to speak –and quite eloquently- by themselves. Using terms from the anthropological tradition, it is not about *ventriloquia* (Breton 2008), but *translation* (Asad 1986). In this formulation, ethnographic work resembles one of translation, this time constituting a careful engagement with knowledges advanced from particular locations into other codes of knowledge produced elsewhere.

From Ventriloquist to Translator

The assumed cognitive superiority of the researcher was used historically to confer the ethnographer the role of interpreting those that made no sense; or speak on behalf of the voiceless. The debates on the politics of representation tried to address this problematic position. The discipline of Anthropology was crucial in the advancement of a new awareness towards the question of representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Clifford 1988; Behard and Gordon 1995;

¹⁶ According to Charles Price, this approach might resemble to the qualitative research methodology of Grounded Theory (Dissertation defense, September 21st 2009).

Marcus 1999). Yet, the epistemological shift towards the multiplication of knowledge producers pushes these debates even further. If the object of study is indeed a knowledge-producer object, “an epistemic object” (Knorr-Cetina 1999), this involves a positive answer to the Spivak’s question about whether the subaltern is able to speak (1995). The researcher then can not be the spokesperson for people considered not to have a recognizable voice. Rather, as a very member of *Precarias* suggested:

“Researching is not about *dubbing*, but providing accurate subtitles to unique movies” (Interview January 2008).

Not speaking for, but the careful task of providing appropriate subtitles, in order to enable the content to travel to other terrains. In this specific regard, perhaps the ethnographer’s role is more akin to that which Latour describes- a translator, a sorter, a relayer (1983); and to what Haraway evokes -a connector among situated knowledges, relating these specific productions to other authors and intellectual trajectories (1991). As Escobar suggests:

“My attempt in this book is to build on ethnographic research in order to *identify the knowledge* produced by activists and to *use this knowledge and analyses to conduct my own analyses* about related topics –or, as I like to put it, *to build bridges* between political-intellectual conversations in social movements about environment, development, etc. and conversations in the academy about corresponding issues.” (2008: 25, emphasis mine)

In other words, the task of translator is not just reproducing what others are saying but rather a practice of *caring listening*, a skill of *attuning* oneself to others’ utterances and modes of living, and *putting into another code* (in this case, the code of anglo-american social sciences) what others are saying. Through that process, the ethnographer is also *adding* his/her own experiential and intellectual background, including anthropological knowledge and training in

this case. It is then a *process of re-appropriation* and *tinkering* from which novel analyses might emerge. Translation can be seen in this way as “identifying the knowledge produced by social movements and to use this knowledge to conduct my [our] own analyses on related topics” in Escobar’s terms.

Furthermore, as any translation, it also provokes a *generation of encounters*: introducing new figures to determined circles of thought; putting different debates in contact with one another that were hitherto unaware of each other; and facilitating processes of exchange. Again, following Escobar “ethnographic research [is used] [...] to build bridges between political-intellectual conversations in social movements [...] and conversations in the academy about corresponding issues”. In order to put two distinct spheres of knowledge into conversation there is a critical step, that of translation.¹⁷

Following this spirit of translator, I tried to compile, identify and reflect on the findings advanced by these activist research projects, treating them as situated sources on topics related to the European Union, globalization, precarity and care. I relate their analyses and concepts to other traditions, concepts and theories coming mainly from the field of Anthropology and other social sciences. The results of putting these analyses into dialogue with one another provide a solid basis for a richer understanding of current problematics. The work of translation also has the goal of spreading, sharing and building bridges among nodes of engaged knowledge producers. This leads us directly into the question of ethnography as weaving technology.

2.3.2. Research as Knitting Process

¹⁷ Translation has been the practice *sine quanon* for intercultural dialogues and thus a required skill to become a diplomat. The ethnographer, by engaging in this system of translation among knowledges, might act then as an *ambassador*; and if the exchange is among non-dominant traditions of thought, *as a grassroots ambassador*.

The revelations about processes of knowledge making advanced by critical literatures signal a different understanding of reality: mainly the passage from dualist binaries to relationality. As if the Knowledge Turn, apparently restricted to the epistemological sphere, is paired up with an Ontological Turn¹⁸ in social theory, reaching the contours of what constitutes the real. The close entanglement of the epistemic with the ontological level involves a series of transformations with critical consequences for the ethnographic practice. This section develops further two methodological challenges posed by the *new realisms* correspondent to the knowledge turn.

Other Realisms are (already) Possible

According to a series of trends in Social Theory advocating for anti-essentialist and post-constructivist epistemologies, knowledge is no longer conceived as a device to apprehend the world, but as constitutive of the world itself. The goal of knowing would not be the search of accurate representations of the world, reducing its chaotic and sieter-geneous character; but the actual embracement of such complexity. This re-conceptualization of knowledge entails a return to realism; but not a return to the naïve realisms of the past (particularly the Cartesian version, or the realism of essences or transcendent entities), but to a neo-realism or neo-materialism:

It can be said that in all of these works there is a renewed attention to materiality, whether through a focus on practice, or relations, networks, embodiments, performances, or attachments between various elements of the social and the biophysical domains. The sources, however, are quite varied; some include poststructuralism and phenomenology (in some cases, the latter via anthropologist's Tim Ingold's influential work, 2000) with attention to practice and engagement with the world, rather than representation. In many of the works, particularly those influenced by ANT and Deleuze and Guattari, the emphasis is on relationality, attempting to ascertain the production of the real through manifold relations linking human and non-human agents, bridging previously taken-for-granted divides (nature/culture, subject/object, self/other) into processes of productions

¹⁸ Term used by A. Escobar in 2008: chapter on networks

and architectures of the real in terms of networks, assemblages, and hybrid socio-natural formations. (Escobar forthcoming).

The knowledge turn is then closely paired up with a particular ontological regime: the real as relational and contingent, rather than structural, dualistic and law-driven. Thinking in terms of “boxes” that represent clear cut categories, normally organized in binarisms, becomes harder to sustain. Alternative images –such as networks, meshworks, assemblages, webs and rhizomes- might capture this profound re-conceptualization of the real.

What research practices correspond to this meshwork ontology?

The modern Cartesian epistemology/ontology has shaped the realm of knowledge production with pervasive binarisms such as subject/object, self/world, action/research, life/inquiry. Building on those, a key distinction made is that between a community of observers (usually scientists) and reality (*other*-humans and *non*-humans). This dominant order of knowledge is increasingly questioned from many directions, as many in the Social Movement Working Group at UNC are trying to show:

“Yet the object, the world, the illegitimate ones, the inappropriate/d others, or the marginalized by these operations always return. I wonder whether the current moment is not one of a more noticeable return than usual. I jokingly call it “*the revenge of the multiplicities*”: of that which is relational rather than just individual, complex instead of binary, interdependent instead of sufficient onto itself, embedded and embodied as opposed to disembedded and disembodied, etc. [I am aware that I am re-introducing a binary to explain the value of what is non-dualist, but let me do it for the sake of the argument]. Could it be that what is at stake is thus the creation of a different order of knowledge, one based on relationality, complexity, interdependency, holism, etc.? And here we find one of the domains in which *the epistemological-cum-ontological struggle* is being fought, namely, theory itself; it is in the name of processual analysis, neo-realist epistemology, ecological holism, relationality, and so forth that the struggle goes on. Some emergent concepts –e.g., assemblages, flat ontologies, multiplicities, and of course networks—point in this direction.” (Escobar, email communication on SMWG Symposium, my emphasis)

What is being fought over in this epistemological/ontological struggle? The passage from dualist to relational approaches for engagement with the real. This transition towards multiplicity and relationality implies that both the observers and the observed get transformed “from bounded entities into traffic”¹⁹ (Escobar PE) and in this manner impacts the research process. This relational ontological regime reframes the notions of the object and subject as 1) constituted by processes and relations; 2) undetermined; 3) historically produced, both being in place and being in networks. This leads to what de Mexican theorist De Landa calls “a *flat ontology*, one made exclusively of unique, singular individuals, different in spatio-temporal scale but not in ontological status” (2002: 47).

Embracing the condition of being relational involves a series of consequences for research practices: rather than categorical thinking and structural analyses, the form of research becomes one attuned to networks, meshworks, rhizomes, webs. In this framework, what is the relationship and place of the researcher vis a vis those networks and webs? During my dissertation process, I explored two methodological insights, in particular: one related to the question of the *positionalities* of the researcher vs. the object of study; and the other one, centered on the transformations upon the *spatialities* of research practices.

2.3.2.A. Becoming Woven into a Web: Re-conceptualizations of the object/subject divide

The epistemological revelation of the knowledge turn puts both parties onto the same plane, by positing researcher and researched as knowledge producers, each in its own right. The achievement is quite powerful, flattening previous hierarchies based on self-ascribed notions of

¹⁹ “Traffic” speaks to some of the main features of anti-essentialism, such as the complication of naturalized boundaries and the absence of neatly bounded identities, nature included. For Haraway, contrary to the positivist view in which the world/real informs knowledge, it is the other way around: knowledge contributes to making the world in profound ways. Escobar PE

authority and expertise. This flattened territory demands changes in the ethnographic endeavor. At its most traditional, Anthropology provided authoritative representations of people without history; now, the ethnographer is transformed into a *translator* -or *grassroots ambassador*- among assemblages, each holding specific historical trajectories and knowledges. Yet, this claim by itself does not deal with the ontological separation between both sides. The consequences of this epistemological claim as such are not totally disentangled. Engaging the ontological reformulations advanced by the knowledge turn, when claiming cognition as being, knowing and doing (Maturana and Varela 1987), an additional task is required to address the dominant Cartesian foundation of current research endeavors: the separation between the self *and* the world/the other.

This framework restricts the possibilities for a relational understanding of the research encounter. The move towards reflexivity tried to engage this challenge, developing a series of achievements in that regard (Aull Davies 1999). Nevertheless, according to some critics, the demarcations between self/other remained untouched (Probyn 1993).²⁰ Without precluding the relevance of the reflexive moment, the KT might go beyond it, allowing and even demanding an ontological blurring of these two entities. This blurring does not entail equating the researcher to the researched (a move captured in formulas such as “going native”), but rather it allows for the awareness and the openness towards unexpected multiple affinities, shared experiences and common notions among the two parties.

²⁰ According to this Cultural Studies scholar, the distinction of Self/Other has remained the main foundation of any kind of ethnographic endeavor, from Malinowsky to the most experimental reflexive ethnographies. This binary poses a hierarchical relationship between the norm vs. the different where the ethnographic endeavor is bringing the exotic into sameness.

This reformulation is possible due to thinking of reality as a ‘net’ made out of interrelated actants. This relational approach would transform both researcher and researched into two distinct “nodes”, “knit threads” or “rootstocks”, each of it *rooted* in particular territories of difference. All the parties would hold singularities based on economic, cultural, etc. backgrounds. In this way the relationship would be flattened, although not equivalent, and open to mutual influence and explicit contagion.²¹ If so, a total separation between the researcher and those that are researched is unthinkable. This is when the self, at least in some of its dimensions, becomes part of the research topic. The methodological consequence of this realization is the explicit embracing of the auto-ethnographic component as a constitutive part of the research process.²²

2.3.2.B. *Knitting the Net: Re-conceptualizations of the “field” or research site*

The very act of researching signals how the researcher is not only *woven* into a larger web, but also, by connecting further dots, she herself is engaging with, and actively *knitting*, a broader net of peoples and places. Thinking in terms of webs and nets brings along a strong spatial component. Furthermore, it requires alternative spatial understandings distinct from those dominant in Modern thought, based on the Euclidian notion of space as a bounded and fixed box, which is itself intimately linked and necessary to the Cartesian subject/object anxiety (Pickles 2004). Actually, this spatial thinking had a strong impact on the historical notion of the *field* in anthropology as a closed and well delimited entity. The ontological regime paired up with the

²¹ In this case, examples of processes of mutual influence, collaboration and proliferation between *Precarias* and ethnographer are: reciprocal translation of respective texts; inspiration to politicize our own situation as graduate students and the formation of 3Cs; collaboration using my own fieldnotes for their projects.

²² My claim shares Narayan’s classical critique to the problematic distinction between ‘regular anthropologist’ studying others and ‘native anthropologist’ focused on their own (1997). By placing the self as another node of the broader network to be analyzed, i am calling for a blurring of clear delimitations between object/subject, and the multiple identifications of the researcher.

knowledge turn entails a conceptual leap to non-Euclidian spatial thinking. Thanks to Lefebvre's notions of space as a process of constant production (1992), clear spatial delimitations are distorted, bringing along also a more relational spatiality.²³

From Box to Network

The spatiality of the research endeavor consequently gets deeply transformed. During the mid nineties, debates about *multi-sited ethnographies* and *tracking strategies* arose in Anthropology to address the shortcomings of the traditional notion of the field. Ethnography moved from its conventional single-site location, contextualized by macro-constructions of a larger social order, such as the capitalist world system; to multiple sites of observation and participation that cut across dichotomies such as the "local" and the "global," the "lifeworld" and the "system" (Marcus 1995). Furthermore, the unquestioned division between the laboratory and the world is also addressed, laboratories becoming a privileged research location for ethnographic inquiry, especially among STS scholars. As part of this turning the roles of fieldsite and laboratory upside down, ethnographies of anthropology departments, their practices and institutional arrangements, put the very expert field of anthropology under the ethnographer's scrutiny (e.g. De Rota forthcoming). In light of this approach, the higher education system itself, and the novel forms of the university in the knowledge economy, should be a requisite focus of any comprehensive ethnographic study of globalization, expert knowledge production or related

²³ The work by Doreen Massey might be especially relevant for this question. See her work on geographies of reciprocity (2004)

topics. This multiplication of the field might extend to include one's own location as university based researchers, the university system becoming itself part of the 'object' of study²⁴

All these variations of "stretching" the single-site field of traditional ethnography speak to the growing awareness about the intrinsic relational character of space as well as to the acceptance that social phenomena, rather than totalizing systems encapsulated in particular locales, constitute decentralized, dispersed, and trans-nationalized ensembles of processes that operate at many levels and through multiple sites: "No current image captures this state of affairs at present more auspiciously than that of the network" (Escobar 2008: 11).

The methodological consequence of this realization is to embrace the network as a site of enunciation, in other words "going networked". By fully engaging a networked approach, rather than reify a supposed 'object' of study, allows for the proliferation of new relations, artifacts and communities bringing about the generation of a quite populated network, short at the beginning, but later on, full of ramifications. This speaks to the emerging task of the ethnographer as "knitting the net". One of the initial methodological manifestations of this task was articulated under the rubric of *multi-sited ethnography*. However, this formulation is not so explicit about the active role of the researcher in the making, maintaining and proliferating of the network, him/herself doing so from a particular location within that network. This is where the verb in *-ing* form, -such as in *knitting*²⁵- comes in, to explicitly place the ethnographer into the network and

²⁴ This particular work has been carried forward in my case via the Counter Cartographies Collective (3Cs Disorientation Map, the current project on Mapping the Economic Crisis on Campus, the Precarity Map of UNC, etc). Here I only want to signal the importance of a spatialized auto-ethnographic attentiveness towards the researcher's own location.

²⁵ The term *knitting* has been chosen because it has fewer technical or professional connotations than networking, and speaks to an everyday activity that usually goes under the radar. Also, the choice of this term is inspired in the activist technique of "radical knitting" predicated by social movements in the US and Canada. See <http://www.ms.unimelb.edu.au/~paul/radical.html>

as an active maker of that network, demanding a serious engagement with its own ‘dot’ as part of this *networked fieldsite*.²⁶

Networks and Places

There is a certain celebratory tone in the discovery, or better, the re-encounter, with networks and the possibilities opened for novel forms of research. However, networks have been too quickly identified with the registers of the global and mobility. This frequent temptation has an important downside: the relegation or concealment of the local and place-based phenomena.

“Scholarship of the past two decades in many fields (geography, anthropology, political economy, communications, etc.) has tended to de-emphasize place and to highlight, on the contrary, movement, displacement, traveling, diaspora, migration, and so forth. Thus, there is a need for a corrective theory that neutralizes this erasure of place, the asymmetry that arises from giving far too much importance to “the global” and far too little value to “place.” (Escobar 2008: 7)

This has led to a scalar hierarchy where the local is enclosed and parochial while the global is porous and cosmopolitan. This type of scalar dualism can end up reducing the complexity of either the global or the local into mutually exclusive dichotomies (white/black; homo/hetero; man/woman; etc.). My engagement with activist collective in different locales involved in global resistance organizing showed this dichotomy to be untenable and inaccurate.

The emergent ethnographic practices born out of the embracement of relational/flat ontologies must try to reconcile the simultaneous condition of being-in-place and being-in-networks. This dissertation research has made an explicit effort to do so, by engaging the transnational movement of activist research in two ways: on the one hand, by showing its

²⁶ It might be certainly argued that the ethnographer, conceived as integral part of this web, is also the one that decide where to “cut the network” when conducting a particular research project. In this way, the ethnographer not only is helping to produce the net, but also is constructing a certain portrait of reality through his/her own incisions in that net. See Marilyn Strathern “Cutting the Network” (1996).

proliferation beyond a single locale and the intense practices of networking among similar initiatives and related struggles, it reveals the highly interwoven character and transnational scope of this movement strategy.²⁷ This transnational network, after identifying a series of commonalities among different activist research initiatives worldwide, has been conceptualized as an emerging global *community of practice*.

Yet, this network made out of transnational encounters, global communication technologies, and international traveling is dependent upon strong place-based commitments. Activist research projects are rooted in particular locales, holding an explicit loyalty to politics of place. In the words of Gibson-Graham the movement of movements is “charting a globally emergent form of localized politics” (2007: XXI) or Osterweil’s description of the spatial notion held by these movements as a “place-based globalism” (2004). It constitutes a network made out of *embedded dots*, connected to places and territories, functioning as a “rooted network” (Rocheleau and Roth 2007). The ethnographer should then acknowledge the place based global aspects of these communities. In order to account for those politics though, my research required a longer-term engagement with a particular place, in this case the Lavapies neighborhood, yet conceived as highly related to other locales. By focusing on Precarias’ work, I tried to engage activist research as a *trans/local practice* able to speak locally and yet produce analytical resonances beyond a specific location. Somehow, my research topic challenges the notion of the local understood as a bounded entity unconnected to others or only the victim of phenomena occurring at larger scales.

²⁷ The activist research trend is actually inheritor of the global justice wave, itself a pioneer of the network form and global politics (Juris 2008).

It is not that the scalar is unimportant rather that the local ceases to be the last rung on a ladder of ever greater rings. The global/local dichotomy -or the assumption that ethnographic research is limited to one of these- is irrelevant in this case. Ethnographies of this kind of transnational yet local based movements should somehow be scale-free. This dissertation must be attentive to the simultaneous processes of making, connecting and unmaking that constitute place (Lepofsky 2007; Massey 2005).²⁸ In this sense, the hub of global migrations and transnational activism that constitutes the Lavapies neighborhood has been considered under the rubric of *trans/local fieldsite*: “trans” to evoke how this place is a constitutive part of broader networks in constant flux (such as migration and global movements); and “local”, in order to rescue the importance of place, although outside scalar dualisms.

2.4. Conclusion

The combination of qualitative methods used yielded an in-depth understanding of activist research practices, their growth, spread and limits. A close involvement with a particular group and its own archives allowed for an understanding of the research process itself, and the analyses and practices that emerged from that process. The methodological challenges raised help to highlight and complexify an otherwise straightforward methods narrative. In particular, the transversal questions of (1) how to engage groups that do so much of their own analyzing and theorizing and (2) how to conduct research on practices and networks of which one forms a part,

²⁸ Lepofsky, building on geographers such as Amin and Thrift, Massey and Allen advance the following understanding of place pertinent for this dissertation: “Place is not a container of activity nor is it simply the realization of meaning within an abstract space of presocial flows. Place is a site of articulation, a space of negotiation, an unfolding set of relations that meet up and become a temporary order (before becoming something else). Just as there is no essential identity, there is no essential place (despite performances of the politics of place which pursue purity in place, as if place could be abstracted from a space of flows). Places exist in relation to other places and in multiple forms. Neither identity nor place can be completely mapped because of this unfolding process of relationality, a process that is always occurring” (2007: 2).

throw many traditional research assumptions into the spotlight. These different challenges were underlined here because they suggest methodological proposals on how to carry out a ‘research with’ in a way that challenges subject-object divides, limited spatial notions of the field, as well as how to address the delicate enterprise of disserting about “writing machines”.

Under the premise of social movements as situated sources/knowledge-producing writing machines, I tried to explore what happens to the figure of the “researcher”. In particular, “what is the role of the ethnographer at this point”? Related to this question, “what might be the positionality adopted by the ethnographer?” The answer I tentatively provide is that ethnography, more than an interpretative or explanatory mechanism, becomes a process of “translation”, articulating distinct and unrelated knowledges in novel ways. In that process, the position of the ethnographer is not one of totally “in” (total equivalence) neither “out” (the neutral god trick). Rather, under the relational ontology of the new realisms embraced by the knowledge turn, the ethnographer is intentionally or not, increasingly “becoming woven” into the relational web that constitutes his/her own research topic intermeshed with life trajectory. Still, as I signal several times: the blurring does not entail equating researcher and researched. The move to “going networked” allows for the awareness and the openness towards unexpected multiple affinities, shared experiences and common notions among the two parties involved.

The specific methodological procedures used for this dissertation might provide some hints of this more relational research approach underlying the proposal of ethnography as translation. For instance, the relationship with social movements’ material as an archive in its own right, the process of mutual interviewing and the engagement as “observant participant” are techniques geared to a different relationality. Indeed, these research practices are somehow

intended to co-construct a broader archive with the movement. In that sense, these techniques are not only about re-drawing the subject/object divide, but also about generating research methods proper to the relational epistemology/ontology advanced by the knowledge turn. So mutual interviewing, observant participation, and particular ways of doing fieldnotes based on notions such as situated sources and trans/local fields, all speak to “relational research methods”.²⁹

²⁹ These are just some concrete implications of both the epistemological and ontological dimensions of the “knowledge turn” for ethnography; these set of concepts and techniques are an initial statement on the methodological intervention I would like to further develop in future work.

Chapter 3

*Investigación Militante*¹

The Cultural Politics of Activist Research

Introduction

Processes of struggle and self-organization, especially those most vivid and dynamic, are fueled by an incentive to produce their own knowledges, languages and images. [...] The goal is that of creating an appropriate and operative theoretical horizon, very close to the surface of the 'lived', where the simplicity and concreteness of elements from which it has emerged, achieve meaning and potential (Malo 2004: 13).

It is no coincidence that some of the most explicit and well articulated claims about the importance of situated knowledge production in processes of social struggle are being put forward by movements themselves. In particular, activist research participants, such as the author of this quote and long term member of *Precarias a la Deriva*, are thinking through ways of producing knowledge which are based on experience (as well as reflection), away from pretensions of neutrality and individual genius as well as without searching for permanent absolute certainties. In a way, the claims advanced by the *knowledge turn* at the level of grand theory, are manifesting and developing themselves in the very terrain of social collective action. To say it differently, a knowledge turn might be simultaneously taking place at the level of social movements' practice. This should not be misread as saying that social movements did not produce knowledge in the past, they certainly did. Yet at the same time there is something distinct about the ways certain movements produce knowledge today. This chapter argues that

¹ Spanish term for the practice of activist research among certain contemporary movements.

this is the case of the current wave of activist research. It presents testimonies from different activist research practitioners about how they conceive of the intricacies of producing knowledge, how activist research works and what kind of epistemologies and ontologies are behind their specific procedures and goals.

The specificity of the practice of activist research is also claimed in relation to initiatives of engaged research originating in the academy. This dissertation then inserts itself within the methodological debates in the social sciences focusing on heterodox research approaches pursuing social transformation. The first section of this chapter, *The Prospects of Engaged Methodologies*, is a brief overview of scholarly traditions of committed research, zooming in on the discipline of Anthropology and the ethnographic method in particular. In the next section, *Activist Research as Embodiment of Autonomous Politics*, I offer a detailed discussion about the rationale and distinctive characteristics of activist or militant research as practiced by contemporary social movements. Based on the engagement with the material of several projects and collectives, especially *Precarias a la Deriva* and *Colectivo Situaciones*², I identify a series of traits constitutive of the practice of militant research: everyday politics, affect, within and against, meshworks, and permanent questioning. This section is mainly based on a careful reading of activist research material, selecting the most insightful quotations that speak directly

² *Colectivo Situaciones* is a Buenos Aires-based collective. This Argentine group is formed by independent researchers working in collaboration with different sectors of Argentinean social movements to investigate current problematics. Colectivo Situaciones coined the term “militant research” and their extensive work has become referential among the networks of activist researchers and Zapatista-oriented global justice movements. See <http://www.situaciones.org/>

about the nature of activist research.³ The third section, *Towards a Distinct Community of Research Practice*, concludes how activist research initiatives are progressively more intertwined with each other and thus are forming a broader global community made out of decentralized networks and common research practices. These networks are growing over time and nurtured by collective projects and international gatherings such as the World Social Forum, continental conferences and mutual exchanges between particular groups. This chapter engages the practice of activist research in general terms, setting the stage for a more detailed engagement with the case of *Precarias a la Deriva* in chapter four.

3.1. The Prospects of Engaged Methodologies

Social and environmental justice has been at the heart of many scholarly projects and intellectual traditions within the academy. I am interested here in those that besides working from ethical concerns, pay careful attention to research methodologies themselves as a source for politicizing the practice of knowledge production per se. The following are some of the most prolific trends using engaged research methodologies: Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991); Decolonial Research (Tuhiwai 1999; Walsh 2009); and more broadly speaking, *engaged* or *activist scholarship* (Boyer 1990; Hale 2008). These are usually trans-disciplinary traditions, and despite the use of different terminologies, they share the basic principle of advancing social transformation and justice through the research process itself. Within Anthropology, there have been different trends at developing engaged research: from the

³ This is when the ethnographer engages with the very products of these “writing machines” or “situated sources”, in this case being heterodox publications, the main cultural artifact of activist research communities. In order to evoke how this practice is made not only out of texts, but also of other *materialities*, I sporadically introduce ethnographic material speaking about sites of encounter and cross-pollination, places of production and infrastructures of distribution.

historical landmark of Sol Tax's Action-Anthropology (Bennet 1996; Foley 1999); to the path-breaking although often forgotten Black Feminist Engaged Anthropology (Harrison 1991; Gordon 1991; McClaurin 2001)⁴; to the projects at engaged Medical Anthropology (Schensul 1999).⁵ Current collective initiatives within the discipline span from the PhD program in Activist Anthropology at the University of Texas (Hale 2001) to the project at developing a Center of Integrating Research and Action (CIRA) at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (Holland, Fox and Powell 2003), to the more international initiative of the World Anthropologies Network (WAN Collective 2005; Restrepo and Escobar 2005; Ribeiro and Escobar 2007).⁶

In fact, the discipline has a long trajectory of a vocation for justice: from the beginnings of American Anthropology, with Boas and his mostly women disciples (Behar and Gordon 1995); to the ongoing political work of Latin-American anthropologists (Aparicio and Blaser 2008); passing through the 1980s' critiques and innovations within Anthropology departments in the US, as described by Orin Starn:

Anthropology appeared to be an avenue for further involvement in social change, the discipline most concerned with the predicament of Indians, peasants, the urban poor, and the rest of a global society's dispossessed majorities. As a graduate student at Stanford University, I found that many other students wanted to transcend what critics of the 1960s and 1970s has begun to charge was a disciplinary legacy of apathy and sometimes complicity with imperialism, even more so in the atmosphere of peril and possibility of the Reagan years with the advances of feminism, the onset of AIDS, the global upheaval from South Africa to Central America. We covered the "Left-Wing Lounge" of the anthropology department with posters of Mandela and Sandino and a silk screen of Karl

⁴ I further elaborate those traditions in the Forth Semester Paper, entitled "The Nexus of Research and Action: From the Seminar to the Squat", requirement of the Anthropology PhD program at UNC-CH, as well as in the conference paper presented at the *Congreso de Antropologia de Espana*, San Sebastian, Septiembre 2008, entitled "Metodologias Disidentes".

⁵ From a series of community-based applied health research came out one of the most referenced contributions linking ethnography to participatory research, the seven volumes of *The Ethnographer's Toolkit* (1999).

⁶ Another recent example born out of young critical anthropologists in Spain just formed called *AntroLab: Red de Antropologias Criticas* (<http://invisibel.net/antrolab>)

Marx that I had bought in San Francisco's Chinatown. The ideal of an anthropology of change underwrote friends' choices about what to study: feminist organizing in India and Nepal, squatter settlements in Mexico City, the struggle over Indian rights in Nicaragua, the U.S. sanctuary movement for war refugees from Central America. The traditional focus on "the primitive" [] had led anthropologists to seek out for study the most "untouched" []. We were motivated by a self-conscious and sometimes self-righteous wish to reverse this history by researching upheaval and mobilization in the Third World and the United States. As part of this vision, the anthropologist would not just study but seek to support the struggle for change, and it seemed to us complicit with power to claim the Olympian remove of scientific objectivity. Our hope was to reinvent anthropology by embracing values of accountability, activism and engagement (1999: 6, 7)

This upheaval, demanding a more engaged and non-authoritarian discipline, was captured by a series of path breaking anthropological publications such as *Writing Culture* (1986), *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1999) and *Women Writing Culture* (1995). This is part of the broader turn towards reflexivity that marked the basis for a practice of fieldwork and writing sensitive to the politics of representation (Aull Davies 1999). However, this claim of supporting struggles through the practice of reflexivity has also been put into question. In fact, much self-criticism about the excesses of reflexivity and its limits at supporting the 'Other' has zeroed in on how it actually reinforces an artificial boundary between researcher and researched (Probyn 1993). These debates have been the source of multiple instances of "ethnographic anxiety" (Murphy 2006).

According to Hale, reflexivity is not enough in and of itself to make scholarship engaged (2008). He poses a division in the field between, on the one hand, *activist research* in which anthropologists are seen as engaged scholars or action-oriented because they are working explicitly *for* social movements; and, on the other, *cultural critique*, in which researchers also stake a political position, but are working in the realm of academic literatures to deconstruct and complexify dominant or hegemonic visions of the real. This controversial dichotomy has

prompted a series of responses. One of them eloquently provides a solution to such a dilemma. Michal Osterweil, as “part of a new generation of social movement scholarship that maintains dual loyalties both to academia and to activism” (Kurzman 2008:11), advocates for a research practice that is able to introduce both: the refinement of “cultural critique“ as well as the spirit of collaboration and open solidarity of an engaged approach (Osterweil 2008).⁷ She is invested in developing a rubric for a networked ethnographic approach. This approach challenges the traditional divisions between researcher/and object of research, but at the same time refuses easy notions of complete horizontality or equivalence in which the researcher is identical to his/her object of study. Instead, she argues for recognizing the flat, dispersed, multi-scalar spaces of knowledge production in which anthropological knowledge is not equivalent to that of the movement, but one meaningful part of a complex network of (potentially) movement- relevant-knowledges.⁸

However, going beyond the questions of engaged scholarship vs. “refined scholarship” as the overarching ethical framework of anthropological research, it is time to zoom in on the very materiality of the ethnographic practice, as Tomaskova has called for (2007). Looking at the anthropological method par excellence, there have been numerous attempts at developing modes of ethnographic engagement attuned to action and collaboration, beyond or in tandem with politics of representation. This is the case of “critical ethnography” and its argument for a more collaborative enterprise (Foley and Valenzuela 2005); as well as Madison’s emphasis on the

⁷ In the same vein, Michal Osterweil together with her colleagues, Dana Powell and myself, are organizing a panel for the AAA 2009 entitled “Knowledge-Objects: Politicizing Ethnographies of the Complex”.

⁸ Also, these three PhD candidates are working with Arturo Escobar in a chapter for the edited volume “Transnational Ethnographies” around similar methodological theoretical proposals for a different politics of ethnographic research mindful of the knowledge turn afoot both in society at large, social theory and its concomitant turn in the arena of social movements.

potentials of ethnography's performative aspects (2005). In reference to feminist ethnography, early experimental feminist ethnographies as described in *Women Writing Culture* (1995) move a step forward from the call to reflexive ethnography (Davis 1999). Anthropologists such as Ruth Landes, Zora N. Hurston, Ella Deloria and Mourning Dove not only used highly refined modes of self-reflexive writing, but also engaged in solid political projects at advancing women, minority and class-based struggles (Cole 1995; Hernandez 1995; Finn 1995) as a method per se is based on the epistemological principles of standpoint epistemology and situated knowledge. Despite being object of intense self-critique, this foundation is said to allow for an ethnography that erases pretensions of hierarchical authority, and advances the potential of a more productive encounter among anthropological knowledges and other knowledges, usually in struggle, and the building of inter-subjective relationships (Abu-Lughod 1993; Gordon 1993; Visweswaran 1994).

In the same vein, participant observation as one of the methods on which the ethnographic approach relies, has also been re-qualified as "engaged observation" (Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006) or "observant participation" (Lorenzi 2008). This speaks to the increased merging between anthropology and activism, where a generation of activists are taking their own experiences as source, field and framework for their anthropological work. For instance, direct action and the consensus process as practices of global justice movements are analyzed by anthropologists who are also long-term participants themselves within those groups: Graeber in New York Direct Action Network (2007, 2008); Casas in Chicago Direct Action Network (2008); Juris in Movimiento Resistencia Global- Barcelona (2008) or Daro in different counter-summits and Really Really Free Markets (2009). The explicit or "felt" presence of first-person accounts becomes not a reflexive mode of engagement with the *Other*, but an intense narrative about one's

experiences and commitments as source for theorizing these moments and methodologies. Taking the author's experience as the point of departure speaks to the traditions of auto-ethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997) and native anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991). However, these activist ethnographies might differ from those traditions in the moment the self is not just an individual, but normally evokes a collective and the wider networks in which such activist group operates. While in the different traditions of auto-ethnography the first person is articulated in singular; in the emerging genre of activist ethnography, the first person becomes plural.

Some of the tentative attempts at resolving the dilemma of a situated ethnographic engagement on the part of the activist-anthropologist range from the "militant ethnographer" (Juris 2007) to a "relational/flat mode of engagement" (Casas, Osterweill and Powell 2008). In contrast with the total identification of the militant ethnographer with a given political group, a relational approach advocates for an acknowledgement of the distinct positions and singularities at play although sharing a common concern or problematic. The methods chapter advances this last proposition by advocating "research as knitting and translation". While admitting the singularity of positions and situated knowledges stemming from those particular sites of enunciation, the research endeavor attempts an actual articulation among those nodes, facilitating paths of communication. This would ideally advance the political goal of supporting and branching out networks among different struggles, embracing the logic of proliferation and contagion of radical ideas and practices through the tool of ethnography.

This brief review is intended to set the stage for engaging the practice of activist research not as an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader constellation of traditions of research for

social transformation.⁹ The current wave of activist research or *investigacion militante* is indeed mindful of antecedents and previous experiences of knowledge for transformation. Taking research out of the laboratory for social justice purposes has a long trajectory, they say. Without claiming newness for this practice, the prologue to a collection of essays on activist research, entitled *Nociones Comunes*¹⁰, explores a series of historical antecedents of movement-based inquiry, focusing on four traditions linked to previous cycles of struggle:

Certainly, these questions are not new, although the context in which they are asked may be. In fact, many of the current experiments that are asking these questions, have looked back, searching for historical references. They are searching for those examples where the production of knowledge was immediately and fruitfully linked to processes of self-organization and struggle. In this sense, four inspirational tendencies are identifiable in recent history: worker inquiries and co-research; feminist epistemology and women's consciousness-raising groups; institutional analysis; and participatory action research or PAR. All of these examples, deserve (due to the wealth of accumulative experience) at least a brief overview, in the style of a historical *excursus* that allows us to situate current discussions and trajectories of militant and/or action research. (Malo 2004: 2, author's translation)

These examples coming mainly from Italy, US, France, Latin America and South Asia, further explained in the prologue of *Nociones Comunes*, are certainly not a total list. Neither this referential book among militant researchers nor its prologue attempts to be comprehensive in their examples. Rather, the collection is evocative of the long-standing tradition of knowledge for action. While this first section reviewed some of the traditions of engaged research from the perspective of the discipline of Anthropology, this second section engages with a parallel

⁹ This review does not pretend to be comprehensive; rather it reflects the schools of thought where I am situated, including my own PhD training in Anthropology and the interdisciplinary working groups at UNC and Duke I am participating in at the time of writing.

¹⁰ *Nociones Comunes* is a collection of contemporary militant research projects, edited by a member of *Precarias a la Deriva*. It is prefaced by what has become a quite referential text, translated into different languages (we ourselves did the English translation thanks to UPCS funds) and widely distributed. The preface is authored by Marta Malo, a prolific writer member of PD and participant in many other political projects in Madrid, Spain and broader European networks. For further reading of the English version of this Preface see: <http://transform.eicpc.net/transversal/0406/malo/en>

phenomenon at politicizing research, or rather, reinventing politics through research: the current wave of activist, or rather, *autonomous research*.

3.2. Activist Research as embodiment of autonomous politics

Buenos Aires 2002

One of the most intense milestones of the global justice movement was the effervescence of autonomous movements in Argentina during the national crisis starting with the government's failure to pay its debt to the IMF in late 2001. The *piqueteros* and neighborhood assemblies were the source of inspiring images and concrete techniques such as the *cacerolada* or re-appropriated factories that subsequently traveled among movements' worldwide.¹¹ The Argentine militant research group *Colectivo Situaciones* registered and analyzed the events considering their research work as "a series of interventions" throughout the different scenarios and political processes (SWMG workshop, Chapel Hill 2009). Their writings also traveled globally becoming a key reference for the current round of militant research practice. The first time I encountered an activist group directly embracing research as a constituent trait of their struggle was in Buenos Aires. We were participating in the Argentinean Social Forum which was held at the National University in downtown BA. We were presenting on a panel about autonomous activism, bringing examples from US movements to the fore. After our talk, we met with one member from *Colectivo Situaciones* at a "cafeteria bonarense". Coffee shops in Buenos Aires are conceived as spaces to talk for a long time, so we enjoyed a lively conversation with good coffee, water and orange juice with a small pastry for free. This is the first time we heard about "an

¹¹ The book *Genealogia de una Revuelta* by Raul Zibechi (2003); the film *The Take* by Naomi Klein and the web-based news *Argentina Indymedia* were key to spreadign the Argentine revolt worldwide, sparking solidarity actions and networks in many cities.

inquiry without object”. After that conversation we realized how the many booklets, zines and other publications by this group –self-defined as “militant researchers” – were circulating among many different activist spaces in Buenos Aires. We took much of this material back to Chicago where we were working at the time and also to Spain during family visits, to both read it carefully and share it with activist initiatives that were emerging in the wake of global justice counter-summits. Traveling with their material as well as engaging in the task of dissemination and translation (from Spanish to English), made *Situaciones*’ work part and parcel of our political and intellectual trajectory. Since then, we have crossed paths with *Situaciones* again in Porto Alegre, Brazil, during the 2005 edition of the World Social Forum where five members of the SMWG participated in a series of international workshops on activist research; in Chapel Hill, USA, where they were read in 2004 and also invited by the SMWG in 2009; and finally in Madrid, where during my fieldwork, the participation from *Situaciones* was required in many of the numerous booklets and collective projects launched by Precarias.

By developing a series of methodological experiments, activist research groups, such as *Colectivo Situaciones*, focus on exploring emerging sets of conditions, possibilities of networking and sites of intervention. These researchers speak from a situated position: from within, and supporting the success of, particular struggles. However, is this political commitment with a particular cause what distinguishes this activist wave of inquiry from other research initiatives within social movements? Research initiatives with political goals tend to share a similar understanding of knowledge as intrinsically linked to action and vice versa. In this sense, many experiences emphasize the political practicality of knowledge production and its consequent possible strategic use. However, while previous and current initiatives share this idea

of a tactical use of research findings, conceiving of research itself as a tool of struggle, I contend that some initiatives of contemporary militant inquiry go a step forward. It is not solely one more component of struggle among the many resources of a movement's repertoire. Rather, research is taken as a permanent ethic, a way of thinking, acting and being. In a way, research becomes the raw material for politics. This implies a re-definition of activist or militant identities as researchers, what I evocatively call "the becoming research of militancy". This intimate connection between subjectivity, politics, and research speaks to many of the principles of the knowledge turn, which are perhaps not so present (or self-consciously present) in other traditions of engaged research.

If politics is so central to the production of knowledge, identifying the notion of the political behind research practices might illuminate in part what makes a tradition distinct from others. This section identifies a series of specific traits to the politics of activist research (AR): what distinguishes traditions of engaged scholarship from AR? All share the ethical concern for justice, experimental methods of collaboration and a careful attention to politics of representation. Furthermore, what is different in the trend of AR when comparing it with previous or parallel initiatives at conducting research within and by other social movements? The task of identifying a particular political rationale to AR is impossible to do without addressing some of the political logics of the broader movement in which AR is inserted, that is, the global justice movement, and specifically its more Zapatista-inspired branches. These movements are

based on the logic and practices associated to autonomous politics.¹² Going through different traits, I highlight how AR appropriates and translates the political logic of *autonomy* -as practiced by the Zapatistas and other contemporary movements- into the terrain of knowledge production. The singularity of AR is then the result of a combination of the following autonomous traits: 1) research as a series of *interventions* in *everyday life* that *prefigure* alternative worlds; 2) research conducted from an autonomous site of enunciation, meaning self-organized and located *within and against* capital or state sponsored spaces; 3) research premised under the re-conceptualization of *struggles as subjects* and oriented towards the production of *affect*; 4) a goal towards network building through *decentralized collective work*, free distribution and non-vanguard knowledge production; and 5) research based on *permanent questioning*. Building on earlier conceptualizations of militant research (especially by *Colectivo Situaciones*), the following characterization has grown out of my own engagement with global justice movements and various militant research projects.

3.2.1. Research as interventionist, everyday and pre-figurative politics

Autonomous logics in the broad sense, as embraced and practiced by a variety of past and contemporary movements, often practice a politics of immediacy. Instead of working towards a hypothetic revolution that would bring along a utopian world, they emphasize the urgency of ‘here and now’. This notion of social transformation is developed through an interventionist

¹² Briefly stated, for the sake of this argument since a fully engagement would go beyond the scope of this work, *autonomy* refers to a political vision and modus operandi defined by key words such as direct democracy, pre-figurative politics, horizontality, self-organization, within and against, antagonism, direct action, self-representation and counter-power. See *Cuadernos de Autonomia* (2001). Autonomous practices have a long trajectory among anti-systemic movements in many countries. Today, it is associated with youth groups, mainly those deeply influenced by global justice movements and the Zapatistas, such as social centers, free software/copyleft projects and recuperated factories.

understanding of actions; a mode of everyday activism and a sense of pre-figurative politics.¹³

The logic of intervention is embraced by many global justice collectives, and is an especially explicit politics among the most art-oriented groups:¹⁴

Over the course of the 1990s, the term "intervention" was increasingly used by politically engaged artists to describe their interdisciplinary approaches, which nearly always took place outside the realm of museums, galleries and studios. A decade later, these "interventionists" continue to create an impressive body of work that trespasses into the everyday world art that critiques, lampoons, interrupts, and co-opts, art that acts subtly or with riotous fanfare, and art that agitates for social change using magic tricks, faux fashion and jacked-up lawn mowers. In contrast to the sometimes heavy-handed political art of the 1980s, interventionist practitioners have begun to carve out compelling new paths for artistic practice, coupling hard-headed politics with a light-handed approach, embracing the anarchist Emma Goldman's dictum that revolutions and dancing belong together. The projects [...] whether they are discussions of urban geography, tents for homeless people, or explorations of current labor practices – are often seasoned with honey rather than vinegar (Media Release on *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*, MASS MoCA's summer exhibition, opening May 29, 2004)

Inspired by the Situationists and Emma Goldman's humorous understanding of political action, the interventionist logic implies a sense of unexpected and joyful interference in reality. Interventions are intended to operate on at least two levels: the world-system's politics and the micro-politics of the subject. Briefly put, the goal is to engage in social transformation through the engagement of everyday life and processes of *re-subjectification*. This understanding of politics is not restricted to the politicized art world, but rather, pervades the background of understanding of many contemporary movements (D'Ignazio 2005).

¹³ These notions of the political are not claimed to be new. Autonomous logics have a long and dispersed historical trajectory out of the scope of this research. It is important to mention though, that contemporary movements acknowledge those past experiences of autonomy as sources of inspiration. For a partial development of this history see anthropologist David Graeber's work *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004).

¹⁴ Some of the so-called "interventionists" I have been in contact with for this research are *YoMango*, *God Bless Graffiti Coalition*, *the Institute for Applied Autonomy*, *Pink Block*, *Institute of Infinite Small Things*, *16 Beaver Group*. Many of them participated in the edited volume *The Interventionists: Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (2004) and its subsequent exhibits depicted.

This understanding of political change is linked to yet another main pillar of autonomous global justice movements: what could be called “everyday activism” and the DIY or “do it yourself culture” (Van Meter et al. 2007). While many politicized individuals in the traditional left were critical of the system, many of their everyday habits were not expected to adjust to that critique. Most of the time, there was a delegating logic towards other actors to enact those required changes—mostly the state. Certain struggles of the 1960s and 1970s though insisted in a very direct correlation between discourse and everyday practice if one wanted to be politically coherent: for example, ecologists will call for vegetarianism/veganism and animal-free consumption patterns; anti-multinational activists will boycott corporate products through their own purchasing practices; feminists will bring a gender-attention to their everyday activities, from work routines to giving birth; etc. This logic of everyday activism has inspired many global justice activists, and has also been brought into the realm of knowledge production. Rather than conceiving of research as a concrete compartmentalized activity delegated to experts, it is time to conduct “in-house research”. This research on movements’ “own terms” takes participants’ everyday life as unique sources for radical inquiry into the interstices of the system. Instead of hiring others to do such work, research becomes one’s own permanent attitude embedded in everyday activities. Chapter 8 provides a graphic illustration of how research is practiced as an everyday ethics and routine.

Everyday interventionism runs parallel to yet another landmark of autonomous global justice movements, the question of “pre-figurative politics” (Sitrin 2004; Graeber 2002). Again, here the political also speaks to world changing *and* subject-making, starting from now and here. Desired for transformations have to be instantiated in our own practices today (Esteva 1997).

What does this understanding of politics mean for knowledge production? How does this notion of social change as continuous transformation get translated into processes of research? One of the main characteristics of activist research is that the procedures involved and the relations that are rendered during the research process then have to become an instantiation of the worlds one desires and is fighting for.

This emphasis on research as everyday activity, engaged in a continuous process of world-making, requires a material-based notion of knowledge. If “research militancy is a form of intervention” (Situaciones 2007: 76), it needs to base itself on an understanding of knowledge that is practice-oriented. In AR, the notion of knowledge might indeed be more intimately linked to embodiment and practice than in standard research traditions. As *Colectivo Situaciones* puts it:

“Research militancy does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics. For, insofar as we see thought as the thinking/doing activity that interrupts the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, thinking is immediately political. On the one hand, if we see politics as the struggle for freedom and justice, all politics involves thinking, because there are forms of thinking against established models implicit in every radical practice – a thought people carry out with their bodies” (2007: 75)

Militant research then opens the possibility for action, and thus the very task of world-making. This is how *Precarias a la Deriva* points to this ability in one of their definitions of activist research:

Militant research is the process by which we re-appropriate our capacity to create worlds fueled by a stubborn militant decision that a-prioris, should-bes and models (old or new) do not work [...] [militant research] interrogates, problematizes and *pushes the real* through a series of concrete procedures (2004: 92, my emphasis).

Holding to this understanding of research, contemporary militant research efforts at intervening in the real must then be quite conscious of their corresponding context and historical

specificity. Current research efforts by social movements are mindful of their role as knowledge producers in a specific historical context, especially when framed as ‘a burgeoning knowledge economy’. Given such a terrain of struggle, social movements then intentionally engage in the production of *counter-knowledges* with the goal of facilitating empowering and effective interventions:

“a peculiar proliferation of experiments with -and search among- the realms of thought, action and enunciation is found within social networks that seek to transform the current state of things (...). They are initiatives that explore: 1) how to break with ideological filters and inherited frameworks; 2) how to produce knowledge that emerges directly from the concrete analyses of the territories of life and cooperation, and experiences of uneasiness and rebellion; 3) how to make this knowledge work for social transformation; 4) how to make the knowledges that already circulate through movements’ networks operative; ...and finally, 5) how to appropriate our intellectual and mental capacities from the dynamics of labor, production of profit, and/or governmentality and how to ally them with collective (subversive, transformative) action, guiding them towards creative interventions” (Malo 2004: 1)

This reflects an explicit and antagonist enunciative position as knowledge producers on the part of social movements themselves. This direct embracing of knowledge production is made in the context of a so called knowledge economy. An illustrative case of research as an everyday form of politics, fighting in the context of a flexible knowledge economy, is the example of militant inquiry on precarity engaged in this dissertation. Facing a profound disquiet with the levels of dispersion and intense fragmentation lived by many flex workers in the ‘new economy’, research became a great device to not only make sense of current transformations, but as an experiential mechanism of aggregation: breaking isolation and promoting communicative practices among dispersed and fragmented subjects. In this way, rather than a tool, research for these movements is transformed into a foundational rock of militancy: “research as raw material of the political” *Precarias* announced as a conclusion of their first research project (Contrapoder

2005). Their research project, further elaborated upon in chapter 4, was intended to make labor transformations more understandable and somehow more bearable, allowing for both inhabiting *and* fighting new labor/existential conditions. The project was proclaimed to provide an opportunity of subjective transformation, to put an end to the permanent feeling of impotence and overwhelmed isolation, politicizing identities and reclaiming one's own everyday life as research material itself. *Precarias* would eloquently put it in these terms: "research as a collective search for a common lexicon to apprehend the real in a collective way" (PD 2004).

This transformative collective experience is product of investigating precarity in a distinct way, a way which is based on a notion of research as everyday and pre-figurative intervention. The purpose of militant research is not to communicate the 'true revolutionary path', rather it is about generating processes of articulation and subjective aggregation in the present moment, producing relationships and maintaining webs of alternative sociability. This goal responds to the urgency posed by a context defined by *Precarias* as "a deleuzian desert" or in Situaciones words, "an ontological reality of dispersion (social, spatial, temporal, subjective dispersion)" (2004: 90). The experience of fragmentation calls for practices that favor counter-inertias of aggregation and mutual support, militant research being one of those practices.

3.2.2. Research as production of affect and alternative sociabilities

If everyday subjective transformation is part and parcel of an autonomous politics, how does this concern translate into the realm of knowledge production? Conventional research requires an object, establishing clear limits between researchers vs. researched. In the case of studying with and about social movements, making the interlocutor into an object can deny the

possibility of transformation.¹⁵ On the contrary, rather than producing empowerment, this standard *modus operandi* reifies hierarchical relations and politics of vanguardism. Taking movements as the object of inquiry brings along a re-instating of hierarchies of knowledge: the role of passivity and ignorance represented by the object of study; and the role of bringers of change and authority by the researchers. Debates over the *coloniality of knowledge* are then a matter of concern for AR. Some experiments have deployed interventions at the micro-level in order to develop an elaborated critique of the object/subject divide and propose alternative modes of engagement. 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 a particular issue of common concern, the problematic becomes the *third object* to be analyzed by all the participants during a series of workshops (Interview CS, August 20, 2002). This methodology tries to articulate a subject-to-subject relationship, where both parties share knowledges and listen to each other 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 – via affordable publishing houses to be distributed among grassroots groups and beyond. One of the booklets that had a broader circulation is *Hipotesis 891* authored by *Colectivo Situaciones* and the unemployed worker group called *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTD) de Solano*. The text is based on a long-term series of workshops held between *Situaciones* and one of the most creative piquetero groups during the period of highest

¹⁵ The question of anti-objectualizing research is pertinent when the topic of inquiry revolves around the very struggles. This differs from other kind of militant research experiences that “look up”: including certain activist cartographies, watch dog groups and power structure analyses (Mayo 2004). There is actually a line of division between militant researchers: on the one hand, those committed to investigating power structures in need of an objectualizing gaze; and on the other hand, those who defend the transformative potential of engaging their own struggles, not as object but subject of their research (Casas 2007).

social unrest. In this case, the work of the militant researchers was to identify the question that was floating in the air, which according to them, would be able to articulate new political formations and renovate social imaginaries. The question arose from the conversations during the workshops: is our demand as unemployed to recuperate our job? what would it mean to go beyond waged labor? How would society look? *Situaciones* and *MTD Solano* worked together to theorize this emerging relationship towards waged labor. This is how one of the unemployed workers, participant in the workshops and publication, expressed herself about *Situaciones*:

“We don’t know of any other academic projects that operate in the way they do. In their thinking, in their writing, they allow the struggles to speak by themselves, our experiences are not interpreted” (Neka Jara from *MTD-Solano*, Chapel Hill November 14, 2004).

Situaciones claims that militant research is an inquiry *without* object, in that regard.¹⁶ The rejection of the violence imposed by processes of objectification into social struggles is one of the key traits of militant research. The actual reframing of the object as subject conveys profound instances of re-subjectification for all those involved in the research process:

“Research militancy is not the name of the experience of someone who does research, but that of the production on an encounter without subjects, or if you prefer, of an encounter that produces subjects” (*Situaciones* 2007: 81)

Even if militant research is quite mindful about the very process of inquiry, one might query about the awareness of power differentials among the different parties involved.

¹⁶ Looking carefully at some of the examples of militant research, I would add that in fact there is actually a displacement of the objectualizing gaze towards other spheres beyond the movements themselves. For instance, *Situaciones*’ workshops bring together two different populations by a third object of study which is a shared concern for the two involved parties; *Precarias a la Deriva*’s approach of “partir de si”, focusing on themselves, takes their own experience as object of study; *counter-mappings of migration* (see *Migmap* 2006, and *Fadaiat* 2004) take the border regime, including control technologies and migration related institutions as the object to be studied and mapped, rather than the migrant populations themselves; the *Counter Cartographies Collective* (2006, 2007) focuses on the university, including faculty, students and staff as situated subjects within that object.

Nonetheless, the mode of engagement is at least to be notably relational, intentionally oriented towards building alternative sociabilities:

“Militant researchers work towards making the elements of a noncapitalist sociability more potent. This requires them to develop a particular type of relation with the groups and movements they work with. Following Spinoza, Colectivo Situaciones calls this relation “composition”. Composition defines relations between bodies. It does not refer to agreements established at a discursive level but to the multidimensional *flows of affect and desire* the relationship puts in motion” (Souza and Holdren 2007: 77, my emphasis).

The relationship that supposedly emerges among the involved parties is defined as *composition*, also being referred to by more bodily and affective tones, such as *friendship* and even *love*:¹⁷

Is it possible to engage in such research without at the same time setting in motion a process of *falling in love*? How would a tie between two experiences be possible without a strong feeling of *love* or *friendship*? Certainly, the experience of research militancy resembles that of the person in love, on condition that we understand by *love* that which a long philosophical tradition – the materialist one – understands by it: that is, not something that just happens to one with respect to another but a process which, in its constitution, *takes* two or more. Such a love relation *participates* without the mediation of an intellectual decision: rather, the existence of two or more finds itself pierced by this shared experience. This is not an illusion, but an authentic experience of anti-utilitarianism, which converts the ‘own’ into the ‘common’ (Situaciones 2003).

This shared experience of affect is proposed as a counterpoint to abstraction and individuality. Again, in Situaciones terms: “This love – or friendship – constitutes itself as a relation that renders undefined what until that moment was kept as individuality, composing a figure integrated by more than one individual body (...) That is why we consider this *love* to be a

¹⁷ This meaning comes from the first instance where the figure of militant research was defined in *Política y Situación: de la potencia al contrapoder*. (2000) By Miguel Benasayag y Diego Stulwark. Ediciones de Mano en Mano.

condition of militant research” (2003).¹⁸ That relationship is thought as a process of mutual empowerment, and not of teaching:

“Militant research does not teach, at least not in the sense of an explanation which assumes the stupidity and powerlessness of those it explains to. Research militancy is a composition of wills, an attempt to create power (potential) of everyone involved. Such a perspective is only possible by admitting from the beginning that one does not have answers, and by doing so, abandoning the desire to lead others, to be seen as the expert” (Souza and Holdren 2007: 79).

This process of re-inventing roles and re-arranging positions of authority might certainly develop differential “empowerments” and informal knowledge hierarchies. Yet, at the level of intentions, militant research attempts to disestablish the expert figure and the regime of expertise as a whole.¹⁹ This challenging enterprise is in large part founded in the forceful claim that social movements are knowledge producers, ultimately posing the questions of who produces knowledge, for what, and for whom:

According to James Scott, the point of departure of radicality is physical, practical, social resistance. Any power relation of subordination produces encounters between the dominant and the dominated. In these spaces of encounter, the dominated exhibit a *public discourse* that consists in saying that which the powerful would like to hear, reinforcing the appearance of their own subordination, while – silently – in a space *invisible* to power, there is the production of a world of *clandestine knowledges (saberes)* which belongs to the experience of micro-resistance and insubordination. (Situaciones 2003)

This led us into the question of how these knowledges are produced and also distributed.

Is the campesino leader the sole artifice of elaborated speeches? Or is the committed intellectual

¹⁸ The connection between knowledge and love has been made by religious approaches such as Zen or Liberation Theology; also by biologists such as Maturana and Varela; feminist geographers such as Gibson and Graham; and extensively developed by feminists of color of the US such as Anzaldúa and Keating via their concept of “technologies of crossing” (2002).

¹⁹ This questioning of expert knowledge and regimes of expertise has clear Foucaultian resonances.

in solidarity with the workers movement the one who writes books? And under what conditions are those speeches and books circulating and being distributed? The social movements where activist research projects are hosted reject any kind of expression of vanguard or leadership. This so called *anti-authoritarian* philosophy is well engrained among autonomous movements and has its correlations in how the production of knowledge is conceived, conducted and circulated. This is the topic of the next section.

3.2.3. *Movements' Networking through Knowledge Production*

Militant research is said to be born out of dual distrust towards institutions of expert knowledge production as well as towards leftist vanguard politics. According to AR practitioners, there is a relationship of friction and tension between these different forms of knowledge production:

Throughout contemporary history, it is possible to trace a persistent distrust, on the part of movements for social transformation, towards certain forms of knowledge production and distribution. On the one hand, a distrust towards those sciences that aid a better organization of command and exploitation, as well as distrust towards the mechanisms of capture of *minor knowledges* (underground, fermented in uneasiness and insubordinations, fed by processes of autonomous social cooperation or rebelliousness)²⁰ on the part of those agencies in charge of guaranteeing governability. On the other hand, in many cases, there has been distrust towards those supposedly “revolutionary” ideological and iconic forms of knowledge and a distrust of possible intellectualist and idealist mutations of knowledges that initially were born at the heart of the movements themselves. This distrust has lead to impotence in some occasions (Malo 2004: 4).

According to this view, both in the case of expert knowledge as well as in the case of revolutionary knowledge, what is at stake is the capturing of knowledges under the mechanisms of individual authorship and copy-right distribution. In contrast with the logic of capture, or what

²⁰ About the notion of minor knowledges, see works by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially, *Mil Mesetas. Capitalismo y Esquizofrenia*, [*A Thousands Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*] PreTextos, Valencia, 1997

some have called “enclosure of knowledge” (Shukaitis 2009; *Compartir es bueno* 2008) militant research advocates for knowledge production authored by collective struggles themselves and free circulation of ideas. Militant research products in that sense are conceived from the get go to be used in a multiplicity of arrangements: from squatted buildings to union meetings to graduate seminars to grant applications. Such a desire of multiple uses and broad dispersion of the intellectual material clashes with the enclosure logic held by powerful publishing industries and their requirements around intellectual property for the fulfillment of profit making and the production of experts. In order to deal with the concern of modes of distribution, militant research results are under anti copy-right licenses, humorously named as *copy-left* licenses. These licenses allow for different forms of free re-usage and distribution.

The following chapters further develop this publishing practice. Here it is important to emphasize the radical difference with standard modes of publication by embracing a very controversial distribution practice, even in legal terms. This does not exclude participating in formal academic journals or major newspapers though. Additionally, there are also other specific channels of distribution such as the reliance on social movements’ own publishing houses (*Traficantes de Sueños* in Madrid or *Ediciones de mano en mano* and *Tinta Limón* in Buenos Aires) which are relatively fast in terms of publication launching. Their publications are quite stylish due to the regular involvement of designers (professional or not), and they are intentionally affordable. Formats range from paper cover books to small booklets, websites, DVDs, maps and public events.²¹ As part of these self-published products, there is also the

²¹ Some of the publications on militant research thus far are mono-graphics about a particular research project (eg. booklets by *Situaciones*; 700 pages textbook by *Observatorio Metropolitano* or collage-publication by PD) and others are edited volumes compiling different militant research experiences worldwide (*Nociones Comunes* and *Constituent Imagination*).

practice of ‘writing prefaces’ about each other’s work. Through prefacing, one collective engages with other’s work obtaining a regular sense of being mutually informed about ongoing projects. The multiple networking practices among the research collectives then range from preface writing to publishing each others’ work, to mutual visits to co-authorship. This speaks to how the practice of knowledge production itself has a potentiality of generating networks. The collectives are spread throughout different cities, countries and continents at this point, and are often articulated via decentralized networks in contact by email, international encounters, publication projects or mutual visits. Networking through knowledge production then is channeled by new technologies but also through more traditional practices such as sharing books, prefacing, personal exchanges. Nonetheless, the novel point is that there is an explicit politics of contagion, learning from each other and allowing ideas to travel, even to be copied and pasted. Usually, but not always, this logic of contagion tries to be aware of the specificities of each place and situation. While arguing for its specificity, in many ways these networking practices reflect university based networking. Perhaps the biggest difference here deals precisely with intellectual property and how to facilitate the spread and re-use of ideas in different context or by different groups.

This embracing of contagion, coping and tinkering as methods speaks to the attempt towards building a non-professionalized sense of the militant research practitioner. According to Holmes, the following would be the sole requirements to become a militant research collective:

[...] there is no intellectual privilege in the activist domain. Activist-researchers can contribute to a short, middle and long-term analysis of the crisis, by examining and inventing new modes of intervention at the micro-political scales where even the largest social movements begin. Who can play this great game? Whoever is able to join or form a *meshwork* of independent researchers. What are the prices, the terrains, the wagers and

rules? Whichever ones your group finds most productive and contagious. How does the game continue, when the ball goes out of your field? Through shared meeting in a meshwork of meshwork, through collective actions, images, projects, and publications” (2007: 43, my emphasis)

Yet, despite the horizontal connotations of *meshwork*, power relations exist within all kind of networks. This is not always openly recognized in the literature by activist researchers, although it is informally acknowledged how certain groups become more relevant nodes, hubs of some sort, within the net. The issue here is how to think about power in networks in ways that potentate, rather than vitiate, network dynamics. Nonetheless, the networking practices engaged by activist research practitioners directly speak to a desire for the democratization of knowledge. This is so specifically in two ways. First, by the development of certain infrastructures (eg. licencing procedures and autonomous publishing houses) there is an actual attempt at freeing ideas and information from current processes of knowledge enclosure. Second, the engagement with a series of concrete procedures of mutual exchange (eg. preface writing and co-authored collections) generates collaborative spaces of communication²² among research groups and beyond. If democratization of knowledge is then a concern for activist research, what are the spaces of production more adequate to respond to such aspirations? What kind of institutional or non-institutional affiliations do these initiatives work from?

3.2.4. Autonomous Spaces of Enunciation

²² However, communication is a controversial term for militant researchers. Both *Situaciones* and *Precarias* problematize the notion of communication and prefer to talk about *resonances*: “Communication produces abstractions of experience. The experience itself can only be lived [...] There is however the possibility of resonances between struggles” (*Situaciones* 2007: 78).

They are asking how to communicate place-based experiences and struggles born out of specific situations without a ‘global standpoint’ but rather an immanent one: “Communication is enunciation from the bottom floor, form a particular place, a producer of subjectivity and imaginary; we are interested in a communication that is capable not so much of generating recruitment as it is of shaking and producing unexpected resonances in others, how also search and ask themselves questions; we are interested in a communication that is the composition of different and for that reason the production of a new real at the edge of the existing real” (PD 2007: 86).

Following my argument, activist research practices are strongly influenced by their conceptual kinship with *autonomous* politics. In terms of the relationship with well-established institutions related to the state, capital or official expertise, autonomous politics advocate for processes of self-organization based on a logic of *within and against*. This implies a self-awareness of a positioning within an institutional or systemic framework that is nonetheless attentive to institutional constraints. From that positionality, an autonomous politics attempts to develop a stance which can bypass those constraints, especially those tangential or contrary to movements' goals. However, given the numerous pressures experienced in the practice when working within or with an institution, many autonomous initiatives have turned to an explicit choice for a non-institutional location. Nonetheless, the possibilities remain open, without rejecting institutional collaboration from a priori. In fact, there are multiple examples of autonomous initiatives working for or in collaboration with official institutions. The premise of acting within the system's circuits being that transformation is not possible if coming from a total outside: first, because there is no such a thing as a total "outside to the system"; and second, because self-isolation is not helpful nor desired. However, they are also very firm about how being completely "within the system" is ineffective for change.²³

Where then does the production of knowledge from this kind of autonomous location takes place? Initiatives at militant research, either as long-term collectives or as temporal projects, are usually articulated beyond standard legal or institutional settings, outside regular structures such as political parties, government agencies, unions, universities or NGOs. They are, nonetheless, open to and often work in collaboration with institutional sites (for instance in the

²³ This political stance of *within and against* is supported by autonomous sister-notions such as "exodus", "antagonism" and "counter-power". See Graeber (2004) and *Colectivo Situaciones*, Toni Negri, John Holloway, Miguel Benasayag, Luis Matini, Horacio González, Ulrich Brandt (2001).

case of *Precarias*, they have worked with the municipality of Madrid, major universities and research institutes as well as educational programs of the European Union). Activist researchers work in tandem with other ‘experts’, accept institutional funds or take advantage of publishing venues. Following this autonomous and antagonistic spirit though, even if there are relationships with institutions, for the most part, militant research projects bypass and contest the regular modes of production and channels of distribution associated with ‘expert’ knowledge. Some of the key specificities of the practice of militant research are evident when contrasting them with knowledge produced under institutional logics. The pressures from university labor markets for career building, through the development of an individual name as symbolic capital, are often absent in militant research. It is true that while militant research is usually produced under collective names, there is also some individual authorship (Marta Malo, Marcelo Exposito, Emmanuel Rodriguez, and Cristina Vega being some prolific authors in Spain). These might result in instances of popularity, producing protagonist figures. However, the political goals will be still the main purpose of the writing, rather than building a name. While there might be projects oriented at combining political goals with professional concerns, important divergences are seen when compared with academic kinds of research:

As far from institutional procedures as it is from ideological certainties, the question is rather to organize life according to a series of hypotheses (practical and theoretical) on the ways to (self-) emancipation. To work in autonomous collectives that do not obey rules imposed by academia implies the establishment of a positive connection with subaltern, dispersed, and hidden knowledges, and the production of a body of *practical knowledges of counter power*. This is just the opposite of using social practices as a field of confirmation for laboratory hypotheses. Research militancy, then, is also the art of establishing compositions that endow with *potencia* the quests and elements of alternative sociability.

Academic research is subjected to a whole set of alienating mechanisms that separate researchers from the very *meaning* of their activity: they must accommodate their work to

determined rules, topics and conclusions. Funding, supervision, language requirements, bureaucratic red tape, empty conferences and protocol, constitute the conditions in which the practice of *official* research unfolds.

Militant research distances itself from those circuits of academic production – of course, neither opposing nor ignoring them. [...] Militant research attempts to work under alternative conditions, created by the collective itself and by the ties to counter power in which it is inscribed, pursuing its own efficacy in the production of knowledges useful to the struggles (Situaciones 2003).

Rather, by this embracing of non-institutional pressures (including its consequent lack of regular financial support), what militant researchers actually want to achieve is a place from which to speak with independence. This is why it is said that militant research attempts to build “autonomous spaces of enunciation” (Escobar 2009). From a decolonial perspective, this positioning allows AR to challenge not only the content, but “the very terms of the conversation”, to use a Mignolo’s expression (2000):

“Autonomous inquiry demands a rupture from the dominant cartographies. Both compass and coordinates must be reinvented if you really want to transform the dynamics of a changing world-system. Only by disorienting the self and uprooting epistemic certainties can anyone hope to inject a positive difference into the unconscious dynamics of the geopolitical order. How then can activist-researchers move to disorient the reigning maps, to transform the dominant cartographies, without falling into the never-never lands of aesthetic extrapolation? The problem of activist research is inseparable from its embodiment, from its social elaboration” (Holmes 2007: 41)

This *uprooting of epistemic certainties* speaks to the last trait being identified as constituent of the activist research practice, that is, the embracement of an epistemology of uncertainty and ontology of unfixity.

3.2.5. A Not-Knowing made out of Questions

The challenge for a different kind of politics, re-invigorated by the Zapatista uprising, has given birth to a variety of experiments with and theories of the real. One of the conceptual

mandates of this contemporary wave of autonomous politics is the Zapatistas' call to "caminar preguntando" or *ask while walking*. This call suggests a form of intervention, or rather, a mode of engagement, that is more a proposition than a totalizing solution; it encourages creativity and transformation and constantly puts itself into question, always ready to self-correct (Villasante 2006).²⁴ It is based on the practice of attentive listening (Other Campaign manifesto 2006). This Zapatista call has become one of the leading principles of militant research practice. In fact, there is even a metonymical use of this call to refer to militant research among European autonomous movements, becoming a clear inspiration for groups such as *Precarias*:

We think re-naming the world is central; and doing it from below, applying the Zapatista call to 'ask while walking' " (2004, public presentation at Universidad Internacional de Andalucía)

Again, how these political mandates of constant creativity, ability to self-correct and active listening translate into practices of knowledge production? First of all, it implies a research attitude not based on a complex set of *a priori* certainties, but on permanent questioning. This logic contrasts with many previous and current progressive movements, as militant researchers point out:

Unlike the political militant, for whom *politics always takes place in its own separate sphere*, the *researcher-militant* is a character made out of questions, not saturated by ideological meanings and models of the world. Nor is militant research a practice of '*committed intellectuals*' or of a group of 'advisors' to social movements. The goal is neither to politicize nor intellectualize the social practices. It is not a question of managing to get them to make a leap in order to pass from the social to 'serious politics' (Situaciones 2003).

²⁴ A brief and humorous engagement with the call for 'asking while walking' contends that this new form of doing politics resembles an intelligent system able to generate "collective construction of alternative and sustainable action and knowledge" in *Sentirse haciendo, caminar preguntando*, Tomas R. Villasante, in *Diagonal* n.27, 2006.

What is at stake is an embracing of a non-vanguard politics. It is important then to explicitly recognize that research is based on an attitude of “not-knowing”, pursuing an epistemology of uncertainty:

Militant research works neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be. On the contrary, the only condition for researcher-militants is a difficult one: to remain faithful to their ‘not knowing’. In this sense, it is an authentic *anti-pedagogy* (Situaciones 2003).

According to one of the members of *Colectivo Situaciones* speaking on a visit to the university of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, militant research is about “locating questions” (Diego Sztulwark, April 2009). Indeed, questions are at the heart of militant research practice. It is about detecting questions that are on the sphere of the real, questions that are coming from the everyday life of movements and sectors: for instance, the question of what to do when the unemployed do not want a regular waged job; or the question of how to conceive of a school for teachers that want something other than the conventional pedagogical model. Those questions become the main articulators of the research projects. They are not peripheral, but rather operate as enunciations and points of departure. This is the case of *Precarias*’ foundational question: “*what is your strike? What does your own strike look like?*” Coming from a situated experience, those questions are intended to provoke and *interpelar*²⁵ other subjects (PD 2004: 81) The embracing of research as “not knowing”, or better, the engagement with the Zapatista’s call for *asking while walking*, is an explicit mandate of militant research. However, rather than pessimist nihilism as a result of the impossibility of absolute knowledge, it bring along another

²⁵ To *compel* is the English translation of the Spanish term *interpelar*, however it does not seem to capture the meaning of putting someone’s common sense into question that *interpelar* entails.

political logic, other methodologies or, why not, a different theology²⁶: that of continuous searching and permanent experimentation.

Chapter 3

*Investigación Militante*²⁷

The Cultural Politics of Activist Research

Introduction

Processes of struggle and self-organization, especially those most vivid and dynamic, are fueled by an incentive to produce their own knowledges, languages and images. [...] The goal is that of creating an appropriate and operative theoretical horizon, very close to the surface of the 'lived', where the simplicity and concreteness of elements from which it has emerged, achieve meaning and potential (Malo 2004: 13).

It is no coincidence that some of the most explicit and well articulated claims about the importance of situated knowledge production in processes of social struggle are being put forward by movements themselves. In particular, activist research participants, such as the author of this quote and long term member of *Precarias a la Deriva*, are thinking through ways of producing knowledge which are based on experience (as well as reflection), away from pretensions of neutrality and individual genius as well as without searching for permanent absolute certainties. In a way, the claims advanced by the *knowledge turn* at the level of grand theory, are manifesting and developing themselves in the very terrain of social collective action.

²⁶ This is in reference to the similar spiritual thinking expressed in the Quaker and Liberation Theology based book *We Make the Road by Walking. Conversations on Education and Social Change* (1990)

²⁷ Spanish term for the practice of activist research among certain contemporary movements.

To say it differently, a knowledge turn might be simultaneously taking place at the level of social movements' practice. This should not be misread as saying that social movements did not produce knowledge in the past, they certainly did. Yet at the same time there is something distinct about the ways certain movements produce knowledge today. This chapter argues that this is the case of the current wave of activist research. It presents testimonies from different activist research practitioners about how they conceive of the intricacies of producing knowledge, how activist research works and what kind of epistemologies and ontologies are behind their specific procedures and goals.

The specificity of the practice of activist research is also claimed in relation to initiatives of engaged research originating in the academy. This dissertation then inserts itself within the methodological debates in the social sciences focusing on heterodox research approaches pursuing social transformation. The first section of this chapter, *The Prospects of Engaged Methodologies*, is a brief overview of scholarly traditions of committed research, zooming in on the discipline of Anthropology and the ethnographic method in particular. In the next section, *Activist Research as Embodiment of Autonomous Politics*, I offer a detailed discussion about the rationale and distinctive characteristics of activist or militant research as practiced by contemporary social movements. Based on the engagement with the material of several projects and collectives, especially *Precarias a la Deriva* and *Colectivo Situaciones*²⁸, I identify a series of traits constitutive of the practice of militant research: everyday politics, affect, within and against, meshworks, and permanent questioning. This section is mainly based on a careful

²⁸ *Colectivo Situaciones* is a Buenos Aires-based collective. This Argentine group is formed by independent researchers working in collaboration with different sectors of Argentinean social movements to investigate current problematics. Colectivo Situaciones coined the term “militant research” and their extensive work has become referential among the networks of activist researchers and Zapatista-oriented global justice movements. See <http://www.situaciones.org/>

reading of activist research material, selecting the most insightful quotations that speak directly about the nature of activist research.²⁹ The third section, *Towards a Distinct Community of Research Practice*, concludes how activist research initiatives are progressively more intertwined with each other and thus are forming a broader global community made out of decentralized networks and common research practices. These networks are growing over time and nurtured by collective projects and international gatherings such as the World Social Forum, continental conferences and mutual exchanges between particular groups. This chapter engages the practice of activist research in general terms, setting the stage for a more detailed engagement with the case of *Precarias a la Deriva* in chapter four.

3.1. The Prospects of Engaged Methodologies

Social and environmental justice has been at the heart of many scholarly projects and intellectual traditions within the academy. I am interested here in those that besides working from ethical concerns, pay careful attention to research methodologies themselves as a source for politicizing the practice of knowledge production per se. The following are some of the most prolific trends using engaged research methodologies: Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991); Decolonial Research (Tuhiwai 1999; Walsh 2009); and more broadly speaking, *engaged* or *activist scholarship* (Boyer 1990; Hale 2008). These are usually trans-disciplinary traditions, and despite the use of different terminologies, they share the basic principle of advancing social transformation and justice through the research process itself.

²⁹ This is when the ethnographer engages with the very products of these “writing machines” or “situated sources”, in this case being heterodox publications, the main cultural artifact of activist research communities. In order to evoke how this practice is made not only out of texts, but also of other *materialities*, I sporadically introduce ethnographic material speaking about sites of encounter and cross-pollination, places of production and infrastructures of distribution.

Within Anthropology, there have been different trends at developing engaged research: from the historical landmark of Sol Tax's Action-Anthropology (Bennet 1996; Foley 1999); to the path-breaking although often forgotten Black Feminist Engaged Anthropology (Harrison 1991; Gordon 1991; McClaurin 2001)³⁰; to the projects at engaged Medical Anthropology (Schensul 1999).³¹ Current collective initiatives within the discipline span from the PhD program in Activist Anthropology at the University of Texas (Hale 2001) to the project at developing a Center of Integrating Research and Action (CIRA) at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (Holland, Fox and Powell 2003), to the more international initiative of the World Anthropologies Network (WAN Collective 2005; Restrepo and Escobar 2005; Ribeiro and Escobar 2007).³²

In fact, the discipline has a long trajectory of a vocation for justice: from the beginnings of American Anthropology, with Boas and his mostly women disciples (Behar and Gordon 1995); to the ongoing political work of Latin-American anthropologists (Aparicio and Blaser 2008); passing through the 1980s' critiques and innovations within Anthropology departments in the US, as described by Orin Starn:

Anthropology appeared to be an avenue for further involvement in social change, the discipline most concerned with the predicament of Indians, peasants, the urban poor, and the rest of a global society's dispossessed majorities. As a graduate student at Stanford University, I found that many other students wanted to transcend what critics of the 1960s and 1970s has begun to charge was a disciplinary legacy of apathy and sometimes complicity with imperialism, even more so in the atmosphere of peril and possibility of

³⁰ I further elaborate those traditions in the Forth Semester Paper, requirement of the Anthropology PhD program at UNC-CH.

³¹ From a series of community-based applied health research came out one of the most referenced contributions linking ethnography to participatory research, the seven volumes of *The Ethnographer's Toolkit* (1999).

³² Another recent example born out of young critical anthropologists in Spain just formed called *AntroLab: Red de Antropologias Criticas* (<http://invisibel.net/antrolab>)

the Reagan years with the advances of feminism, the onset of AIDS, the global upheaval from South Africa to Central America. We covered the “Left-Wing Lounge” of the anthropology department with posters of Mandela and Sandino and a silk screen of Karl Marx that I had bought in San Francisco’s Chinatown. The ideal of an anthropology of change underwrote friends’ choices about what to study: feminist organizing in India and Nepal, squatter settlements in Mexico City, the struggle over Indian rights in Nicaragua, the U.S. sanctuary movement for war refugees from Central America. The traditional focus on “the primitive” [] had led anthropologists to seek out for study the most “untouched” []. We were motivated by a self-conscious and sometimes self-righteous wish to reverse this history by researching upheaval and mobilization in the Third World and the United States. As part of this vision, the anthropologist would not just study but seek to support the struggle for change, and it seemed to us complicit with power to claim the Olympian remove of scientific objectivity. Our hope was to reinvent anthropology by embracing values of accountability, activism and engagement (1999: 6, 7)

This upheaval, demanding a more engaged and non-authoritarian discipline, was captured by a series of path breaking anthropological publications such as *Writing Culture* (1986), *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1999) and *Women Writing Culture* (1995). This is part of the broader turn towards reflexivity that marked the basis for a practice of fieldwork and writing sensitive to the politics of representation (Aull Davies 1999). However, this claim of supporting struggles through the practice of reflexivity has also been put into question. In fact, much self-criticism about the excesses of reflexivity and its limits at supporting the ‘Other’ has zeroed in on how it actually reinforces an artificial boundary between researcher and researched (Probyn 1993). These debates have been the source of multiple instances of “ethnographic anxiety” (Murphy 2006).

According to Hale, reflexivity is not enough in and of itself to make scholarship engaged (2008). He poses a division in the field between, on the one hand, *activist research* in which anthropologists are seen as engaged scholars or action-oriented because they are working explicitly *for* social movements; and, on the other, *cultural critique*, in which researchers also

stake a political position, but are working in the realm of academic literatures to deconstruct and complexify dominant or hegemonic visions of the real. This controversial dichotomy has prompted a series of responses. One of them eloquently provides a solution to such a dilemma. Michal Osterweil, as “part of a new generation of social movement scholarship that maintains dual loyalties both to academia and to activism” (Kurzman 2008:11), advocates for a research practice that is able to introduce both: the refinement of “cultural critique“ as well as the spirit of collaboration and open solidarity of an engaged approach (Osterweil 2008).³³ She is invested in developing a rubric for a networked ethnographic approach. This approach challenges the traditional divisions between researcher/and object of research, but at the same time refuses easy notions of complete horizontality or equivalence in which the researcher is identical to his/her object of study. Instead, she argues for recognizing the flat, dispersed, multi-scalar spaces of knowledge production in which anthropological knowledge is not equivalent to that of the movement, but one meaningful part of a complex network of (potentially) movement- relevant-knowledges.³⁴

However, going beyond the questions of engaged scholarship vs. “refined scholarship” as the overarching ethical framework of anthropological research, it is time to zoom in on the very materiality of the ethnographic practice, as Tomaskova has called for (2007). Looking at the anthropological method par excellence, there have been numerous attempts at developing modes of ethnographic engagement attuned to action and collaboration, beyond or in tandem with

³³ In the same vein, Michal Osterweill together with her colleagues, Dana Powell and myself, are organizing a panel for the AAA 2009 entitled “Knowledge-Objects: Politicizing Ethnographies of the Complex”.

³⁴ Also, these three PhD candidates are working with Arturo Escobar in a chapter for the edited volume “Transnational Ethnographies” around similar methodological theoretical proposals for a different politics of ethnographic research mindful of the knowledge turn afoot both in society at large, social theory and its concomitant turn in the arena of social movements.

politics of representation. This is the case of “critical ethnography” and its argument for a more collaborative enterprise (Foley and Valenzuela 2005); as well as Madison’s emphasis on the potentials of ethnography’s performative aspects (2005). In reference to feminist ethnography, early experimental feminist ethnographies as described in *Women Writing Culture* (1995) move a step forward from the call to reflexive ethnography (Davis 1999). Anthropologists such as Ruth Landes, Zora N. Hurston, Ella Deloria and Mourning Dove not only used highly refined modes of self-reflexive writing, but also engaged in solid political projects at advancing women, minority and class-based struggles (Cole 1995; Hernandez 1995; Finn 1995) as a method per se is based on the epistemological principles of standpoint epistemology and situated knowledge. Despite being object of intense self-critique, this foundation is said to allow for an ethnography that erases pretensions of hierarchical authority, and advances the potential of a more productive encounter among anthropological knowledges and other knowledges, usually in struggle, and the building of inter-subjective relationships (Abu-Lughod 1993; Gordon 1993; Visweswaran 1994).

In the same vein, participant observation as one of the methods on which the ethnographic approach relies, has also been re-qualified as “engaged observation” (Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006) or “observant participation” (Lorenzi 2008). This speaks to the increased merging between anthropology and activism, where a generation of activists are taking their own experiences as source, field and framework for their anthropological work. For instance, direct action and the consensus process as practices of global justice movements are analyzed by anthropologists who are also long-term participants themselves within those groups: Graeber in New York Direct Action Network (2007, 2008); Casas in Chicago Direct Action Network (2008); Juris in Movimiento Resistencia Global- Barcelona (2008) or Daro in different counter-summits

and Really Really Free Markets (2009). The explicit or “felt” presence of first-person accounts becomes not a reflexive mode of engagement with the *Other*, but an intense narrative about one’s experiences and commitments as source for theorizing these moments and methodologies. Taking the author’s experience as the point of departure speaks to the traditions of auto-ethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997) and native anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991). However, these activist ethnographies might differ from those traditions in the moment the self is not just an individual, but normally evokes a collective and the wider networks in which such activist group operates. While in the different traditions of auto-ethnography the first person is articulated in singular; in the emerging genre of activist ethnography, the first person becomes plural.

Some of the tentative attempts at resolving the dilemma of a situated ethnographic engagement on the part of the activist-anthropologist range from the “militant ethnographer” (Juris 2007) to a “relational/flat mode of engagement” (Casas, Osterweill and Powell 2008). In contrast with the total identification of the militant ethnographer with a given political group, a relational approach advocates for an acknowledgement of the distinct positions and singularities at play although sharing a common concern or problematic. The methods chapter advances this last proposition by advocating “research as knitting and translation”. While admitting the singularity of positions and situated knowledges stemming from those particular sites of enunciation, the research endeavor attempts an actual articulation among those nodes, facilitating paths of communication. This would ideally advance the political goal of supporting and branching out networks among different struggles, embracing the logic of proliferation and contagion of radical ideas and practices through the tool of ethnography.

This brief review is intended to set the stage for engaging the practice of activist research not as an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader constellation of traditions of research for social transformation.³⁵ The current wave of activist research or *investigacion militante* is indeed mindful of antecedents and previous experiences of knowledge for transformation. Taking research out of the laboratory for social justice purposes has a long trajectory, they say. Without claiming newness for this practice, the prologue to a collection of essays on activist research, entitled *Nociones Comunes*³⁶, explores a series of historical antecedents of movement-based inquiry, focusing on four traditions linked to previous cycles of struggle:

Certainly, these questions are not new, although the context in which they are asked may be. In fact, many of the current experiments that are asking these questions, have looked back, searching for historical references. They are searching for those examples where the production of knowledge was immediately and fruitfully linked to processes of self-organization and struggle. In this sense, four inspirational tendencies are identifiable in recent history: worker inquiries and co-research; feminist epistemology and women's consciousness-raising groups; institutional analysis; and participatory action research or PAR. All of these examples, deserve (due to the wealth of accumulative experience) at least a brief overview, in the style of a historical *excursus* that allows us to situate current discussions and trajectories of militant and/or action research. (Malo 2004: 2, author's translation)

These examples coming mainly from Italy, US, France, Latin America and South Asia, further explained in the prologue of *Nociones Comunes*, are certainly not a total list. Neither this referential book among militant researchers nor its prologue attempts to be comprehensive in their examples. Rather, the collection is evocative of the long-standing tradition of knowledge for

³⁵ This review does not pretend to be comprehensive; rather it reflects the schools of thought where I am situated, including my own PhD training in Anthropology and the interdisciplinary working groups at UNC and Duke I am participating in at the time of writing.

³⁶ *Nociones Comunes* is a collection of contemporary militant research projects, edited by a member of *Precarias a la Deriva*. It is prefaced by what has become a quite referential text, translated into different languages (we ourselves did the English translation thanks to UPCS funds) and widely distributed. The preface is authored by Marta Malo, a prolific writer member of PD and participant in many other political projects in Madrid, Spain and broader European networks. For further reading of the English version of this Preface see: <http://transform.eicpcp.net/transversal/0406/malo/en>

action. While this first section reviewed some of the traditions of engaged research from the perspective of the discipline of Anthropology, this second section engages with a parallel phenomenon at politicizing research, or rather, reinventing politics through research: the current wave of activist, or rather, *autonomous research*.

3.2. Activist Research as embodiment of autonomous politics

Buenos Aires 2002

One of the most intense milestones of the global justice movement was the effervescence of autonomous movements in Argentina during the national crisis starting with the government's failure to pay its debt to the IMF in late 2001. The *piqueteros* and neighborhood assemblies were the source of inspiring images and concrete techniques such as the *cacerolada* or re-appropriated factories that subsequently traveled among movements' worldwide.³⁷ The Argentine militant research group *Colectivo Situaciones* registered and analyzed the events considering their research work as "a series of interventions" throughout the different scenarios and political processes (SWMG workshop, Chapel Hill 2009). Their writings also traveled globally becoming a key reference for the current round of militant research practice. The first time I encountered an activist group directly embracing research as a constituent trait of their struggle was in Buenos Aires. We were participating in the Argentinean Social Forum which was held at the National University in downtown BA. We were presenting on a panel about autonomous activism, bringing examples from US movements to the fore. After our talk, we met with one member from *Colectivo Situaciones* at a "cafeteria bonarense". Coffee shops in Buenos Aires are

³⁷ The book *Genealogia de una Revuelta* by Raul Zibechi (2003); the film *The Take* by Naomi Klein and the web-based news *Argentina Indymedia* were key to spreadign the Argentine revolt worldwide, sparking solidarity actions and networks in many cities.

conceived as spaces to talk for a long time, so we enjoyed a lively conversation with good coffee, water and orange juice with a small pastry for free. This is the first time we heard about “an inquiry without object”. After that conversation we realized how the many booklets, zines and other publications by this group –self-defined as “militant researchers” – were circulating among many different activist spaces in Buenos Aires. We took much of this material back to Chicago where we were working at the time and also to Spain during family visits, to both read it carefully and share it with activist initiatives that were emerging in the wake of global justice counter-summits. Traveling with their material as well as engaging in the task of dissemination and translation (from Spanish to English), made *Situaciones*’ work part and parcel of our political and intellectual trajectory. Since then, we have crossed paths with *Situaciones* again in Porto Alegre, Brazil, during the 2005 edition of the World Social Forum where five members of the SMWG participated in a series of international workshops on activist research; in Chapel Hill, USA, where they were read in 2004 and also invited by the SMWG in 2009; and finally in Madrid, where during my fieldwork, the participation from *Situaciones* was required in many of the numerous booklets and collective projects launched by Precarias.

By developing a series of methodological experiments, activist research groups, such as *Colectivo Situaciones*, focus on exploring emerging sets of conditions, possibilities of networking and sites of intervention. These researchers speak from a situated position: from within, and supporting the success of, particular struggles. However, is this political commitment with a particular cause what distinguishes this activist wave of inquiry from other research initiatives within social movements? Research initiatives with political goals tend to share a similar understanding of knowledge as intrinsically linked to action and vice versa. In this sense,

many experiences emphasize the political practicality of knowledge production and its consequent possible strategic use. However, while previous and current initiatives share this idea of a tactical use of research findings, conceiving of research itself as a tool of struggle, I contend that some initiatives of contemporary militant inquiry go a step forward. It is not solely one more component of struggle among the many resources of a movement's repertoire. Rather, research is taken as a permanent ethic, a way of thinking, acting and being. In a way, research becomes the raw material for politics. This implies a re-definition of activist or militant identities as researchers, what I evocatively call "the becoming research of militancy". This intimate connection between subjectivity, politics, and research speaks to many of the principles of the knowledge turn, which are perhaps not so present (or self-consciously present) in other traditions of engaged research.

If politics is so central to the production of knowledge, identifying the notion of the political behind research practices might illuminate in part what makes a tradition distinct from others. This section identifies a series of specific traits to the politics of activist research (AR): what distinguishes traditions of engaged scholarship from AR? All share the ethical concern for justice, experimental methods of collaboration and a careful attention to politics of representation. Furthermore, what is different in the trend of AR when comparing it with previous or parallel initiatives at conducting research within and by other social movements? The task of identifying a particular political rationale to AR is impossible to do without addressing some of the political logics of the broader movement in which AR is inserted, that is, the global justice movement, and specifically its more Zapatista-inspired branches. These movements are

based on the logic and practices associated to autonomous politics.³⁸ Going through different traits, I highlight how AR appropriates and translates the political logic of *autonomy* -as practiced by the Zapatistas and other contemporary movements- into the terrain of knowledge production. The singularity of AR is then the result of a combination of the following autonomous traits: 1) research as a series of *interventions* in *everyday life* that *prefigure* alternative worlds; 2) research conducted from an autonomous site of enunciation, meaning self-organized and located *within and against* capital or state sponsored spaces; 3) research premised under the re-conceptualization of *struggles as subjects* and oriented towards the production of *affect*; 4) a goal towards network building through *decentralized collective work*, free distribution and non-vanguard knowledge production; and 5) research based on *permanent questioning*. Building on earlier conceptualizations of militant research (especially by *Colectivo Situaciones*), the following characterization has grown out of my own engagement with global justice movements and various militant research projects.

3.2.1. Research as interventionist, everyday and pre-figurative politics

Autonomous logics in the broad sense, as embraced and practiced by a variety of past and contemporary movements, often practice a politics of immediacy. Instead of working towards a hypothetic revolution that would bring along a utopian world, they emphasize the urgency of ‘here and now’. This notion of social transformation is developed through an interventionist

³⁸ Briefly stated, for the sake of this argument since a fully engagement would go beyond the scope of this work, *autonomy* refers to a political vision and modus operandi defined by key words such as direct democracy, pre-figurative politics, horizontality, self-organization, within and against, antagonism, direct action, self-representation and counter-power. See *Cuadernos de Autonomia* (2001). Autonomous practices have a long trajectory among anti-systemic movements in many countries. Today, it is associated with youth groups, mainly those deeply influenced by global justice movements and the Zapatistas, such as social centers, free software/copyleft projects and recuperated factories.

understanding of actions; a mode of everyday activism and a sense of pre-figurative politics.³⁹

The logic of intervention is embraced by many global justice collectives, and is an especially explicit politics among the most art-oriented groups:⁴⁰

Over the course of the 1990s, the term "intervention" was increasingly used by politically engaged artists to describe their interdisciplinary approaches, which nearly always took place outside the realm of museums, galleries and studios. A decade later, these "interventionists" continue to create an impressive body of work that trespasses into the everyday world art that critiques, lampoons, interrupts, and co-opts, art that acts subtly or with riotous fanfare, and art that agitates for social change using magic tricks, faux fashion and jacked-up lawn mowers. In contrast to the sometimes heavy-handed political art of the 1980s, interventionist practitioners have begun to carve out compelling new paths for artistic practice, coupling hard-headed politics with a light-handed approach, embracing the anarchist Emma Goldman's dictum that revolutions and dancing belong together. The projects [...] whether they are discussions of urban geography, tents for homeless people, or explorations of current labor practices – are often seasoned with honey rather than vinegar (Media Release on *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*, MASS MoCA's summer exhibition, opening May 29, 2004)

Inspired by the Situationists and Emma Goldman's humorous understanding of political action, the interventionist logic implies a sense of unexpected and joyful interference in reality. Interventions are intended to operate on at least two levels: the world-system's politics and the micro-politics of the subject. Briefly put, the goal is to engage in social transformation through the engagement of everyday life and processes of *re-subjectification*. This understanding of politics is not restricted to the politicized art world, but rather, pervades the background of understanding of many contemporary movements (D'Ignazio 2005).

³⁹ These notions of the political are not claimed to be new. Autonomous logics have a long and dispersed historical trajectory out of the scope of this research. It is important to mention though, that contemporary movements acknowledge those past experiences of autonomy as sources of inspiration. For a partial development of this history see anthropologist David Graeber's work *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004).

⁴⁰ Some of the so-called "interventionists" I have been in contact with for this research are *YoMango*, *God Bless Graffiti Coalition*, *the Institute for Applied Autonomy*, *Pink Block*, *Institute of Infinite Small Things*, *16 Beaver Group*. Many of them participated in the edited volume *The Interventionists: Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (2004) and its subsequent exhibits depicted.

This understanding of political change is linked to yet another main pillar of autonomous global justice movements: what could be called “everyday activism” and the DIY or “do it yourself culture” (Van Meter et al. 2007). While many politicized individuals in the traditional left were critical of the system, many of their everyday habits were not expected to adjust to that critique. Most of the time, there was a delegating logic towards other actors to enact those required changes—mostly the state. Certain struggles of the 1960s and 1970s though insisted in a very direct correlation between discourse and everyday practice if one wanted to be politically coherent: for example, ecologists will call for vegetarianism/veganism and animal-free consumption patterns; anti-multinational activists will boycott corporate products through their own purchasing practices; feminists will bring a gender-attention to their everyday activities, from work routines to giving birth; etc. This logic of everyday activism has inspired many global justice activists, and has also been brought into the realm of knowledge production. Rather than conceiving of research as a concrete compartmentalized activity delegated to experts, it is time to conduct “in-house research”. This research on movements’ “own terms” takes participants’ everyday life as unique sources for radical inquiry into the interstices of the system. Instead of hiring others to do such work, research becomes one’s own permanent attitude embedded in everyday activities. Chapter 8 provides a graphic illustration of how research is practiced as an everyday ethics and routine.

Everyday interventionism runs parallel to yet another landmark of autonomous global justice movements, the question of “pre-figurative politics” (Sitrin 2004; Graeber 2002). Again, here the political also speaks to world changing *and* subject-making, starting from now and here. Desired for transformations have to be instantiated in our own practices today (Esteva 1997).

What does this understanding of politics mean for knowledge production? How does this notion of social change as continuous transformation get translated into processes of research? One of the main characteristics of activist research is that the procedures involved and the relations that are rendered during the research process then have to become an instantiation of the worlds one desires and is fighting for.

This emphasis on research as everyday activity, engaged in a continuous process of world-making, requires a material-based notion of knowledge. If “research militancy is a form of intervention” (Situaciones 2007: 76), it needs to base itself on an understanding of knowledge that is practice-oriented. In AR, the notion of knowledge might indeed be more intimately linked to embodiment and practice than in standard research traditions. As *Colectivo Situaciones* puts it:

“Research militancy does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics. For, insofar as we see thought as the thinking/doing activity that interrupts the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, thinking is immediately political. On the one hand, if we see politics as the struggle for freedom and justice, all politics involves thinking, because there are forms of thinking against established models implicit in every radical practice – a thought people carry out with their bodies” (2007: 75)

Militant research then opens the possibility for action, and thus the very task of world-making. This is how *Precarias a la Deriva* points to this ability in one of their definitions of activist research:

Militant research is the process by which we re-appropriate our capacity to create worlds fueled by a stubborn militant decision that a-prioris, should-bes and models (old or new) do not work [...] [militant research] interrogates, problematizes and *pushes the real* through a series of concrete procedures (2004: 92, my emphasis).

Holding to this understanding of research, contemporary militant research efforts at intervening in the real must then be quite conscious of their corresponding context and historical

specificity. Current research efforts by social movements are mindful of their role as knowledge producers in a specific historical context, especially when framed as ‘a burgeoning knowledge economy’. Given such a terrain of struggle, social movements then intentionally engage in the production of *counter-knowledges* with the goal of facilitating empowering and effective interventions:

“a peculiar proliferation of experiments with -and search among- the realms of thought, action and enunciation is found within social networks that seek to transform the current state of things (...). They are initiatives that explore: 1) how to break with ideological filters and inherited frameworks; 2) how to produce knowledge that emerges directly from the concrete analyses of the territories of life and cooperation, and experiences of uneasiness and rebellion; 3) how to make this knowledge work for social transformation; 4) how to make the knowledges that already circulate through movements’ networks operative; ...and finally, 5) how to appropriate our intellectual and mental capacities from the dynamics of labor, production of profit, and/or governmentality and how to ally them with collective (subversive, transformative) action, guiding them towards creative interventions” (Malo 2004: 1)

This reflects an explicit and antagonist enunciative position as knowledge producers on the part of social movements themselves. This direct embracing of knowledge production is made in the context of a so called knowledge economy. An illustrative case of research as an everyday form of politics, fighting in the context of a flexible knowledge economy, is the example of militant inquiry on precarity engaged in this dissertation. Facing a profound disquiet with the levels of dispersion and intense fragmentation lived by many flex workers in the ‘new economy’, research became a great device to not only make sense of current transformations, but as an experiential mechanism of aggregation: breaking isolation and promoting communicative practices among dispersed and fragmented subjects. In this way, rather than a tool, research for these movements is transformed into a foundational rock of militancy: “research as raw material of the political” *Precarias* announced as a conclusion of their first research project (Contrapoder

2005). Their research project, further elaborated upon in chapter 4, was intended to make labor transformations more understandable and somehow more bearable, allowing for both inhabiting *and* fighting new labor/existential conditions. The project was proclaimed to provide an opportunity of subjective transformation, to put an end to the permanent feeling of impotence and overwhelmed isolation, politicizing identities and reclaiming one's own everyday life as research material itself. *Precarias* would eloquently put it in these terms: "research as a collective search for a common lexicon to apprehend the real in a collective way" (PD 2004).

This transformative collective experience is product of investigating precarity in a distinct way, a way which is based on a notion of research as everyday and pre-figurative intervention. The purpose of militant research is not to communicate the 'true revolutionary path', rather it is about generating processes of articulation and subjective aggregation in the present moment, producing relationships and maintaining webs of alternative sociability. This goal responds to the urgency posed by a context defined by *Precarias* as "a deleuzian desert" or in Situaciones words, "an ontological reality of dispersion (social, spatial, temporal, subjective dispersion)" (2004: 90). The experience of fragmentation calls for practices that favor counter-inertias of aggregation and mutual support, militant research being one of those practices.

3.2.2. Research as production of affect and alternative sociabilities

If everyday subjective transformation is part and parcel of an autonomous politics, how does this concern translate into the realm of knowledge production? Conventional research requires an object, establishing clear limits between researchers vs. researched. In the case of studying with and about social movements, making the interlocutor into an object can deny the

possibility of transformation.⁴¹ On the contrary, rather than producing empowerment, this standard *modus operandi* reifies hierarchical relations and politics of vanguardism. Taking movements as the object of inquiry brings along a re-instating of hierarchies of knowledge: the role of passivity and ignorance represented by the object of study; and the role of bringers of change and authority by the researchers. Debates over the *coloniality of knowledge* are then a matter of concern for AR. Some experiments have deployed interventions at the micro-level in order to develop an elaborated critique of the object/subject divide and propose alternative modes of engagement. 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 a particular issue of common concern, the problematic becomes the *third object* to be analyzed by all the participants during a series of workshops (Interview CS, August 20, 2002). This methodology tries to articulate a subject-to-subject relationship, where both parties share knowledges and listen to each other 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 – via affordable publishing houses to be distributed among grassroots groups and beyond. One of the booklets that had a broader circulation is *Hipotesis 891* authored by *Colectivo Situaciones* and the unemployed worker group called *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTD) de Solano*. The text is based on a long-term series of workshops held between *Situaciones* and one of the most creative piquetero groups during the period of highest

⁴¹ The question of anti-objectualizing research is pertinent when the topic of inquiry revolves around the very struggles. This differs from other kind of militant research experiences that “look up”: including certain activist cartographies, watch dog groups and power structure analyses (Mayo 2004). There is actually a line of division between militant researchers: on the one hand, those committed to investigating power structures in need of an objectualizing gaze; and on the other hand, those who defend the transformative potential of engaging their own struggles, not as object but subject of their research (Casas 2007).

social unrest. In this case, the work of the militant researchers was to identify the question that was floating in the air, which according to them, would be able to articulate new political formations and renovate social imaginaries. The question arose from the conversations during the workshops: is our demand as unemployed to recuperate our job? what would it mean to go beyond waged labor? How would society look? *Situaciones* and *MTD Solano* worked together to theorize this emerging relationship towards waged labor. This is how one of the unemployed workers, participant in the workshops and publication, expressed herself about *Situaciones*:

“We don’t know of any other academic projects that operate in the way they do. In their thinking, in their writing, they allow the struggles to speak by themselves, our experiences are not interpreted” (Neka Jara from *MTD-Solano*, Chapel Hill November 14, 2004).

Situaciones claims that militant research is an inquiry *without* object, in that regard.⁴² The rejection of the violence imposed by processes of objectification into social struggles is one of the key traits of militant research. The actual reframing of the object as subject conveys profound instances of re-subjectification for all those involved in the research process:

“Research militancy is not the name of the experience of someone who does research, but that of the production on an encounter without subjects, or if you prefer, of an encounter that produces subjects” (*Situaciones* 2007: 81)

Even if militant research is quite mindful about the very process of inquiry, one might query about the awareness of power differentials among the different parties involved.

⁴² Looking carefully at some of the examples of militant research, I would add that in fact there is actually a displacement of the objectualizing gaze towards other spheres beyond the movements themselves. For instance, *Situaciones*’ workshops bring together two different populations by a third object of study which is a shared concern for the two involved parties; *Precarias a la Deriva*’s approach of “partir de si”, focusing on themselves, takes their own experience as object of study; *counter-mappings of migration* (see *Migmap* 2006, and *Fadaiat* 2004) take the border regime, including control technologies and migration related institutions as the object to be studied and mapped, rather than the migrant populations themselves; the *Counter Cartographies Collective* (2006, 2007) focuses on the university, including faculty, students and staff as situated subjects within that object.

Nonetheless, the mode of engagement is at least to be notably relational, intentionally oriented towards building alternative sociabilities:

“Militant researchers work towards making the elements of a noncapitalist sociability more potent. This requires them to develop a particular type of relation with the groups and movements they work with. Following Spinoza, Colectivo Situaciones calls this relation “composition”. Composition defines relations between bodies. It does not refer to agreements established at a discursive level but to the multidimensional *flows of affect and desire* the relationship puts in motion” (Souza and Holdren 2007: 77, my emphasis).

The relationship that supposedly emerges among the involved parties is defined as *composition*, also being referred to by more bodily and affective tones, such as *friendship* and even *love*:⁴³

Is it possible to engage in such research without at the same time setting in motion a process of *falling in love*? How would a tie between two experiences be possible without a strong feeling of *love* or *friendship*? Certainly, the experience of research militancy resembles that of the person in love, on condition that we understand by *love* that which a long philosophical tradition – the materialist one – understands by it: that is, not something that just happens to one with respect to another but a process which, in its constitution, *takes* two or more. Such a love relation *participates* without the mediation of an intellectual decision: rather, the existence of two or more finds itself pierced by this shared experience. This is not an illusion, but an authentic experience of anti-utilitarianism, which converts the ‘own’ into the ‘common’ (Situaciones 2003).

This shared experience of affect is proposed as a counterpoint to abstraction and individuality. Again, in Situaciones terms: “This love – or friendship – constitutes itself as a relation that renders undefined what until that moment was kept as individuality, composing a figure integrated by more than one individual body (...) That is why we consider this *love* to be a

⁴³ This meaning comes from the first instance where the figure of militant research was defined in *Política y Situación: de la potencia al contrapoder*. (2000) By *Miguel Benasayag y Diego Stulwark*. Ediciones de Mano en Mano.

condition of militant research” (2003).⁴⁴ That relationship is thought as a process of mutual empowerment, and not of teaching:

“Militant research does not teach, at least not in the sense of an explanation which assumes the stupidity and powerlessness of those it explains to. Research militancy is a composition of wills, an attempt to create power (potential) of everyone involved. Such a perspective is only possible by admitting from the beginning that one does not have answers, and by doing so, abandoning the desire to lead others, to be seen as the expert” (Souza and Holdren 2007: 79).

This process of re-inventing roles and re-arranging positions of authority might certainly develop differential “empowerments” and informal knowledge hierarchies. Yet, at the level of intentions, militant research attempts to disestablish the expert figure and the regime of expertise as a whole.⁴⁵ This challenging enterprise is in large part founded in the forceful claim that social movements are knowledge producers, ultimately posing the questions of who produces knowledge, for what, and for whom:

According to James Scott, the point of departure of radicality is physical, practical, social resistance. Any power relation of subordination produces encounters between the dominant and the dominated. In these spaces of encounter, the dominated exhibit a *public discourse* that consists in saying that which the powerful would like to hear, reinforcing the appearance of their own subordination, while – silently – in a space *invisible* to power, there is the production of a world of *clandestine knowledges (saberes)* which belongs to the experience of micro-resistance and insubordination. (Situaciones 2003)

This led us into the question of how these knowledges are produced and also distributed.

Is the campesino leader the sole artifice of elaborated speeches? Or is the committed intellectual

⁴⁴ The connection between knowledge and love has been made by religious approaches such as Zen or Liberation Theology; also by biologists such as Maturana and Varela; feminist geographers such as Gibson and Graham; and extensively developed by feminists of color of the US such as Anzaldúa and Keating via their concept of “technologies of crossing” (2002).

⁴⁵ This questioning of expert knowledge and regimes of expertise has clear Foucaultian resonances.

in solidarity with the workers movement the one who writes books? And under what conditions are those speeches and books circulating and being distributed? The social movements where activist research projects are hosted reject any kind of expression of vanguard or leadership. This so called *anti-authoritarian* philosophy is well engrained among autonomous movements and has its correlations in how the production of knowledge is conceived, conducted and circulated. This is the topic of the next section.

3.2.3. Movements' Networking through Knowledge Production

Militant research is said to be born out of dual distrust towards institutions of expert knowledge production as well as towards leftist vanguard politics. According to AR practitioners, there is a relationship of friction and tension between these different forms of knowledge production:

Throughout contemporary history, it is possible to trace a persistent distrust, on the part of movements for social transformation, towards certain forms of knowledge production and distribution. On the one hand, a distrust towards those sciences that aid a better organization of command and exploitation, as well as distrust towards the mechanisms of capture of *minor knowledges* (underground, fermented in uneasiness and insubordinations, fed by processes of autonomous social cooperation or rebelliousness)⁴⁶ on the part of those agencies in charge of guaranteeing governability. On the other hand, in many cases, there has been distrust towards those supposedly “revolutionary” ideological and iconic forms of knowledge and a distrust of possible intellectualist and idealist mutations of knowledges that initially were born at the heart of the movements themselves. This distrust has led to impotence in some occasions (Malo 2004: 4).

According to this view, both in the case of expert knowledge as well as in the case of revolutionary knowledge, what is at stake is the capturing of knowledges under the mechanisms of individual authorship and copy-right distribution. In contrast with the logic of capture, or what

⁴⁶ About the notion of minor knowledges, see works by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially, *Mil Mesetas. Capitalismo y Esquizofrenia*, [A Thousands Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia] PreTextos, Valencia, 1997

some have called “enclosure of knowledge” (Shukaitis 2009; *Compartir es bueno* 2008) militant research advocates for knowledge production authored by collective struggles themselves and free circulation of ideas. Militant research products in that sense are conceived from the get go to be used in a multiplicity of arrangements: from squatted buildings to union meetings to graduate seminars to grant applications. Such a desire of multiple uses and broad dispersion of the intellectual material clashes with the enclosure logic held by powerful publishing industries and their requirements around intellectual property for the fulfillment of profit making and the production of experts. In order to deal with the concern of modes of distribution, militant research results are under anti copy-right licenses, humorously named as *copy-left* licenses. These licenses allow for different forms of free re-usage and distribution.

The following chapters further develop this publishing practice. Here it is important to emphasize the radical difference with standard modes of publication by embracing a very controversial distribution practice, even in legal terms. This does not exclude participating in formal academic journals or major newspapers though. Additionally, there are also other specific channels of distribution such as the reliance on social movements’ own publishing houses (*Traficantes de Sueños* in Madrid or *Ediciones de mano en mano* and *Tinta Limón* in Buenos Aires) which are relatively fast in terms of publication launching. Their publications are quite stylish due to the regular involvement of designers (professional or not), and they are intentionally affordable. Formats range from paper cover books to small booklets, websites, DVDs, maps and public events.⁴⁷ As part of these self-published products, there is also the

⁴⁷ Some of the publications on militant research thus far are mono-graphics about a particular research project (eg. booklets by *Situaciones*; 700 pages textbook by *Observatorio Metropolitano* or collage-publication by PD) and others are edited volumes compiling different militant research experiences worldwide (*Nociones Comunes* and *Constituent Imagination*).

practice of ‘writing prefaces’ about each other’s work. Through prefacing, one collective engages with other’s work obtaining a regular sense of being mutually informed about ongoing projects. The multiple networking practices among the research collectives then range from preface writing to publishing each others’ work, to mutual visits to co-authorship. This speaks to how the practice of knowledge production itself has a potentiality of generating networks. The collectives are spread throughout different cities, countries and continents at this point, and are often articulated via decentralized networks in contact by email, international encounters, publication projects or mutual visits. Networking through knowledge production then is channeled by new technologies but also through more traditional practices such as sharing books, prefacing, personal exchanges. Nonetheless, the novel point is that there is an explicit politics of contagion, learning from each other and allowing ideas to travel, even to be copied and pasted. Usually, but not always, this logic of contagion tries to be aware of the specificities of each place and situation. While arguing for its specificity, in many ways these networking practices reflect university based networking. Perhaps the biggest difference here deals precisely with intellectual property and how to facilitate the spread and re-use of ideas in different context or by different groups.

This embracing of contagion, coping and tinkering as methods speaks to the attempt towards building a non-professionalized sense of the militant research practitioner. According to Holmes, the following would be the sole requirements to become a militant research collective:

[...] there is no intellectual privilege in the activist domain. Activist-researchers can contribute to a short, middle and long-term analysis of the crisis, by examining and inventing new modes of intervention at the micro-political scales where even the largest social movements begin. Who can play this great game? Whoever is able to join or form a *meshwork* of independent researchers. What are the prices, the terrains, the wagers and

rules? Whichever ones your group finds most productive and contagious. How does the game continue, when the ball goes out of your field? Through shared meeting in a meshwork of meshwork, through collective actions, images, projects, and publications” (2007: 43, my emphasis)

Yet, despite the horizontal connotations of *meshwork*, power relations exist within all kind of networks. This is not always openly recognized in the literature by activist researchers, although it is informally acknowledged how certain groups become more relevant nodes, hubs of some sort, within the net. The issue here is how to think about power in networks in ways that potentate, rather than vitiate, network dynamics. Nonetheless, the networking practices engaged by activist research practitioners directly speak to a desire for the democratization of knowledge. This is so specifically in two ways. First, by the development of certain infrastructures (eg. licencing procedures and autonomous publishing houses) there is an actual attempt at freeing ideas and information from current processes of knowledge enclosure. Second, the engagement with a series of concrete procedures of mutual exchange (eg. preface writing and co-authored collections) generates collaborative spaces of communication⁴⁸ among research groups and beyond. If democratization of knowledge is then a concern for activist research, what are the spaces of production more adequate to respond to such aspirations? What kind of institutional or non-institutional affiliations do these initiatives work from?

3.2.4. Autonomous Spaces of Enunciation

⁴⁸ However, communication is a controversial term for militant researchers. Both *Situaciones* and *Precarias* problematize the notion of communication and prefer to talk about *resonances*: “Communication produces abstractions of experience. The experience itself can only be lived [...] There is however the possibility of resonances between struggles” (*Situaciones* 2007: 78).

They are asking how to communicate place-based experiences and struggles born out of specific situations without a ‘global standpoint’ but rather an immanent one: “Communication is enunciation from the bottom floor, form a particular place, a producer of subjectivity and imaginary; we are interested in a communication that is capable not so much of generating recruitment as it is of shaking and producing unexpected resonances in others, how also search and ask themselves questions; we are interested in a communication that is the composition of different and for that reason the production of a new real at the edge of the existing real” (PD 2007: 86).

Following my argument, activist research practices are strongly influenced by their conceptual kinship with *autonomous* politics. In terms of the relationship with well-established institutions related to the state, capital or official expertise, autonomous politics advocate for processes of self-organization based on a logic of *within and against*. This implies a self-awareness of a positioning within an institutional or systemic framework that is nonetheless attentive to institutional constraints. From that positionality, an autonomous politics attempts to develop a stance which can bypass those constraints, especially those tangential or contrary to movements' goals. However, given the numerous pressures experienced in the practice when working within or with an institution, many autonomous initiatives have turned to an explicit choice for a non-institutional location. Nonetheless, the possibilities remain open, without rejecting institutional collaboration from a priori. In fact, there are multiple examples of autonomous initiatives working for or in collaboration with official institutions. The premise of acting within the system's circuits being that transformation is not possible if coming from a total outside: first, because there is no such a thing as a total "outside to the system"; and second, because self-isolation is not helpful nor desired. However, they are also very firm about how being completely "within the system" is ineffective for change.⁴⁹

Where then does the production of knowledge from this kind of autonomous location takes place? Initiatives at militant research, either as long-term collectives or as temporal projects, are usually articulated beyond standard legal or institutional settings, outside regular structures such as political parties, government agencies, unions, universities or NGOs. They are, nonetheless, open to and often work in collaboration with institutional sites (for instance in the

⁴⁹ This political stance of *within and against* is supported by autonomous sister-notions such as "exodus", "antagonism" and "counter-power". See Graeber (2004) and *Colectivo Situaciones*, Toni Negri, John Holloway, Miguel Benasayag, Luis Matini, Horacio González, Ulrich Brandt (2001).

case of *Precarias*, they have worked with the municipality of Madrid, major universities and research institutes as well as educational programs of the European Union). Activist researchers work in tandem with other ‘experts’, accept institutional funds or take advantage of publishing venues. Following this autonomous and antagonistic spirit though, even if there are relationships with institutions, for the most part, militant research projects bypass and contest the regular modes of production and channels of distribution associated with ‘expert’ knowledge. Some of the key specificities of the practice of militant research are evident when contrasting them with knowledge produced under institutional logics. The pressures from university labor markets for career building, through the development of an individual name as symbolic capital, are often absent in militant research. It is true that while militant research is usually produced under collective names, there is also some individual authorship (Marta Malo, Marcelo Exposito, Emmanuel Rodriguez, and Cristina Vega being some prolific authors in Spain). These might result in instances of popularity, producing protagonist figures. However, the political goals will be still the main purpose of the writing, rather than building a name. While there might be projects oriented at combining political goals with professional concerns, important divergences are seen when compared with academic kinds of research:

As far from institutional procedures as it is from ideological certainties, the question is rather to organize life according to a series of hypotheses (practical and theoretical) on the ways to (self-) emancipation. To work in autonomous collectives that do not obey rules imposed by academia implies the establishment of a positive connection with subaltern, dispersed, and hidden knowledges, and the production of a body of *practical knowledges of counter power*. This is just the opposite of using social practices as a field of confirmation for laboratory hypotheses. Research militancy, then, is also the art of establishing compositions that endow with *potencia* the quests and elements of alternative sociability.

Academic research is subjected to a whole set of alienating mechanisms that separate researchers from the very *meaning* of their activity: they must accommodate their work to

determined rules, topics and conclusions. Funding, supervision, language requirements, bureaucratic red tape, empty conferences and protocol, constitute the conditions in which the practice of *official* research unfolds.

Militant research distances itself from those circuits of academic production – of course, neither opposing nor ignoring them. [...] Militant research attempts to work under alternative conditions, created by the collective itself and by the ties to counter power in which it is inscribed, pursuing its own efficacy in the production of knowledges useful to the struggles (Situaciones 2003).

Rather, by this embracing of non-institutional pressures (including its consequent lack of regular financial support), what militant researchers actually want to achieve is a place from which to speak with independence. This is why it is said that militant research attempts to build “autonomous spaces of enunciation” (Escobar 2009). From a decolonial perspective, this positioning allows AR to challenge not only the content, but “the very terms of the conversation”, to use a Mignolo’s expression (2000):

“Autonomous inquiry demands a rupture from the dominant cartographies. Both compass and coordinates must be reinvented if you really want to transform the dynamics of a changing world-system. Only by disorienting the self and uprooting epistemic certainties can anyone hope to inject a positive difference into the unconscious dynamics of the geopolitical order. How then can activist-researchers move to disorient the reigning maps, to transform the dominant cartographies, without falling into the never-never lands of aesthetic extrapolation? The problem of activist research is inseparable from its embodiment, from its social elaboration” (Holmes 2007: 41)

This *uprooting of epistemic certainties* speaks to the last trait being identified as constituent of the activist research practice, that is, the embracement of an epistemology of uncertainty and ontology of unfixity.

3.2.5. A Not-Knowing made out of Questions

The challenge for a different kind of politics, re-invigorated by the Zapatista uprising, has given birth to a variety of experiments with and theories of the real. One of the conceptual

mandates of this contemporary wave of autonomous politics is the Zapatistas' call to "caminar preguntando" or *ask while walking*. This call suggests a form of intervention, or rather, a mode of engagement, that is more a proposition than a totalizing solution; it encourages creativity and transformation and constantly puts itself into question, always ready to self-correct (Villasante 2006).⁵⁰ It is based on the practice of attentive listening (Other Campaign manifesto 2006). This Zapatista call has become one of the leading principles of militant research practice. In fact, there is even a metonymical use of this call to refer to militant research among European autonomous movements, becoming a clear inspiration for groups such as *Precarias*:

We think re-naming the world is central; and doing it from below, applying the Zapatista call to 'ask while walking' " (2004, public presentation at Universidad Internacional de Andalucía)

Again, how these political mandates of constant creativity, ability to self-correct and active listening translate into practices of knowledge production? First of all, it implies a research attitude not based on a complex set of *a priori* certainties, but on permanent questioning. This logic contrasts with many previous and current progressive movements, as militant researchers point out:

Unlike the political militant, for whom *politics always takes place in its own separate sphere*, the *researcher-militant* is a character made out of questions, not saturated by ideological meanings and models of the world. Nor is militant research a practice of 'committed intellectuals' or of a group of 'advisors' to social movements. The goal is neither to politicize nor intellectualize the social practices. It is not a question of managing to get them to make a leap in order to pass from the social to 'serious politics' (Situaciones 2003).

⁵⁰ A brief and humorous engagement with the call for 'asking while walking' contends that this new form of doing politics resembles an intelligent system able to generate "collective construction of alternative and sustainable action and knowledge" in *Sentirse haciendo, caminar preguntando*, Tomas R. Villasante, in *Diagonal* n.27, 2006.

What is at stake is an embracing of a non-vanguard politics. It is important then to explicitly recognize that research is based on an attitude of “not-knowing”, pursuing an epistemology of uncertainty:

Militant research works neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be. On the contrary, the only condition for researcher-militants is a difficult one: to remain faithful to their ‘not knowing’. In this sense, it is an authentic *anti-pedagogy* (Situaciones 2003).

According to one of the members of *Colectivo Situaciones* speaking on a visit to the university of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, militant research is about “locating questions” (Diego Sztulwark, April 2009). Indeed, questions are at the heart of militant research practice. It is about detecting questions that are on the sphere of the real, questions that are coming from the everyday life of movements and sectors: for instance, the question of what to do when the unemployed do not want a regular waged job; or the question of how to conceive of a school for teachers that want something other than the conventional pedagogical model. Those questions become the main articulators of the research projects. They are not peripheral, but rather operate as enunciations and points of departure. This is the case of *Precarias*’ foundational question: “*what is your strike? What does your own strike look like?*” Coming from a situated experience, those questions are intended to provoke and *interpelar*⁵¹ other subjects (PD 2004: 81) The embracing of research as “not knowing”, or better, the engagement with the Zapatista’s call for *asking while walking*, is an explicit mandate of militant research. However, rather than pessimist nihilism as a result of the impossibility of absolute knowledge, it bring along another

⁵¹ To *compel* is the English translation of the Spanish term *interpelar*, however it does not seem to capture the meaning of putting someone’s common sense into question that *interpelar* entails.

political logic, other methodologies or, why not, a different theology⁵²: that of continuous searching and permanent experimentation.

Chapter 3

*Investigación Militante*⁵³

The Cultural Politics of Activist Research

Introduction

Processes of struggle and self-organization, especially those most vivid and dynamic, are fueled by an incentive to produce their own knowledges, languages and images. [...] The goal is that of creating an appropriate and operative theoretical horizon, very close to the surface of the 'lived', where the simplicity and concreteness of elements from which it has emerged, achieve meaning and potential (Malo 2004: 13).

It is no coincidence that some of the most explicit and well articulated claims about the importance of situated knowledge production in processes of social struggle are being put forward by movements themselves. In particular, activist research participants, such as the author of this quote and long term member of *Precarias a la Deriva*, are thinking through ways of producing knowledge which are based on experience (as well as reflection), away from pretensions of neutrality and individual genius as well as without searching for permanent absolute certainties. In a way, the claims advanced by the *knowledge turn* at the level of grand theory, are manifesting and developing themselves in the very terrain of social collective action.

⁵² This is in reference to the similar spiritual thinking expressed in the Quaker and Liberation Theology based book *We Make the Road by Walking. Conversations on Education and Social Change* (1990)

⁵³ Spanish term for the practice of activist research among certain contemporary movements.

To say it differently, a knowledge turn might be simultaneously taking place at the level of social movements' practice. This should not be misread as saying that social movements did not produce knowledge in the past, they certainly did. Yet at the same time there is something distinct about the ways certain movements produce knowledge today. This chapter argues that this is the case of the current wave of activist research. It presents testimonies from different activist research practitioners about how they conceive of the intricacies of producing knowledge, how activist research works and what kind of epistemologies and ontologies are behind their specific procedures and goals.

The specificity of the practice of activist research is also claimed in relation to initiatives of engaged research originating in the academy. This dissertation then inserts itself within the methodological debates in the social sciences focusing on heterodox research approaches pursuing social transformation. The first section of this chapter, *The Prospects of Engaged Methodologies*, is a brief overview of scholarly traditions of committed research, zooming in on the discipline of Anthropology and the ethnographic method in particular. In the next section, *Activist Research as Embodiment of Autonomous Politics*, I offer a detailed discussion about the rationale and distinctive characteristics of activist or militant research as practiced by contemporary social movements. Based on the engagement with the material of several projects and collectives, especially *Precarias a la Deriva* and *Colectivo Situaciones*⁵⁴, I identify a series of traits constitutive of the practice of militant research: everyday politics, affect, within and against, meshworks, and permanent questioning. This section is mainly based on a careful

⁵⁴ *Colectivo Situaciones* is a Buenos Aires-based collective. This Argentine group is formed by independent researchers working in collaboration with different sectors of Argentinean social movements to investigate current problematics. Colectivo Situaciones coined the term “militant research” and their extensive work has become referential among the networks of activist researchers and Zapatista-oriented global justice movements. See <http://www.situaciones.org/>

reading of activist research material, selecting the most insightful quotations that speak directly about the nature of activist research.⁵⁵ The third section, *Towards a Distinct Community of Research Practice*, concludes how activist research initiatives are progressively more intertwined with each other and thus are forming a broader global community made out of decentralized networks and common research practices. These networks are growing over time and nurtured by collective projects and international gatherings such as the World Social Forum, continental conferences and mutual exchanges between particular groups. This chapter engages the practice of activist research in general terms, setting the stage for a more detailed engagement with the case of *Precarias a la Deriva* in chapter four.

3.1. The Prospects of Engaged Methodologies

Social and environmental justice has been at the heart of many scholarly projects and intellectual traditions within the academy. I am interested here in those that besides working from ethical concerns, pay careful attention to research methodologies themselves as a source for politicizing the practice of knowledge production per se. The following are some of the most prolific trends using engaged research methodologies: Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991); Decolonial Research (Tuhiwai 1999; Walsh 2009); and more broadly speaking, *engaged* or *activist scholarship* (Boyer 1990; Hale 2008). These are usually trans-disciplinary traditions, and despite the use of different terminologies, they share the basic principle of advancing social transformation and justice through the research process itself.

⁵⁵ This is when the ethnographer engages with the very products of these “writing machines” or “situated sources”, in this case being heterodox publications, the main cultural artifact of activist research communities. In order to evoke how this practice is made not only out of texts, but also of other *materialities*, I sporadically introduce ethnographic material speaking about sites of encounter and cross-pollination, places of production and infrastructures of distribution.

Within Anthropology, there have been different trends at developing engaged research: from the historical landmark of Sol Tax's Action-Anthropology (Bennet 1996; Foley 1999); to the path-breaking although often forgotten Black Feminist Engaged Anthropology (Harrison 1991; Gordon 1991; McClaurin 2001)⁵⁶; to the projects at engaged Medical Anthropology (Schensul 1999).⁵⁷ Current collective initiatives within the discipline span from the PhD program in Activist Anthropology at the University of Texas (Hale 2001) to the project at developing a Center of Integrating Research and Action (CIRA) at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (Holland, Fox and Powell 2003), to the more international initiative of the World Anthropologies Network (WAN Collective 2005; Restrepo and Escobar 2005; Ribeiro and Escobar 2007).⁵⁸

In fact, the discipline has a long trajectory of a vocation for justice: from the beginnings of American Anthropology, with Boas and his mostly women disciples (Behar and Gordon 1995); to the ongoing political work of Latin-American anthropologists (Aparicio and Blaser 2008); passing through the 1980s' critiques and innovations within Anthropology departments in the US, as described by Orin Starn:

Anthropology appeared to be an avenue for further involvement in social change, the discipline most concerned with the predicament of Indians, peasants, the urban poor, and the rest of a global society's dispossessed majorities. As a graduate student at Stanford University, I found that many other students wanted to transcend what critics of the 1960s and 1970s has begun to charge was a disciplinary legacy of apathy and sometimes complicity with imperialism, even more so in the atmosphere of peril and possibility of

⁵⁶ I further elaborate those traditions in the Forth Semester Paper, requirement of the Anthropology PhD program at UNC-CH.

⁵⁷ From a series of community-based applied health research came out one of the most referenced contributions linking ethnography to participatory research, the seven volumes of *The Ethnographer's Toolkit* (1999).

⁵⁸ Another recent example born out of young critical anthropologists in Spain just formed called *AntroLab: Red de Antropologias Criticas* (<http://invisibel.net/antrolab>)

the Reagan years with the advances of feminism, the onset of AIDS, the global upheaval from South Africa to Central America. We covered the “Left-Wing Lounge” of the anthropology department with posters of Mandela and Sandino and a silk screen of Karl Marx that I had bought in San Francisco’s Chinatown. The ideal of an anthropology of change underwrote friends’ choices about what to study: feminist organizing in India and Nepal, squatter settlements in Mexico City, the struggle over Indian rights in Nicaragua, the U.S. sanctuary movement for war refugees from Central America. The traditional focus on “the primitive” [] had led anthropologists to seek out for study the most “untouched” []. We were motivated by a self-conscious and sometimes self-righteous wish to reverse this history by researching upheaval and mobilization in the Third World and the United States. As part of this vision, the anthropologist would not just study but seek to support the struggle for change, and it seemed to us complicit with power to claim the Olympian remove of scientific objectivity. Our hope was to reinvent anthropology by embracing values of accountability, activism and engagement (1999: 6, 7)

This upheaval, demanding a more engaged and non-authoritarian discipline, was captured by a series of path breaking anthropological publications such as *Writing Culture* (1986), *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1999) and *Women Writing Culture* (1995). This is part of the broader turn towards reflexivity that marked the basis for a practice of fieldwork and writing sensitive to the politics of representation (Aull Davies 1999). However, this claim of supporting struggles through the practice of reflexivity has also been put into question. In fact, much self-criticism about the excesses of reflexivity and its limits at supporting the ‘Other’ has zeroed in on how it actually reinforces an artificial boundary between researcher and researched (Probyn 1993). These debates have been the source of multiple instances of “ethnographic anxiety” (Murphy 2006).

According to Hale, reflexivity is not enough in and of itself to make scholarship engaged (2008). He poses a division in the field between, on the one hand, *activist research* in which anthropologists are seen as engaged scholars or action-oriented because they are working explicitly *for* social movements; and, on the other, *cultural critique*, in which researchers also

stake a political position, but are working in the realm of academic literatures to deconstruct and complexify dominant or hegemonic visions of the real. This controversial dichotomy has prompted a series of responses. One of them eloquently provides a solution to such a dilemma. Michal Osterweil, as “part of a new generation of social movement scholarship that maintains dual loyalties both to academia and to activism” (Kurzman 2008:11), advocates for a research practice that is able to introduce both: the refinement of “cultural critique“ as well as the spirit of collaboration and open solidarity of an engaged approach (Osterweil 2008).⁵⁹ She is invested in developing a rubric for a networked ethnographic approach. This approach challenges the traditional divisions between researcher/and object of research, but at the same time refuses easy notions of complete horizontality or equivalence in which the researcher is identical to his/her object of study. Instead, she argues for recognizing the flat, dispersed, multi-scalar spaces of knowledge production in which anthropological knowledge is not equivalent to that of the movement, but one meaningful part of a complex network of (potentially) movement- relevant- knowledges.⁶⁰

However, going beyond the questions of engaged scholarship vs. “refined scholarship” as the overarching ethical framework of anthropological research, it is time to zoom in on the very materiality of the ethnographic practice, as Tomaskova has called for (2007). Looking at the anthropological method par excellence, there have been numerous attempts at developing modes of ethnographic engagement attuned to action and collaboration, beyond or in tandem with

⁵⁹ In the same vein, Michal Osterweill together with her colleagues, Dana Powell and myself, are organizing a panel for the AAA 2009 entitled “Knowledge-Objects: Politicizing Ethnographies of the Complex”.

⁶⁰ Also, these three PhD candidates are working with Arturo Escobar in a chapter for the edited volume “Transnational Ethnographies” around similar methodological theoretical proposals for a different politics of ethnographic research mindful of the knowledge turn afoot both in society at large, social theory and its concomitant turn in the arena of social movements.

politics of representation. This is the case of “critical ethnography” and its argument for a more collaborative enterprise (Foley and Valenzuela 2005); as well as Madison’s emphasis on the potentials of ethnography’s performative aspects (2005). In reference to feminist ethnography, early experimental feminist ethnographies as described in *Women Writing Culture* (1995) move a step forward from the call to reflexive ethnography (Davis 1999). Anthropologists such as Ruth Landes, Zora N. Hurston, Ella Deloria and Mourning Dove not only used highly refined modes of self-reflexive writing, but also engaged in solid political projects at advancing women, minority and class-based struggles (Cole 1995; Hernandez 1995; Finn 1995) as a method per se is based on the epistemological principles of standpoint epistemology and situated knowledge. Despite being object of intense self-critique, this foundation is said to allow for an ethnography that erases pretensions of hierarchical authority, and advances the potential of a more productive encounter among anthropological knowledges and other knowledges, usually in struggle, and the building of inter-subjective relationships (Abu-Lughod 1993; Gordon 1993; Visweswaran 1994).

In the same vein, participant observation as one of the methods on which the ethnographic approach relies, has also been re-qualified as “engaged observation” (Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006) or “observant participation” (Lorenzi 2008). This speaks to the increased merging between anthropology and activism, where a generation of activists are taking their own experiences as source, field and framework for their anthropological work. For instance, direct action and the consensus process as practices of global justice movements are analyzed by anthropologists who are also long-term participants themselves within those groups: Graeber in New York Direct Action Network (2007, 2008); Casas in Chicago Direct Action Network (2008); Juris in Movimiento Resistencia Global- Barcelona (2008) or Daro in different counter-summits

and Really Really Free Markets (2009). The explicit or “felt” presence of first-person accounts becomes not a reflexive mode of engagement with the *Other*, but an intense narrative about one’s experiences and commitments as source for theorizing these moments and methodologies. Taking the author’s experience as the point of departure speaks to the traditions of auto-ethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997) and native anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991). However, these activist ethnographies might differ from those traditions in the moment the self is not just an individual, but normally evokes a collective and the wider networks in which such activist group operates. While in the different traditions of auto-ethnography the first person is articulated in singular; in the emerging genre of activist ethnography, the first person becomes plural.

Some of the tentative attempts at resolving the dilemma of a situated ethnographic engagement on the part of the activist-anthropologist range from the “militant ethnographer” (Juris 2007) to a “relational/flat mode of engagement” (Casas, Osterweill and Powell 2008). In contrast with the total identification of the militant ethnographer with a given political group, a relational approach advocates for an acknowledgement of the distinct positions and singularities at play although sharing a common concern or problematic. The methods chapter advances this last proposition by advocating “research as knitting and translation”. While admitting the singularity of positions and situated knowledges stemming from those particular sites of enunciation, the research endeavor attempts an actual articulation among those nodes, facilitating paths of communication. This would ideally advance the political goal of supporting and branching out networks among different struggles, embracing the logic of proliferation and contagion of radical ideas and practices through the tool of ethnography.

This brief review is intended to set the stage for engaging the practice of activist research not as an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader constellation of traditions of research for social transformation.⁶¹ The current wave of activist research or *investigacion militante* is indeed mindful of antecedents and previous experiences of knowledge for transformation. Taking research out of the laboratory for social justice purposes has a long trajectory, they say. Without claiming newness for this practice, the prologue to a collection of essays on activist research, entitled *Nociones Comunes*⁶², explores a series of historical antecedents of movement-based inquiry, focusing on four traditions linked to previous cycles of struggle:

Certainly, these questions are not new, although the context in which they are asked may be. In fact, many of the current experiments that are asking these questions, have looked back, searching for historical references. They are searching for those examples where the production of knowledge was immediately and fruitfully linked to processes of self-organization and struggle. In this sense, four inspirational tendencies are identifiable in recent history: worker inquiries and co-research; feminist epistemology and women's consciousness-raising groups; institutional analysis; and participatory action research or PAR. All of these examples, deserve (due to the wealth of accumulative experience) at least a brief overview, in the style of a historical *excursus* that allows us to situate current discussions and trajectories of militant and/or action research. (Malo 2004: 2, author's translation)

These examples coming mainly from Italy, US, France, Latin America and South Asia, further explained in the prologue of *Nociones Comunes*, are certainly not a total list. Neither this referential book among militant researchers nor its prologue attempts to be comprehensive in their examples. Rather, the collection is evocative of the long-standing tradition of knowledge for

⁶¹ This review does not pretend to be comprehensive; rather it reflects the schools of thought where I am situated, including my own PhD training in Anthropology and the interdisciplinary working groups at UNC and Duke I am participating in at the time of writing.

⁶² *Nociones Comunes* is a collection of contemporary militant research projects, edited by a member of *Precarias a la Deriva*. It is prefaced by what has become a quite referential text, translated into different languages (we ourselves did the English translation thanks to UPCS funds) and widely distributed. The preface is authored by Marta Malo, a prolific writer member of PD and participant in many other political projects in Madrid, Spain and broader European networks. For further reading of the English version of this Preface see: <http://transform.eicpcp.net/transversal/0406/malo/en>

action. While this first section reviewed some of the traditions of engaged research from the perspective of the discipline of Anthropology, this second section engages with a parallel phenomenon at politicizing research, or rather, reinventing politics through research: the current wave of activist, or rather, *autonomous research*.

3.2. Activist Research as Embodiment of Autonomous Politics

Buenos Aires 2002

One of the most intense milestones of the global justice movement was the effervescence of autonomous movements in Argentina during the national crisis starting with the government's failure to pay its debt to the IMF in late 2001. The *piqueteros* and neighborhood assemblies were the source of inspiring images and concrete techniques such as the *cacerolada* or re-appropriated factories that subsequently traveled among movements' worldwide.⁶³ The Argentine militant research group *Colectivo Situaciones* registered and analyzed the events considering their research work as "a series of interventions" throughout the different scenarios and political processes (SWMG workshop, Chapel Hill 2009). Their writings also traveled globally becoming a key reference for the current round of militant research practice. The first time I encountered an activist group directly embracing research as a constituent trait of their struggle was in Buenos Aires. We were participating in the Argentinean Social Forum which was held at the National University in downtown BA. We were presenting on a panel about autonomous activism, bringing examples from US movements to the fore. After our talk, we met with one member from *Colectivo Situaciones* at a "cafeteria bonarense". Coffee shops in Buenos Aires are

⁶³ The book *Genealogia de una Revuelta* by Raul Zibechi (2003); the film *The Take* by Naomi Klein and the web-based news *Argentina Indymedia* were key to spreadign the Argentine revolt worldwide, sparking solidarity actions and networks in many cities.

conceived as spaces to talk for a long time, so we enjoyed a lively conversation with good coffee, water and orange juice with a small pastry for free. This is the first time we heard about “an inquiry without object”. After that conversation we realized how the many booklets, zines and other publications by this group –self-defined as “militant researchers” – were circulating among many different activist spaces in Buenos Aires. We took much of this material back to Chicago where we were working at the time and also to Spain during family visits, to both read it carefully and share it with activist initiatives that were emerging in the wake of global justice counter-summits. Traveling with their material as well as engaging in the task of dissemination and translation (from Spanish to English), made *Situaciones*’ work part and parcel of our political and intellectual trajectory. Since then, we have crossed paths with *Situaciones* again in Porto Alegre, Brazil, during the 2005 edition of the World Social Forum where five members of the SMWG participated in a series of international workshops on activist research; in Chapel Hill, USA, where they were read in 2004 and also invited by the SMWG in 2009; and finally in Madrid, where during my fieldwork, the participation from *Situaciones* was required in many of the numerous booklets and collective projects launched by Precarias.

By developing a series of methodological experiments, activist research groups, such as *Colectivo Situaciones*, focus on exploring emerging sets of conditions, possibilities of networking and sites of intervention. These researchers speak from a situated position: from within, and supporting the success of, particular struggles. However, is this political commitment with a particular cause what distinguishes this activist wave of inquiry from other research initiatives within social movements? Research initiatives with political goals tend to share a similar understanding of knowledge as intrinsically linked to action and vice versa. In this sense,

many experiences emphasize the political practicality of knowledge production and its consequent possible strategic use. However, while previous and current initiatives share this idea of a tactical use of research findings, conceiving of research itself as a tool of struggle, I contend that some initiatives of contemporary militant inquiry go a step forward. It is not solely one more component of struggle among the many resources of a movement's repertoire. Rather, research is taken as a permanent ethic, a way of thinking, acting and being. In a way, research becomes the raw material for politics. This implies a re-definition of activist or militant identities as researchers, what I evocatively call "the becoming research of militancy". This intimate connection between subjectivity, politics, and research speaks to many of the principles of the knowledge turn, which are perhaps not so present (or self-consciously present) in other traditions of engaged research.

If politics is so central to the production of knowledge, identifying the notion of the political behind research practices might illuminate in part what makes a tradition distinct from others. This section identifies a series of specific traits to the politics of activist research (AR): what distinguishes traditions of engaged scholarship from AR? All share the ethical concern for justice, experimental methods of collaboration and a careful attention to politics of representation. Furthermore, what is different in the trend of AR when comparing it with previous or parallel initiatives at conducting research within and by other social movements? The task of identifying a particular political rationale to AR is impossible to do without addressing some of the political logics of the broader movement in which AR is inserted, that is, the global justice movement, and specifically its more Zapatista-inspired branches. These movements are

based on the logic and practices associated to autonomous politics.⁶⁴ Going through different traits, I highlight how AR appropriates and translates the political logic of *autonomy* -as practiced by the Zapatistas and other contemporary movements- into the terrain of knowledge production. The singularity of AR is then the result of a combination of the following autonomous traits: 1) research as a series of *interventions* in *everyday life* that *prefigure* alternative worlds; 2) research conducted from an autonomous site of enunciation, meaning self-organized and located *within and against* capital or state sponsored spaces; 3) research premised under the re-conceptualization of *struggles as subjects* and oriented towards the production of *affect*; 4) a goal towards network building through *decentralized collective work*, free distribution and non-vanguard knowledge production; and 5) research based on *permanent questioning*. Building on earlier conceptualizations of militant research (especially by *Colectivo Situaciones*), the following characterization has grown out of my own engagement with global justice movements and various militant research projects.

3.2.1. Research as interventionist, everyday and pre-figurative politics

Autonomous logics in the broad sense, as embraced and practiced by a variety of past and contemporary movements, often practice a politics of immediacy. Instead of working towards a hypothetic revolution that would bring along a utopian world, they emphasize the urgency of ‘here and now’. This notion of social transformation is developed through an interventionist

⁶⁴ Briefly stated, for the sake of this argument since a fully engagement would go beyond the scope of this work, *autonomy* refers to a political vision and modus operandi defined by key words such as direct democracy, pre-figurative politics, horizontality, self-organization, within and against, antagonism, direct action, self-representation and counter-power. See *Cuadernos de Autonomia* (2001). Autonomous practices have a long trajectory among anti-systemic movements in many countries. Today, it is associated with youth groups, mainly those deeply influenced by global justice movements and the Zapatistas, such as social centers, free software/copyleft projects and recuperated factories.

understanding of actions; a mode of everyday activism and a sense of pre-figurative politics.⁶⁵

The logic of intervention is embraced by many global justice collectives, and is an especially explicit politics among the most art-oriented groups:⁶⁶

Over the course of the 1990s, the term "intervention" was increasingly used by politically engaged artists to describe their interdisciplinary approaches, which nearly always took place outside the realm of museums, galleries and studios. A decade later, these "interventionists" continue to create an impressive body of work that trespasses into the everyday world art that critiques, lampoons, interrupts, and co-opts, art that acts subtly or with riotous fanfare, and art that agitates for social change using magic tricks, faux fashion and jacked-up lawn mowers. In contrast to the sometimes heavy-handed political art of the 1980s, interventionist practitioners have begun to carve out compelling new paths for artistic practice, coupling hard-headed politics with a light-handed approach, embracing the anarchist Emma Goldman's dictum that revolutions and dancing belong together. The projects [...] whether they are discussions of urban geography, tents for homeless people, or explorations of current labor practices – are often seasoned with honey rather than vinegar (Media Release on *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*, MASS MoCA's summer exhibition, opening May 29, 2004)

Inspired by the Situationists and Emma Goldman's humorous understanding of political action, the interventionist logic implies a sense of unexpected and joyful interference in reality. Interventions are intended to operate on at least two levels: the world-system's politics and the micro-politics of the subject. Briefly put, the goal is to engage in social transformation through the engagement of everyday life and processes of *re-subjectification*. This understanding of politics is not restricted to the politicized art world, but rather, pervades the background of understanding of many contemporary movements (D'Ignazio 2005).

⁶⁵ These notions of the political are not claimed to be new. Autonomous logics have a long and dispersed historical trajectory out of the scope of this research. It is important to mention though, that contemporary movements acknowledge those past experiences of autonomy as sources of inspiration. For a partial development of this history see anthropologist David Graeber's work *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004).

⁶⁶ Some of the so-called "interventionists" I have been in contact with for this research are *YoMango*, *God Bless Graffiti Coalition*, *the Institute for Applied Autonomy*, *Pink Block*, *Institute of Infinite Small Things*, *16 Beaver Group*. Many of them participated in the edited volume *The Interventionists: Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (2004) and its subsequent exhibits depicted.

This understanding of political change is linked to yet another main pillar of autonomous global justice movements: what could be called “everyday activism” and the DIY or “do it yourself culture” (Van Meter et al. 2007). While many politicized individuals in the traditional left were critical of the system, many of their everyday habits were not expected to adjust to that critique. Most of the time, there was a delegating logic towards other actors to enact those required changes—mostly the state. Certain struggles of the 1960s and 1970s though insisted in a very direct correlation between discourse and everyday practice if one wanted to be politically coherent: for example, ecologists will call for vegetarianism/veganism and animal-free consumption patterns; anti-multinational activists will boycott corporate products through their own purchasing practices; feminists will bring a gender-attention to their everyday activities, from work routines to giving birth; etc. This logic of everyday activism has inspired many global justice activists, and has also been brought into the realm of knowledge production. Rather than conceiving of research as a concrete compartmentalized activity delegated to experts, it is time to conduct “in-house research”. This research on movements’ “own terms” takes participants’ everyday life as unique sources for radical inquiry into the interstices of the system. Instead of hiring others to do such work, research becomes one’s own permanent attitude embedded in everyday activities. Chapter 8 provides a graphic illustration of how research is practiced as an everyday ethics and routine.

Everyday interventionism runs parallel to yet another landmark of autonomous global justice movements, the question of “pre-figurative politics” (Sitrin 2004; Graeber 2002). Again, here the political also speaks to world changing *and* subject-making, starting from now and here. Desired for transformations have to be instantiated in our own practices today (Esteva 1997).

What does this understanding of politics mean for knowledge production? How does this notion of social change as continuous transformation get translated into processes of research? One of the main characteristics of activist research is that the procedures involved and the relations that are rendered during the research process then have to become an instantiation of the worlds one desires and is fighting for.

This emphasis on research as everyday activity, engaged in a continuous process of world-making, requires a material-based notion of knowledge. If “research militancy is a form of intervention” (Situaciones 2007: 76), it needs to base itself on an understanding of knowledge that is practice-oriented. In AR, the notion of knowledge might indeed be more intimately linked to embodiment and practice than in standard research traditions. As *Colectivo Situaciones* puts it:

“Research militancy does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics. For, insofar as we see thought as the thinking/doing activity that interrupts the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, thinking is immediately political. On the one hand, if we see politics as the struggle for freedom and justice, all politics involves thinking, because there are forms of thinking against established models implicit in every radical practice – a thought people carry out with their bodies” (2007: 75)

Militant research then opens the possibility for action, and thus the very task of world-making. This is how *Precarias a la Deriva* points to this ability in one of their definitions of activist research:

Militant research is the process by which we re-appropriate our capacity to create worlds fueled by a stubborn militant decision that a-prioris, should-bes and models (old or new) do not work [...] [militant research] interrogates, problematizes and *pushes the real* through a series of concrete procedures (2004: 92, my emphasis).

Holding to this understanding of research, contemporary militant research efforts at intervening in the real must then be quite conscious of their corresponding context and historical

specificity. Current research efforts by social movements are mindful of their role as knowledge producers in a specific historical context, especially when framed as ‘a burgeoning knowledge economy’. Given such a terrain of struggle, social movements then intentionally engage in the production of *counter-knowledges* with the goal of facilitating empowering and effective interventions:

“a peculiar proliferation of experiments with -and search among- the realms of thought, action and enunciation is found within social networks that seek to transform the current state of things (...). They are initiatives that explore: 1) how to break with ideological filters and inherited frameworks; 2) how to produce knowledge that emerges directly from the concrete analyses of the territories of life and cooperation, and experiences of uneasiness and rebellion; 3) how to make this knowledge work for social transformation; 4) how to make the knowledges that already circulate through movements’ networks operative; ...and finally, 5) how to appropriate our intellectual and mental capacities from the dynamics of labor, production of profit, and/or governmentality and how to ally them with collective (subversive, transformative) action, guiding them towards creative interventions” (Malo 2004: 1)

This reflects an explicit and antagonist enunciative position as knowledge producers on the part of social movements themselves. This direct embracing of knowledge production is made in the context of a so called knowledge economy. An illustrative case of research as an everyday form of politics, fighting in the context of a flexible knowledge economy, is the example of militant inquiry on precarity engaged in this dissertation. Facing a profound disquiet with the levels of dispersion and intense fragmentation lived by many flex workers in the ‘new economy’, research became a great device to not only make sense of current transformations, but as an experiential mechanism of aggregation: breaking isolation and promoting communicative practices among dispersed and fragmented subjects. In this way, rather than a tool, research for these movements is transformed into a foundational rock of militancy: “research as raw material of the political” *Precarias* announced as a conclusion of their first research project (Contrapoder

2005). Their research project, further elaborated upon in chapter 4, was intended to make labor transformations more understandable and somehow more bearable, allowing for both inhabiting *and* fighting new labor/existential conditions. The project was proclaimed to provide an opportunity of subjective transformation, to put an end to the permanent feeling of impotence and overwhelmed isolation, politicizing identities and reclaiming one's own everyday life as research material itself. *Precarias* would eloquently put it in these terms: "research as a collective search for a common lexicon to apprehend the real in a collective way" (PD 2004).

This transformative collective experience is product of investigating precarity in a distinct way, a way which is based on a notion of research as everyday and pre-figurative intervention. The purpose of militant research is not to communicate the 'true revolutionary path', rather it is about generating processes of articulation and subjective aggregation in the present moment, producing relationships and maintaining webs of alternative sociability. This goal responds to the urgency posed by a context defined by *Precarias* as "a deleuzian desert" or in Situaciones words, "an ontological reality of dispersion (social, spatial, temporal, subjective dispersion)" (2004: 90). The experience of fragmentation calls for practices that favor counter-inertias of aggregation and mutual support, militant research being one of those practices.

3.2.2. Research as production of affect and alternative sociabilities

If everyday subjective transformation is part and parcel of an autonomous politics, how does this concern translate into the realm of knowledge production? Conventional research requires an object, establishing clear limits between researchers vs. researched. In the case of studying with and about social movements, making the interlocutor into an object can deny the

possibility of transformation.⁶⁷ On the contrary, rather than producing empowerment, this standard *modus operandi* reifies hierarchical relations and politics of vanguardism. Taking movements as the object of inquiry brings along a re-instating of hierarchies of knowledge: the role of passivity and ignorance represented by the object of study; and the role of bringers of change and authority by the researchers. Debates over the *coloniality of knowledge* are then a matter of concern for AR. Some experiments have deployed interventions at the micro-level in order to develop an elaborated critique of the object/subject divide and propose alternative modes of engagement. 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 a particular issue of common concern, the problematic becomes the *third object* to be analyzed by all the participants during a series of workshops (Interview CS, August 20, 2002). This methodology tries to articulate a subject-to-subject relationship, where both parties share knowledges and listen to each other 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 – via affordable publishing houses to be distributed among grassroots groups and beyond. One of the booklets that had a broader circulation is *Hipotesis 891* authored by *Colectivo Situaciones* and the unemployed worker group called *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTD) de Solano*. The text is based on a long-term series of workshops held between *Situaciones* and one of the most creative piquetero groups during the period of highest

⁶⁷ The question of anti-objectualizing research is pertinent when the topic of inquiry revolves around the very struggles. This differs from other kind of militant research experiences that “look up”: including certain activist cartographies, watch dog groups and power structure analyses (Mayo 2004). There is actually a line of division between militant researchers: on the one hand, those committed to investigating power structures in need of an objectualizing gaze; and on the other hand, those who defend the transformative potential of engaging their own struggles, not as object but subject of their research (Casas 2007).

social unrest. In this case, the work of the militant researchers was to identify the question that was floating in the air, which according to them, would be able to articulate new political formations and renovate social imaginaries. The question arose from the conversations during the workshops: is our demand as unemployed to recuperate our job? what would it mean to go beyond waged labor? How would society look? *Situaciones* and *MTD Solano* worked together to theorize this emerging relationship towards waged labor. This is how one of the unemployed workers, participant in the workshops and publication, expressed herself about *Situaciones*:

“We don’t know of any other academic projects that operate in the way they do. In their thinking, in their writing, they allow the struggles to speak by themselves, our experiences are not interpreted” (Neka Jara from *MTD-Solano*, Chapel Hill November 14, 2004).

Situaciones claims that militant research is an inquiry *without* object, in that regard.⁶⁸ The rejection of the violence imposed by processes of objectification into social struggles is one of the key traits of militant research. The actual reframing of the object as subject conveys profound instances of re-subjectification for all those involved in the research process:

“Research militancy is not the name of the experience of someone who does research, but that of the production on an encounter without subjects, or if you prefer, of an encounter that produces subjects” (*Situaciones* 2007: 81)

Even if militant research is quite mindful about the very process of inquiry, one might query about the awareness of power differentials among the different parties involved.

⁶⁸ Looking carefully at some of the examples of militant research, I would add that in fact there is actually a displacement of the objectualizing gaze towards other spheres beyond the movements themselves. For instance, *Situaciones*’ workshops bring together two different populations by a third object of study which is a shared concern for the two involved parties; *Precarias a la Deriva*’s approach of “partir de si”, focusing on themselves, takes their own experience as object of study; *counter-mappings of migration* (see *Migmap* 2006, and *Fadaiat* 2004) take the border regime, including control technologies and migration related institutions as the object to be studied and mapped, rather than the migrant populations themselves; the *Counter Cartographies Collective* (2006, 2007) focuses on the university, including faculty, students and staff as situated subjects within that object.

Nonetheless, the mode of engagement is at least to be notably relational, intentionally oriented towards building alternative sociabilities:

“Militant researchers work towards making the elements of a noncapitalist sociability more potent. This requires them to develop a particular type of relation with the groups and movements they work with. Following Spinoza, Colectivo Situaciones calls this relation “composition”. Composition defines relations between bodies. It does not refer to agreements established at a discursive level but to the multidimensional *flows of affect and desire* the relationship puts in motion” (Souza and Holdren 2007: 77, my emphasis).

The relationship that supposedly emerges among the involved parties is defined as *composition*, also being referred to by more bodily and affective tones, such as *friendship* and even *love*:⁶⁹

Is it possible to engage in such research without at the same time setting in motion a process of *falling in love*? How would a tie between two experiences be possible without a strong feeling of *love* or *friendship*? Certainly, the experience of research militancy resembles that of the person in love, on condition that we understand by *love* that which a long philosophical tradition – the materialist one – understands by it: that is, not something that just happens to one with respect to another but a process which, in its constitution, *takes* two or more. Such a love relation *participates* without the mediation of an intellectual decision: rather, the existence of two or more finds itself pierced by this shared experience. This is not an illusion, but an authentic experience of anti-utilitarianism, which converts the ‘own’ into the ‘common’ (Situaciones 2003).

This shared experience of affect is proposed as a counterpoint to abstraction and individuality. Again, in Situaciones terms: “This love – or friendship – constitutes itself as a relation that renders undefined what until that moment was kept as individuality, composing a figure integrated by more than one individual body (...) That is why we consider this *love* to be a

⁶⁹ This meaning comes from the first instance where the figure of militant research was defined in *Política y Situación: de la potencia al contrapoder*. (2000) By *Miguel Benasayag y Diego Stulwark*. Ediciones de Mano en Mano.

condition of militant research” (2003).⁷⁰ That relationship is thought as a process of mutual empowerment, and not of teaching:

“Militant research does not teach, at least not in the sense of an explanation which assumes the stupidity and powerlessness of those it explains to. Research militancy is a composition of wills, an attempt to create power (potential) of everyone involved. Such a perspective is only possible by admitting from the beginning that one does not have answers, and by doing so, abandoning the desire to lead others, to be seen as the expert” (Souza and Holdren 2007: 79).

This process of re-inventing roles and re-arranging positions of authority might certainly develop differential “empowerments” and informal knowledge hierarchies. Yet, at the level of intentions, militant research attempts to disestablish the expert figure and the regime of expertise as a whole.⁷¹ This challenging enterprise is in large part founded in the forceful claim that social movements are knowledge producers, ultimately posing the questions of who produces knowledge, for what, and for whom:

According to James Scott, the point of departure of radicality is physical, practical, social resistance. Any power relation of subordination produces encounters between the dominant and the dominated. In these spaces of encounter, the dominated exhibit a *public discourse* that consists in saying that which the powerful would like to hear, reinforcing the appearance of their own subordination, while – silently – in a space *invisible* to power, there is the production of a world of *clandestine knowledges (saberes)* which belongs to the experience of micro-resistance and insubordination. (Situaciones 2003)

This led us into the question of how these knowledges are produced and also distributed. Is the campesino leader the sole artifice of elaborated speeches? Or is the committed intellectual

⁷⁰ The connection between knowledge and love has been made by religious approaches such as Zen or Liberation Theology; also by biologists such as Maturana and Varela; feminist geographers such as Gibson and Graham; and extensively developed by feminists of color of the US such as Anzaldúa and Keating via their concept of “technologies of crossing” (2002).

⁷¹ This questioning of expert knowledge and regimes of expertise has clear Foucaultian resonances.

in solidarity with the workers movement the one who writes books? And under what conditions are those speeches and books circulating and being distributed? The social movements where activist research projects are hosted reject any kind of expression of vanguard or leadership. This so called *anti-authoritarian* philosophy is well engrained among autonomous movements and has its correlations in how the production of knowledge is conceived, conducted and circulated. This is the topic of the next section.

3.2.3. Movements' Networking through Knowledge Production

Militant research is said to be born out of dual distrust towards institutions of expert knowledge production as well as towards leftist vanguard politics. According to AR practitioners, there is a relationship of friction and tension between these different forms of knowledge production:

Throughout contemporary history, it is possible to trace a persistent distrust, on the part of movements for social transformation, towards certain forms of knowledge production and distribution. On the one hand, a distrust towards those sciences that aid a better organization of command and exploitation, as well as distrust towards the mechanisms of capture of *minor knowledges* (underground, fermented in uneasiness and insubordinations, fed by processes of autonomous social cooperation or rebelliousness)⁷² on the part of those agencies in charge of guaranteeing governability. On the other hand, in many cases, there has been distrust towards those supposedly “revolutionary” ideological and iconic forms of knowledge and a distrust of possible intellectualist and idealist mutations of knowledges that initially were born at the heart of the movements themselves. This distrust has lead to impotence in some occasions (Malo 2004: 4).

According to this view, both in the case of expert knowledge as well as in the case of revolutionary knowledge, what is at stake is the capturing of knowledges under the mechanisms of individual authorship and copy-right distribution. In contrast with the logic of capture, or what

⁷² About the notion of minor knowledges, see works by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially, *Mil Mesetas. Capitalismo y Esquizofrenia*, [*A Thousands Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*] PreTextos, Valencia, 1997

some have called “enclosure of knowledge” (Shukaitis 2009; *Compartir es bueno* 2008) militant research advocates for knowledge production authored by collective struggles themselves and free circulation of ideas. Militant research products in that sense are conceived from the get go to be used in a multiplicity of arrangements: from squatted buildings to union meetings to graduate seminars to grant applications. Such a desire of multiple uses and broad dispersion of the intellectual material clashes with the enclosure logic held by powerful publishing industries and their requirements around intellectual property for the fulfillment of profit making and the production of experts. In order to deal with the concern of modes of distribution, militant research results are under anti copy-right licenses, humorously named as *copy-left* licenses. These licenses allow for different forms of free re-usage and distribution.

The following chapters further develop this publishing practice. Here it is important to emphasize the radical difference with standard modes of publication by embracing a very controversial distribution practice, even in legal terms. This does not exclude participating in formal academic journals or major newspapers though. Additionally, there are also other specific channels of distribution such as the reliance on social movements’ own publishing houses (*Traficantes de Sueños* in Madrid or *Ediciones de mano en mano* and *Tinta Limón* in Buenos Aires) which are relatively fast in terms of publication launching. Their publications are quite stylish due to the regular involvement of designers (professional or not), and they are intentionally affordable. Formats range from paper cover books to small booklets, websites, DVDs, maps and public events.⁷³ As part of these self-published products, there is also the

⁷³ Some of the publications on militant research thus far are mono-graphics about a particular research project (eg. booklets by *Situaciones*; 700 pages textbook by *Observatorio Metropolitano* or collage-publication by PD) and others are edited volumes compiling different militant research experiences worldwide (*Nociones Comunes* and *Constituent Imagination*).

practice of ‘writing prefaces’ about each other’s work. Through prefacing, one collective engages with other’s work obtaining a regular sense of being mutually informed about ongoing projects. The multiple networking practices among the research collectives then range from preface writing to publishing each others’ work, to mutual visits to co-authorship. This speaks to how the practice of knowledge production itself has a potentiality of generating networks. The collectives are spread throughout different cities, countries and continents at this point, and are often articulated via decentralized networks in contact by email, international encounters, publication projects or mutual visits. Networking through knowledge production then is channeled by new technologies but also through more traditional practices such as sharing books, prefacing, personal exchanges. Nonetheless, the novel point is that there is an explicit politics of contagion, learning from each other and allowing ideas to travel, even to be copied and pasted. Usually, but not always, this logic of contagion tries to be aware of the specificities of each place and situation. While arguing for its specificity, in many ways these networking practices reflect university based networking. Perhaps the biggest difference here deals precisely with intellectual property and how to facilitate the spread and re-use of ideas in different context or by different groups.

This embracing of contagion, coping and tinkering as methods speaks to the attempt towards building a non-professionalized sense of the militant research practitioner. According to Holmes, the following would be the sole requirements to become a militant research collective:

[...] there is no intellectual privilege in the activist domain. Activist-researchers can contribute to a short, middle and long-term analysis of the crisis, by examining and inventing new modes of intervention at the micro-political scales where even the largest social movements begin. Who can play this great game? Whoever is able to join or form a *meshwork* of independent researchers. What are the prices, the terrains, the wagers and

rules? Whichever ones your group finds most productive and contagious. How does the game continue, when the ball goes out of your field? Through shared meeting in a meshwork of meshwork, through collective actions, images, projects, and publications” (2007: 43, my emphasis)

Yet, despite the horizontal connotations of *meshwork*, power relations exist within all kind of networks. This is not always openly recognized in the literature by activist researchers, although it is informally acknowledged how certain groups become more relevant nodes, hubs of some sort, within the net. The issue here is how to think about power in networks in ways that potentate, rather than vitiate, network dynamics. Nonetheless, the networking practices engaged by activist research practitioners directly speak to a desire for the democratization of knowledge. This is so specifically in two ways. First, by the development of certain infrastructures (eg. licencing procedures and autonomous publishing houses) there is an actual attempt at freeing ideas and information from current processes of knowledge enclosure. Second, the engagement with a series of concrete procedures of mutual exchange (eg. preface writing and co-authored collections) generates collaborative spaces of communication⁷⁴ among research groups and beyond. If democratization of knowledge is then a concern for activist research, what are the spaces of production more adequate to respond to such aspirations? What kind of institutional or non-institutional affiliations do these initiatives work from?

3.2.4. Autonomous Spaces of Enunciation

⁷⁴ However, communication is a controversial term for militant researchers. Both *Situaciones* and *Precarias* problematize the notion of communication and prefer to talk about *resonances*: “Communication produces abstractions of experience. The experience itself can only be lived [...] There is however the possibility of resonances between struggles” (*Situaciones* 2007: 78).

They are asking how to communicate place-based experiences and struggles born out of specific situations without a ‘global standpoint’ but rather an immanent one: “Communication is enunciation from the bottom floor, form a particular place, a producer of subjectivity and imaginary; we are interested in a communication that is capable not so much of generating recruitment as it is of shaking and producing unexpected resonances in others, how also search and ask themselves questions; we are interested in a communication that is the composition of different and for that reason the production of a new real at the edge of the existing real” (PD 2007: 86).

Following my argument, activist research practices are strongly influenced by their conceptual kinship with *autonomous* politics. In terms of the relationship with well-established institutions related to the state, capital or official expertise, autonomous politics advocate for processes of self-organization based on a logic of *within and against*. This implies a self-awareness of a positioning within an institutional or systemic framework that is nonetheless attentive to institutional constraints. From that positionality, an autonomous politics attempts to develop a stance which can bypass those constraints, especially those tangential or contrary to movements' goals. However, given the numerous pressures experienced in the practice when working within or with an institution, many autonomous initiatives have turned to an explicit choice for a non-institutional location. Nonetheless, the possibilities remain open, without rejecting institutional collaboration from a priori. In fact, there are multiple examples of autonomous initiatives working for or in collaboration with official institutions. The premise of acting within the system's circuits being that transformation is not possible if coming from a total outside: first, because there is no such a thing as a total "outside to the system"; and second, because self-isolation is not helpful nor desired. However, they are also very firm about how being completely "within the system" is ineffective for change.⁷⁵

Where then does the production of knowledge from this kind of autonomous location takes place? Initiatives at militant research, either as long-term collectives or as temporal projects, are usually articulated beyond standard legal or institutional settings, outside regular structures such as political parties, government agencies, unions, universities or NGOs. They are, nonetheless, open to and often work in collaboration with institutional sites (for instance in the

⁷⁵ This political stance of *within and against* is supported by autonomous sister-notions such as "exodus", "antagonism" and "counter-power". See Graeber (2004) and *Colectivo Situaciones*, Toni Negri, John Holloway, Miguel Benasayag, Luis Matini, Horacio González, Ulrich Brandt (2001).

case of *Precarias*, they have worked with the municipality of Madrid, major universities and research institutes as well as educational programs of the European Union). Activist researchers work in tandem with other ‘experts’, accept institutional funds or take advantage of publishing venues. Following this autonomous and antagonistic spirit though, even if there are relationships with institutions, for the most part, militant research projects bypass and contest the regular modes of production and channels of distribution associated with ‘expert’ knowledge. Some of the key specificities of the practice of militant research are evident when contrasting them with knowledge produced under institutional logics. The pressures from university labor markets for career building, through the development of an individual name as symbolic capital, are often absent in militant research. It is true that while militant research is usually produced under collective names, there is also some individual authorship (Marta Malo, Marcelo Exposito, Emmanuel Rodriguez, and Cristina Vega being some prolific authors in Spain). These might result in instances of popularity, producing protagonist figures. However, the political goals will be still the main purpose of the writing, rather than building a name. While there might be projects oriented at combining political goals with professional concerns, important divergences are seen when compared with academic kinds of research:

As far from institutional procedures as it is from ideological certainties, the question is rather to organize life according to a series of hypotheses (practical and theoretical) on the ways to (self-) emancipation. To work in autonomous collectives that do not obey rules imposed by academia implies the establishment of a positive connection with subaltern, dispersed, and hidden knowledges, and the production of a body of *practical knowledges of counter power*. This is just the opposite of using social practices as a field of confirmation for laboratory hypotheses. Research militancy, then, is also the art of establishing compositions that endow with *potencia* the quests and elements of alternative sociability.

Academic research is subjected to a whole set of alienating mechanisms that separate researchers from the very *meaning* of their activity: they must accommodate their work to

determined rules, topics and conclusions. Funding, supervision, language requirements, bureaucratic red tape, empty conferences and protocol, constitute the conditions in which the practice of *official* research unfolds.

Militant research distances itself from those circuits of academic production – of course, neither opposing nor ignoring them. [...] Militant research attempts to work under alternative conditions, created by the collective itself and by the ties to counter power in which it is inscribed, pursuing its own efficacy in the production of knowledges useful to the struggles (Situaciones 2003).

Rather, by this embracing of non-institutional pressures (including its consequent lack of regular financial support), what militant researchers actually want to achieve is a place from which to speak with independence. This is why it is said that militant research attempts to build “autonomous spaces of enunciation” (Escobar 2009). From a decolonial perspective, this positioning allows AR to challenge not only the content, but “the very terms of the conversation”, to use a Mignolo’s expression (2000):

“Autonomous inquiry demands a rupture from the dominant cartographies. Both compass and coordinates must be reinvented if you really want to transform the dynamics of a changing world-system. Only by disorienting the self and uprooting epistemic certainties can anyone hope to inject a positive difference into the unconscious dynamics of the geopolitical order. How then can activist-researchers move to disorient the reigning maps, to transform the dominant cartographies, without falling into the never-never lands of aesthetic extrapolation? The problem of activist research is inseparable from its embodiment, from its social elaboration” (Holmes 2007: 41)

This *uprooting of epistemic certainties* speaks to the last trait being identified as constituent of the activist research practice, that is, the embracement of an epistemology of uncertainty and ontology of unfixity.

3.2.5. A Not-Knowing made out of Questions

The challenge for a different kind of politics, re-invigorated by the Zapatista uprising, has given birth to a variety of experiments with and theories of the real. One of the conceptual

mandates of this contemporary wave of autonomous politics is the Zapatistas' call to "caminar preguntando" or *ask while walking*. This call suggests a form of intervention, or rather, a mode of engagement, that is more a proposition than a totalizing solution; it encourages creativity and transformation and constantly puts itself into question, always ready to self-correct (Villasante 2006).⁷⁶ It is based on the practice of attentive listening (Other Campaign manifesto 2006). This Zapatista call has become one of the leading principles of militant research practice. In fact, there is even a metonymical use of this call to refer to militant research among European autonomous movements, becoming a clear inspiration for groups such as *Precarias*:

We think re-naming the world is central; and doing it from below, applying the Zapatista call to 'ask while walking' " (2004, public presentation at Universidad Internacional de Andalucía)

Again, how these political mandates of constant creativity, ability to self-correct and active listening translate into practices of knowledge production? First of all, it implies a research attitude not based on a complex set of *a priori* certainties, but on permanent questioning. This logic contrasts with many previous and current progressive movements, as militant researchers point out:

Unlike the political militant, for whom *politics always takes place in its own separate sphere*, the *researcher-militant* is a character made out of questions, not saturated by ideological meanings and models of the world. Nor is militant research a practice of 'committed intellectuals' or of a group of 'advisors' to social movements. The goal is neither to politicize nor intellectualize the social practices. It is not a question of managing to get them to make a leap in order to pass from the social to 'serious politics' (Situaciones 2003).

⁷⁶ A brief and humorous engagement with the call for 'asking while walking' contends that this new form of doing politics resembles an intelligent system able to generate "collective construction of alternative and sustainable action and knowledge" in *Sentirse haciendo, caminar preguntando*, Tomas R. Villasante, in *Diagonal* n.27, 2006.

What is at stake is an embracing of a non-vanguard politics. It is important then to explicitly recognize that research is based on an attitude of “not-knowing”, pursuing an epistemology of uncertainty:

Militant research works neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be. On the contrary, the only condition for researcher-militants is a difficult one: to remain faithful to their ‘not knowing’. In this sense, it is an authentic *anti-pedagogy* (Situaciones 2003).

According to one of the members of *Colectivo Situaciones* speaking on a visit to the university of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, militant research is about “locating questions” (Diego Sztulwark, April 2009). Indeed, questions are at the heart of militant research practice. It is about detecting questions that are on the sphere of the real, questions that are coming from the everyday life of movements and sectors: for instance, the question of what to do when the unemployed do not want a regular waged job; or the question of how to conceive of a school for teachers that want something other than the conventional pedagogical model. Those questions become the main articulators of the research projects. They are not peripheral, but rather operate as enunciations and points of departure. This is the case of *Precarias*’ foundational question: “*what is your strike? What does your own strike look like?*” Coming from a situated experience, those questions are intended to provoke and *interpelar*⁷⁷ other subjects (PD 2004: 81) The embracing of research as “not knowing”, or better, the engagement with the Zapatista’s call for *asking while walking*, is an explicit mandate of militant research. However, rather than pessimist nihilism as a result of the impossibility of absolute knowledge, it bring along another

⁷⁷ To *compel* is the English translation of the Spanish term *interpelar*, however it does not seem to capture the meaning of putting someone’s common sense into question that *interpelar* entails.

political logic, other methodologies or, why not, a different theology⁷⁸: that of continuous searching and permanent experimentation.

Chapter 3

*Investigación Militante*⁷⁹

The Cultural Politics of Activist Research

Introduction

Processes of struggle and self-organization, especially those most vivid and dynamic, are fueled by an incentive to produce their own knowledges, languages and images. [...] The goal is that of creating an appropriate and operative theoretical horizon, very close to the surface of the 'lived', where the simplicity and concreteness of elements from which it has emerged, achieve meaning and potential (Malo 2004: 13).

It is no coincidence that some of the most explicit and well articulated claims about the importance of situated knowledge production in processes of social struggle are being put forward by movements themselves. In particular, activist research participants, such as the author of this quote and long term member of *Precarias a la Deriva*, are thinking through ways of producing knowledge which are based on experience (as well as reflection), away from pretensions of neutrality and individual genius as well as without searching for permanent absolute certainties. In a way, the claims advanced by the *knowledge turn* at the level of grand theory, are manifesting and developing themselves in the very terrain of social collective action.

⁷⁸ This is in reference to the similar spiritual thinking expressed in the Quaker and Liberation Theology based book *We Make the Road by Walking. Conversations on Education and Social Change* (1990)

⁷⁹ Spanish term for the practice of activist research among certain contemporary movements.

To say it differently, a knowledge turn might be simultaneously taking place at the level of social movements' practice. This should not be misread as saying that social movements did not produce knowledge in the past, they certainly did. Yet at the same time there is something distinct about the ways certain movements produce knowledge today. This chapter argues that this is the case of the current wave of activist research. It presents testimonies from different activist research practitioners about how they conceive of the intricacies of producing knowledge, how activist research works and what kind of epistemologies and ontologies are behind their specific procedures and goals.

The specificity of the practice of activist research is also claimed in relation to initiatives of engaged research originating in the academy. This dissertation then inserts itself within the methodological debates in the social sciences focusing on heterodox research approaches pursuing social transformation. The first section of this chapter, *The Prospects of Engaged Methodologies*, is a brief overview of scholarly traditions of committed research, zooming in on the discipline of Anthropology and the ethnographic method in particular. In the next section, *Activist Research as Embodiment of Autonomous Politics*, I offer a detailed discussion about the rationale and distinctive characteristics of activist or militant research as practiced by contemporary social movements. Based on the engagement with the material of several projects and collectives, especially *Precarias a la Deriva* and *Colectivo Situaciones*⁸⁰, I identify a series of traits constitutive of the practice of militant research: everyday politics, affect, within and against, meshworks, and permanent questioning. This section is mainly based on a careful

⁸⁰ *Colectivo Situaciones* is a Buenos Aires-based collective. This Argentine group is formed by independent researchers working in collaboration with different sectors of Argentinean social movements to investigate current problematics. Colectivo Situaciones coined the term “militant research” and their extensive work has become referential among the networks of activist researchers and Zapatista-oriented global justice movements. See <http://www.situaciones.org/>

reading of activist research material, selecting the most insightful quotations that speak directly about the nature of activist research.⁸¹ The third section, *Towards a Distinct Community of Research Practice*, concludes how activist research initiatives are progressively more intertwined with each other and thus are forming a broader global community made out of decentralized networks and common research practices. These networks are growing over time and nurtured by collective projects and international gatherings such as the World Social Forum, continental conferences and mutual exchanges between particular groups. This chapter engages the practice of activist research in general terms, setting the stage for a more detailed engagement with the case of *Precarias a la Deriva* in chapter four.

3.1. The Prospects of Engaged Methodologies

Social and environmental justice has been at the heart of many scholarly projects and intellectual traditions within the academy. I am interested here in those that besides working from ethical concerns, pay careful attention to research methodologies themselves as a source for politicizing the practice of knowledge production per se. The following are some of the most prolific trends using engaged research methodologies: Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda and Rahman 1991); Decolonial Research (Tuhiwai 1999; Walsh 2009); and more broadly speaking, *engaged* or *activist scholarship* (Boyer 1990; Hale 2008). These are usually trans-disciplinary traditions, and despite the use of different terminologies, they share the basic principle of advancing social transformation and justice through the research process itself.

⁸¹ This is when the ethnographer engages with the very products of these “writing machines” or “situated sources”, in this case being heterodox publications, the main cultural artifact of activist research communities. In order to evoke how this practice is made not only out of texts, but also of other *materialities*, I sporadically introduce ethnographic material speaking about sites of encounter and cross-pollination, places of production and infrastructures of distribution.

Within Anthropology, there have been different trends at developing engaged research: from the historical landmark of Sol Tax's Action-Anthropology (Bennet 1996; Foley 1999); to the path-breaking although often forgotten Black Feminist Engaged Anthropology (Harrison 1991; Gordon 1991; McClaurin 2001)⁸²; to the projects at engaged Medical Anthropology (Schensul 1999).⁸³ Current collective initiatives within the discipline span from the PhD program in Activist Anthropology at the University of Texas (Hale 2001) to the project at developing a Center of Integrating Research and Action (CIRA) at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (Holland, Fox and Powell 2003), to the more international initiative of the World Anthropologies Network (WAN Collective 2005; Restrepo and Escobar 2005; Ribeiro and Escobar 2007).⁸⁴

In fact, the discipline has a long trajectory of a vocation for justice: from the beginnings of American Anthropology, with Boas and his mostly women disciples (Behar and Gordon 1995); to the ongoing political work of Latin-American anthropologists (Aparicio and Blaser 2008); passing through the 1980s' critiques and innovations within Anthropology departments in the US, as described by Orin Starn:

Anthropology appeared to be an avenue for further involvement in social change, the discipline most concerned with the predicament of Indians, peasants, the urban poor, and the rest of a global society's dispossessed majorities. As a graduate student at Stanford University, I found that many other students wanted to transcend what critics of the 1960s and 1970s has begun to charge was a disciplinary legacy of apathy and sometimes complicity with imperialism, even more so in the atmosphere of peril and possibility of

⁸² I further elaborate those traditions in the Forth Semester Paper, requirement of the Anthropology PhD program at UNC-CH.

⁸³ From a series of community-based applied health research came out one of the most referenced contributions linking ethnography to participatory research, the seven volumes of *The Ethnographer's Toolkit* (1999).

⁸⁴ Another recent example born out of young critical anthropologists in Spain just formed called *AntroLab: Red de Antropologias Criticas* (<http://invisibel.net/antrolab>)

the Reagan years with the advances of feminism, the onset of AIDS, the global upheaval from South Africa to Central America. We covered the “Left-Wing Lounge” of the anthropology department with posters of Mandela and Sandino and a silk screen of Karl Marx that I had bought in San Francisco’s Chinatown. The ideal of an anthropology of change underwrote friends’ choices about what to study: feminist organizing in India and Nepal, squatter settlements in Mexico City, the struggle over Indian rights in Nicaragua, the U.S. sanctuary movement for war refugees from Central America. The traditional focus on “the primitive” [] had led anthropologists to seek out for study the most “untouched” []. We were motivated by a self-conscious and sometimes self-righteous wish to reverse this history by researching upheaval and mobilization in the Third World and the United States. As part of this vision, the anthropologist would not just study but seek to support the struggle for change, and it seemed to us complicit with power to claim the Olympian remove of scientific objectivity. Our hope was to reinvent anthropology by embracing values of accountability, activism and engagement (1999: 6, 7)

This upheaval, demanding a more engaged and non-authoritarian discipline, was captured by a series of path breaking anthropological publications such as *Writing Culture* (1986), *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1999) and *Women Writing Culture* (1995). This is part of the broader turn towards reflexivity that marked the basis for a practice of fieldwork and writing sensitive to the politics of representation (Aull Davies 1999). However, this claim of supporting struggles through the practice of reflexivity has also been put into question. In fact, much self-criticism about the excesses of reflexivity and its limits at supporting the ‘Other’ has zeroed in on how it actually reinforces an artificial boundary between researcher and researched (Probyn 1993). These debates have been the source of multiple instances of “ethnographic anxiety” (Murphy 2006).

According to Hale, reflexivity is not enough in and of itself to make scholarship engaged (2008). He poses a division in the field between, on the one hand, *activist research* in which anthropologists are seen as engaged scholars or action-oriented because they are working explicitly *for* social movements; and, on the other, *cultural critique*, in which researchers also

stake a political position, but are working in the realm of academic literatures to deconstruct and complexify dominant or hegemonic visions of the real. This controversial dichotomy has prompted a series of responses. One of them eloquently provides a solution to such a dilemma. Michal Osterweil, as “part of a new generation of social movement scholarship that maintains dual loyalties both to academia and to activism” (Kurzman 2008:11), advocates for a research practice that is able to introduce both: the refinement of “cultural critique“ as well as the spirit of collaboration and open solidarity of an engaged approach (Osterweil 2008).⁸⁵ She is invested in developing a rubric for a networked ethnographic approach. This approach challenges the traditional divisions between researcher/and object of research, but at the same time refuses easy notions of complete horizontality or equivalence in which the researcher is identical to his/her object of study. Instead, she argues for recognizing the flat, dispersed, multi-scalar spaces of knowledge production in which anthropological knowledge is not equivalent to that of the movement, but one meaningful part of a complex network of (potentially) movement- relevant- knowledges.⁸⁶

However, going beyond the questions of engaged scholarship vs. “refined scholarship” as the overarching ethical framework of anthropological research, it is time to zoom in on the very materiality of the ethnographic practice, as Tomaskova has called for (2007). Looking at the anthropological method par excellence, there have been numerous attempts at developing modes of ethnographic engagement attuned to action and collaboration, beyond or in tandem with

⁸⁵ In the same vein, Michal Osterweill together with her colleagues, Dana Powell and myself, are organizing a panel for the AAA 2009 entitled “Knowledge-Objects: Politicizing Ethnographies of the Complex”.

⁸⁶ Also, these three PhD candidates are working with Arturo Escobar in a chapter for the edited volume “Transnational Ethnographies” around similar methodological theoretical proposals for a different politics of ethnographic research mindful of the knowledge turn afoot both in society at large, social theory and its concomitant turn in the arena of social movements.

politics of representation. This is the case of “critical ethnography” and its argument for a more collaborative enterprise (Foley and Valenzuela 2005); as well as Madison’s emphasis on the potentials of ethnography’s performative aspects (2005). In reference to feminist ethnography, early experimental feminist ethnographies as described in *Women Writing Culture* (1995) move a step forward from the call to reflexive ethnography (Davis 1999). Anthropologists such as Ruth Landes, Zora N. Hurston, Ella Deloria and Mourning Dove not only used highly refined modes of self-reflexive writing, but also engaged in solid political projects at advancing women, minority and class-based struggles (Cole 1995; Hernandez 1995; Finn 1995) as a method per se is based on the epistemological principles of standpoint epistemology and situated knowledge. Despite being object of intense self-critique, this foundation is said to allow for an ethnography that erases pretensions of hierarchical authority, and advances the potential of a more productive encounter among anthropological knowledges and other knowledges, usually in struggle, and the building of inter-subjective relationships (Abu-Lughod 1993; Gordon 1993; Visweswaran 1994).

In the same vein, participant observation as one of the methods on which the ethnographic approach relies, has also been re-qualified as “engaged observation” (Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006) or “observant participation” (Lorenzi 2008). This speaks to the increased merging between anthropology and activism, where a generation of activists are taking their own experiences as source, field and framework for their anthropological work. For instance, direct action and the consensus process as practices of global justice movements are analyzed by anthropologists who are also long-term participants themselves within those groups: Graeber in New York Direct Action Network (2007, 2008); Casas in Chicago Direct Action Network (2008); Juris in Movimiento Resistencia Global- Barcelona (2008) or Daro in different counter-summits

and Really Really Free Markets (2009). The explicit or “felt” presence of first-person accounts becomes not a reflexive mode of engagement with the *Other*, but an intense narrative about one’s experiences and commitments as source for theorizing these moments and methodologies. Taking the author’s experience as the point of departure speaks to the traditions of auto-ethnography (Reed-Danahay 1997) and native anthropology (Abu-Lughod 1991). However, these activist ethnographies might differ from those traditions in the moment the self is not just an individual, but normally evokes a collective and the wider networks in which such activist group operates. While in the different traditions of auto-ethnography the first person is articulated in singular; in the emerging genre of activist ethnography, the first person becomes plural.

Some of the tentative attempts at resolving the dilemma of a situated ethnographic engagement on the part of the activist-anthropologist range from the “militant ethnographer” (Juris 2007) to a “relational/flat mode of engagement” (Casas, Osterweill and Powell 2008). In contrast with the total identification of the militant ethnographer with a given political group, a relational approach advocates for an acknowledgement of the distinct positions and singularities at play although sharing a common concern or problematic. The methods chapter advances this last proposition by advocating “research as knitting and translation”. While admitting the singularity of positions and situated knowledges stemming from those particular sites of enunciation, the research endeavor attempts an actual articulation among those nodes, facilitating paths of communication. This would ideally advance the political goal of supporting and branching out networks among different struggles, embracing the logic of proliferation and contagion of radical ideas and practices through the tool of ethnography.

This brief review is intended to set the stage for engaging the practice of activist research not as an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader constellation of traditions of research for social transformation.⁸⁷ The current wave of activist research or *investigacion militante* is indeed mindful of antecedents and previous experiences of knowledge for transformation. Taking research out of the laboratory for social justice purposes has a long trajectory, they say. Without claiming newness for this practice, the prologue to a collection of essays on activist research, entitled *Nociones Comunes*⁸⁸, explores a series of historical antecedents of movement-based inquiry, focusing on four traditions linked to previous cycles of struggle:

Certainly, these questions are not new, although the context in which they are asked may be. In fact, many of the current experiments that are asking these questions, have looked back, searching for historical references. They are searching for those examples where the production of knowledge was immediately and fruitfully linked to processes of self-organization and struggle. In this sense, four inspirational tendencies are identifiable in recent history: worker inquiries and co-research; feminist epistemology and women's consciousness-raising groups; institutional analysis; and participatory action research or PAR. All of these examples, deserve (due to the wealth of accumulative experience) at least a brief overview, in the style of a historical *excursus* that allows us to situate current discussions and trajectories of militant and/or action research. (Malo 2004: 2, author's translation)

These examples coming mainly from Italy, US, France, Latin America and South Asia, further explained in the prologue of *Nociones Comunes*, are certainly not a total list. Neither this referential book among militant researchers nor its prologue attempts to be comprehensive in their examples. Rather, the collection is evocative of the long-standing tradition of knowledge for

⁸⁷ This review does not pretend to be comprehensive; rather it reflects the schools of thought where I am situated, including my own PhD training in Anthropology and the interdisciplinary working groups at UNC and Duke I am participating in at the time of writing.

⁸⁸ *Nociones Comunes* is a collection of contemporary militant research projects, edited by a member of *Precarias a la Deriva*. It is prefaced by what has become a quite referential text, translated into different languages (we ourselves did the English translation thanks to UPCS funds) and widely distributed. The preface is authored by Marta Malo, a prolific writer member of PD and participant in many other political projects in Madrid, Spain and broader European networks. For further reading of the English version of this Preface see: <http://transform.eicpcp.net/transversal/0406/malo/en>

action. While this first section reviewed some of the traditions of engaged research from the perspective of the discipline of Anthropology, this second section engages with a parallel phenomenon at politicizing research, or rather, reinventing politics through research: the current wave of activist, or rather, *autonomous research*.

3.2. Activist Research as embodiment of autonomous politics

Buenos Aires 2002

One of the most intense milestones of the global justice movement was the effervescence of autonomous movements in Argentina during the national crisis starting with the government's failure to pay its debt to the IMF in late 2001. The *piqueteros* and neighborhood assemblies were the source of inspiring images and concrete techniques such as the *cacerolada* or re-appropriated factories that subsequently traveled among movements' worldwide.⁸⁹ The Argentine militant research group *Colectivo Situaciones* registered and analyzed the events considering their research work as "a series of interventions" throughout the different scenarios and political processes (SWMG workshop, Chapel Hill 2009). Their writings also traveled globally becoming a key reference for the current round of militant research practice. The first time I encountered an activist group directly embracing research as a constituent trait of their struggle was in Buenos Aires. We were participating in the Argentinean Social Forum which was held at the National University in downtown BA. We were presenting on a panel about autonomous activism, bringing examples from US movements to the fore. After our talk, we met with one member from *Colectivo Situaciones* at a "cafeteria bonarense". Coffee shops in Buenos Aires are

⁸⁹ The book *Genealogia de una Revuelta* by Raul Zibechi (2003); the film *The Take* by Naomi Klein and the web-based news *Argentina Indymedia* were key to spreadign the Argentine revolt worldwide, sparking solidarity actions and networks in many cities.

conceived as spaces to talk for a long time, so we enjoyed a lively conversation with good coffee, water and orange juice with a small pastry for free. This is the first time we heard about “an inquiry without object”. After that conversation we realized how the many booklets, zines and other publications by this group –self-defined as “militant researchers” – were circulating among many different activist spaces in Buenos Aires. We took much of this material back to Chicago where we were working at the time and also to Spain during family visits, to both read it carefully and share it with activist initiatives that were emerging in the wake of global justice counter-summits. Traveling with their material as well as engaging in the task of dissemination and translation (from Spanish to English), made *Situaciones*’ work part and parcel of our political and intellectual trajectory. Since then, we have crossed paths with *Situaciones* again in Porto Alegre, Brazil, during the 2005 edition of the World Social Forum where five members of the SMWG participated in a series of international workshops on activist research; in Chapel Hill, USA, where they were read in 2004 and also invited by the SMWG in 2009; and finally in Madrid, where during my fieldwork, the participation from *Situaciones* was required in many of the numerous booklets and collective projects launched by Precarias.

By developing a series of methodological experiments, activist research groups, such as *Colectivo Situaciones*, focus on exploring emerging sets of conditions, possibilities of networking and sites of intervention. These researchers speak from a situated position: from within, and supporting the success of, particular struggles. However, is this political commitment with a particular cause what distinguishes this activist wave of inquiry from other research initiatives within social movements? Research initiatives with political goals tend to share a similar understanding of knowledge as intrinsically linked to action and vice versa. In this sense,

many experiences emphasize the political practicality of knowledge production and its consequent possible strategic use. However, while previous and current initiatives share this idea of a tactical use of research findings, conceiving of research itself as a tool of struggle, I contend that some initiatives of contemporary militant inquiry go a step forward. It is not solely one more component of struggle among the many resources of a movement's repertoire. Rather, research is taken as a permanent ethic, a way of thinking, acting and being. In a way, research becomes the raw material for politics. This implies a re-definition of activist or militant identities as researchers, what I evocatively call "the becoming research of militancy". This intimate connection between subjectivity, politics, and research speaks to many of the principles of the knowledge turn, which are perhaps not so present (or self-consciously present) in other traditions of engaged research.

If politics is so central to the production of knowledge, identifying the notion of the political behind research practices might illuminate in part what makes a tradition distinct from others. This section identifies a series of specific traits to the politics of activist research (AR): what distinguishes traditions of engaged scholarship from AR? All share the ethical concern for justice, experimental methods of collaboration and a careful attention to politics of representation. Furthermore, what is different in the trend of AR when comparing it with previous or parallel initiatives at conducting research within and by other social movements? The task of identifying a particular political rationale to AR is impossible to do without addressing some of the political logics of the broader movement in which AR is inserted, that is, the global justice movement, and specifically its more Zapatista-inspired branches. These movements are

based on the logic and practices associated to autonomous politics.⁹⁰ Going through different traits, I highlight how AR appropriates and translates the political logic of *autonomy* -as practiced by the Zapatistas and other contemporary movements- into the terrain of knowledge production. The singularity of AR is then the result of a combination of the following autonomous traits: 1) research as a series of *interventions* in *everyday life* that *prefigure* alternative worlds; 2) research conducted from an autonomous site of enunciation, meaning self-organized and located *within and against* capital or state sponsored spaces; 3) research premised under the re-conceptualization of *struggles as subjects* and oriented towards the production of *affect*; 4) a goal towards network building through *decentralized collective work*, free distribution and non-vanguard knowledge production; and 5) research based on *permanent questioning*. Building on earlier conceptualizations of militant research (especially by *Colectivo Situaciones*), the following characterization has grown out of my own engagement with global justice movements and various militant research projects.

3.2.1. Research as interventionist, everyday and pre-figurative politics

Autonomous logics in the broad sense, as embraced and practiced by a variety of past and contemporary movements, often practice a politics of immediacy. Instead of working towards a hypothetic revolution that would bring along a utopian world, they emphasize the urgency of ‘here and now’. This notion of social transformation is developed through an interventionist

⁹⁰ Briefly stated, for the sake of this argument since a fully engagement would go beyond the scope of this work, *autonomy* refers to a political vision and modus operandi defined by key words such as direct democracy, pre-figurative politics, horizontality, self-organization, within and against, antagonism, direct action, self-representation and counter-power. See *Cuadernos de Autonomia* (2001). Autonomous practices have a long trajectory among anti-systemic movements in many countries. Today, it is associated with youth groups, mainly those deeply influenced by global justice movements and the Zapatistas, such as social centers, free software/copyleft projects and recuperated factories.

understanding of actions; a mode of everyday activism and a sense of pre-figurative politics.⁹¹

The logic of intervention is embraced by many global justice collectives, and is an especially explicit politics among the most art-oriented groups:⁹²

Over the course of the 1990s, the term "intervention" was increasingly used by politically engaged artists to describe their interdisciplinary approaches, which nearly always took place outside the realm of museums, galleries and studios. A decade later, these "interventionists" continue to create an impressive body of work that trespasses into the everyday world art that critiques, lampoons, interrupts, and co-opts, art that acts subtly or with riotous fanfare, and art that agitates for social change using magic tricks, faux fashion and jacked-up lawn mowers. In contrast to the sometimes heavy-handed political art of the 1980s, interventionist practitioners have begun to carve out compelling new paths for artistic practice, coupling hard-headed politics with a light-handed approach, embracing the anarchist Emma Goldman's dictum that revolutions and dancing belong together. The projects [...] whether they are discussions of urban geography, tents for homeless people, or explorations of current labor practices – are often seasoned with honey rather than vinegar (Media Release on *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*, MASS MoCA's summer exhibition, opening May 29, 2004)

Inspired by the Situationists and Emma Goldman's humorous understanding of political action, the interventionist logic implies a sense of unexpected and joyful interference in reality. Interventions are intended to operate on at least two levels: the world-system's politics and the micro-politics of the subject. Briefly put, the goal is to engage in social transformation through the engagement of everyday life and processes of *re-subjectification*. This understanding of politics is not restricted to the politicized art world, but rather, pervades the background of understanding of many contemporary movements (D'Ignazio 2005).

⁹¹ These notions of the political are not claimed to be new. Autonomous logics have a long and dispersed historical trajectory out of the scope of this research. It is important to mention though, that contemporary movements acknowledge those past experiences of autonomy as sources of inspiration. For a partial development of this history see anthropologist David Graeber's work *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (2004).

⁹² Some of the so-called "interventionists" I have been in contact with for this research are *YoMango*, *God Bless Graffiti Coalition*, *the Institute for Applied Autonomy*, *Pink Block*, *Institute of Infinite Small Things*, *16 Beaver Group*. Many of them participated in the edited volume *The Interventionists: Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (2004) and its subsequent exhibits depicted.

This understanding of political change is linked to yet another main pillar of autonomous global justice movements: what could be called “everyday activism” and the DIY or “do it yourself culture” (Van Meter et al. 2007). While many politicized individuals in the traditional left were critical of the system, many of their everyday habits were not expected to adjust to that critique. Most of the time, there was a delegating logic towards other actors to enact those required changes—mostly the state. Certain struggles of the 1960s and 1970s though insisted in a very direct correlation between discourse and everyday practice if one wanted to be politically coherent: for example, ecologists will call for vegetarianism/veganism and animal-free consumption patterns; anti-multinational activists will boycott corporate products through their own purchasing practices; feminists will bring a gender-attention to their everyday activities, from work routines to giving birth; etc. This logic of everyday activism has inspired many global justice activists, and has also been brought into the realm of knowledge production. Rather than conceiving of research as a concrete compartmentalized activity delegated to experts, it is time to conduct “in-house research”. This research on movements’ “own terms” takes participants’ everyday life as unique sources for radical inquiry into the interstices of the system. Instead of hiring others to do such work, research becomes one’s own permanent attitude embedded in everyday activities. Chapter 8 provides a graphic illustration of how research is practiced as an everyday ethics and routine.

Everyday interventionism runs parallel to yet another landmark of autonomous global justice movements, the question of “pre-figurative politics” (Sitrin 2004; Graeber 2002). Again, here the political also speaks to world changing *and* subject-making, starting from now and here. Desired for transformations have to be instantiated in our own practices today (Esteva 1997).

What does this understanding of politics mean for knowledge production? How does this notion of social change as continuous transformation get translated into processes of research? One of the main characteristics of activist research is that the procedures involved and the relations that are rendered during the research process then have to become an instantiation of the worlds one desires and is fighting for.

This emphasis on research as everyday activity, engaged in a continuous process of world-making, requires a material-based notion of knowledge. If “research militancy is a form of intervention” (Situaciones 2007: 76), it needs to base itself on an understanding of knowledge that is practice-oriented. In AR, the notion of knowledge might indeed be more intimately linked to embodiment and practice than in standard research traditions. As *Colectivo Situaciones* puts it:

“Research militancy does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics. For, insofar as we see thought as the thinking/doing activity that interrupts the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, thinking is immediately political. On the one hand, if we see politics as the struggle for freedom and justice, all politics involves thinking, because there are forms of thinking against established models implicit in every radical practice – a thought people carry out with their bodies” (2007: 75)

Militant research then opens the possibility for action, and thus the very task of world-making. This is how *Precarias a la Deriva* points to this ability in one of their definitions of activist research:

Militant research is the process by which we re-appropriate our capacity to create worlds fueled by a stubborn militant decision that a-prioris, should-bes and models (old or new) do not work [...] [militant research] interrogates, problematizes and *pushes the real* through a series of concrete procedures (2004: 92, my emphasis).

Holding to this understanding of research, contemporary militant research efforts at intervening in the real must then be quite conscious of their corresponding context and historical

specificity. Current research efforts by social movements are mindful of their role as knowledge producers in a specific historical context, especially when framed as ‘a burgeoning knowledge economy’. Given such a terrain of struggle, social movements then intentionally engage in the production of *counter-knowledges* with the goal of facilitating empowering and effective interventions:

“a peculiar proliferation of experiments with -and search among- the realms of thought, action and enunciation is found within social networks that seek to transform the current state of things (...). They are initiatives that explore: 1) how to break with ideological filters and inherited frameworks; 2) how to produce knowledge that emerges directly from the concrete analyses of the territories of life and cooperation, and experiences of uneasiness and rebellion; 3) how to make this knowledge work for social transformation; 4) how to make the knowledges that already circulate through movements’ networks operative; ...and finally, 5) how to appropriate our intellectual and mental capacities from the dynamics of labor, production of profit, and/or governmentality and how to ally them with collective (subversive, transformative) action, guiding them towards creative interventions” (Malo 2004: 1)

This reflects an explicit and antagonist enunciative position as knowledge producers on the part of social movements themselves. This direct embracing of knowledge production is made in the context of a so called knowledge economy. An illustrative case of research as an everyday form of politics, fighting in the context of a flexible knowledge economy, is the example of militant inquiry on precarity engaged in this dissertation. Facing a profound disquiet with the levels of dispersion and intense fragmentation lived by many flex workers in the ‘new economy’, research became a great device to not only make sense of current transformations, but as an experiential mechanism of aggregation: breaking isolation and promoting communicative practices among dispersed and fragmented subjects. In this way, rather than a tool, research for these movements is transformed into a foundational rock of militancy: “research as raw material of the political” *Precarias* announced as a conclusion of their first research project (Contrapoder

2005). Their research project, further elaborated upon in chapter 4, was intended to make labor transformations more understandable and somehow more bearable, allowing for both inhabiting *and* fighting new labor/existential conditions. The project was proclaimed to provide an opportunity of subjective transformation, to put an end to the permanent feeling of impotence and overwhelmed isolation, politicizing identities and reclaiming one's own everyday life as research material itself. *Precarias* would eloquently put it in these terms: "research as a collective search for a common lexicon to apprehend the real in a collective way" (PD 2004).

This transformative collective experience is product of investigating precarity in a distinct way, a way which is based on a notion of research as everyday and pre-figurative intervention. The purpose of militant research is not to communicate the 'true revolutionary path', rather it is about generating processes of articulation and subjective aggregation in the present moment, producing relationships and maintaining webs of alternative sociability. This goal responds to the urgency posed by a context defined by *Precarias* as "a deleuzian desert" or in Situaciones words, "an ontological reality of dispersion (social, spatial, temporal, subjective dispersion)" (2004: 90). The experience of fragmentation calls for practices that favor counter-inertias of aggregation and mutual support, militant research being one of those practices.

3.2.2. Research as production of affect and alternative sociabilities

If everyday subjective transformation is part and parcel of an autonomous politics, how does this concern translate into the realm of knowledge production? Conventional research requires an object, establishing clear limits between researchers vs. researched. In the case of studying with and about social movements, making the interlocutor into an object can deny the

possibility of transformation.⁹³ On the contrary, rather than producing empowerment, this standard *modus operandi* reifies hierarchical relations and politics of vanguardism. Taking movements as the object of inquiry brings along a re-instating of hierarchies of knowledge: the role of passivity and ignorance represented by the object of study; and the role of bringers of change and authority by the researchers. Debates over the *coloniality of knowledge* are then a matter of concern for AR. Some experiments have deployed interventions at the micro-level in order to develop an elaborated critique of the object/subject divide and propose alternative modes of engagement. 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 a particular issue of common concern, the problematic becomes the *third object* to be analyzed by all the participants during a series of workshops (Interview CS, August 20, 2002). This methodology tries to articulate a subject-to-subject relationship, where both parties share knowledges and listen to each other 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 – via affordable publishing houses to be distributed among grassroots groups and beyond. One of the booklets that had a broader circulation is *Hipotesis 891* authored by *Colectivo Situaciones* and the unemployed worker group called *Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados (MTD) de Solano*. The text is based on a long-term series of workshops held between *Situaciones* and one of the most creative piquetero groups during the period of highest

⁹³ The question of anti-objectualizing research is pertinent when the topic of inquiry revolves around the very struggles. This differs from other kind of militant research experiences that “look up”: including certain activist cartographies, watch dog groups and power structure analyses (Mayo 2004). There is actually a line of division between militant researchers: on the one hand, those committed to investigating power structures in need of an objectualizing gaze; and on the other hand, those who defend the transformative potential of engaging their own struggles, not as object but subject of their research (Casas 2007).

social unrest. In this case, the work of the militant researchers was to identify the question that was floating in the air, which according to them, would be able to articulate new political formations and renovate social imaginaries. The question arose from the conversations during the workshops: is our demand as unemployed to recuperate our job? what would it mean to go beyond waged labor? How would society look? *Situaciones* and *MTD Solano* worked together to theorize this emerging relationship towards waged labor. This is how one of the unemployed workers, participant in the workshops and publication, expressed herself about *Situaciones*:

“We don’t know of any other academic projects that operate in the way they do. In their thinking, in their writing, they allow the struggles to speak by themselves, our experiences are not interpreted” (Neka Jara from *MTD-Solano*, Chapel Hill November 14, 2004).

Situaciones claims that militant research is an inquiry *without* object, in that regard.⁹⁴ The rejection of the violence imposed by processes of objectification into social struggles is one of the key traits of militant research. The actual reframing of the object as subject conveys profound instances of re-subjectification for all those involved in the research process:

“Research militancy is not the name of the experience of someone who does research, but that of the production on an encounter without subjects, or if you prefer, of an encounter that produces subjects” (*Situaciones* 2007: 81)

Even if militant research is quite mindful about the very process of inquiry, one might query about the awareness of power differentials among the different parties involved.

⁹⁴ Looking carefully at some of the examples of militant research, I would add that in fact there is actually a displacement of the objectualizing gaze towards other spheres beyond the movements themselves. For instance, *Situaciones*’ workshops bring together two different populations by a third object of study which is a shared concern for the two involved parties; *Precarias a la Deriva*’s approach of “partir de si”, focusing on themselves, takes their own experience as object of study; *counter-mappings of migration* (see *Migmap* 2006, and *Fadaiat* 2004) take the border regime, including control technologies and migration related institutions as the object to be studied and mapped, rather than the migrant populations themselves; the *Counter Cartographies Collective* (2006, 2007) focuses on the university, including faculty, students and staff as situated subjects within that object.

Nonetheless, the mode of engagement is at least to be notably relational, intentionally oriented towards building alternative sociabilities:

“Militant researchers work towards making the elements of a noncapitalist sociability more potent. This requires them to develop a particular type of relation with the groups and movements they work with. Following Spinoza, Colectivo Situaciones calls this relation “composition”. Composition defines relations between bodies. It does not refer to agreements established at a discursive level but to the multidimensional *flows of affect and desire* the relationship puts in motion” (Souza and Holdren 2007: 77, my emphasis).

The relationship that supposedly emerges among the involved parties is defined as *composition*, also being referred to by more bodily and affective tones, such as *friendship* and even *love*:⁹⁵

Is it possible to engage in such research without at the same time setting in motion a process of *falling in love*? How would a tie between two experiences be possible without a strong feeling of *love* or *friendship*? Certainly, the experience of research militancy resembles that of the person in love, on condition that we understand by *love* that which a long philosophical tradition – the materialist one – understands by it: that is, not something that just happens to one with respect to another but a process which, in its constitution, *takes* two or more. Such a love relation *participates* without the mediation of an intellectual decision: rather, the existence of two or more finds itself pierced by this shared experience. This is not an illusion, but an authentic experience of anti-utilitarianism, which converts the ‘own’ into the ‘common’ (Situaciones 2003).

This shared experience of affect is proposed as a counterpoint to abstraction and individuality. Again, in Situaciones terms: “This love – or friendship – constitutes itself as a relation that renders undefined what until that moment was kept as individuality, composing a figure integrated by more than one individual body (...) That is why we consider this *love* to be a

⁹⁵ This meaning comes from the first instance where the figure of militant research was defined in *Política y Situación: de la potencia al contrapoder*. (2000) By *Miguel Benasayag y Diego Stulwark*. Ediciones de Mano en Mano.

condition of militant research” (2003).⁹⁶ That relationship is thought as a process of mutual empowerment, and not of teaching:

“Militant research does not teach, at least not in the sense of an explanation which assumes the stupidity and powerlessness of those it explains to. Research militancy is a composition of wills, an attempt to create power (potential) of everyone involved. Such a perspective is only possible by admitting from the beginning that one does not have answers, and by doing so, abandoning the desire to lead others, to be seen as the expert” (Souza and Holdren 2007: 79).

This process of re-inventing roles and re-arranging positions of authority might certainly develop differential “empowerments” and informal knowledge hierarchies. Yet, at the level of intentions, militant research attempts to disestablish the expert figure and the regime of expertise as a whole.⁹⁷ This challenging enterprise is in large part founded in the forceful claim that social movements are knowledge producers, ultimately posing the questions of who produces knowledge, for what, and for whom:

According to James Scott, the point of departure of radicality is physical, practical, social resistance. Any power relation of subordination produces encounters between the dominant and the dominated. In these spaces of encounter, the dominated exhibit a *public discourse* that consists in saying that which the powerful would like to hear, reinforcing the appearance of their own subordination, while – silently – in a space *invisible* to power, there is the production of a world of *clandestine knowledges (saberes)* which belongs to the experience of micro-resistance and insubordination. (Situaciones 2003)

This led us into the question of how these knowledges are produced and also distributed.

Is the campesino leader the sole artifice of elaborated speeches? Or is the committed intellectual

⁹⁶ The connection between knowledge and love has been made by religious approaches such as Zen or Liberation Theology; also by biologists such as Maturana and Varela; feminist geographers such as Gibson and Graham; and extensively developed by feminists of color of the US such as Anzaldúa and Keating via their concept of “technologies of crossing” (2002).

⁹⁷ This questioning of expert knowledge and regimes of expertise has clear Foucaultian resonances.

in solidarity with the workers movement the one who writes books? And under what conditions are those speeches and books circulating and being distributed? The social movements where activist research projects are hosted reject any kind of expression of vanguard or leadership. This so called *anti-authoritarian* philosophy is well engrained among autonomous movements and has its correlations in how the production of knowledge is conceived, conducted and circulated. This is the topic of the next section.

3.2.3. *Movements' Networking through Knowledge Production*

Militant research is said to be born out of dual distrust towards institutions of expert knowledge production as well as towards leftist vanguard politics. According to AR practitioners, there is a relationship of friction and tension between these different forms of knowledge production:

Throughout contemporary history, it is possible to trace a persistent distrust, on the part of movements for social transformation, towards certain forms of knowledge production and distribution. On the one hand, a distrust towards those sciences that aid a better organization of command and exploitation, as well as distrust towards the mechanisms of capture of *minor knowledges* (underground, fermented in uneasiness and insubordinations, fed by processes of autonomous social cooperation or rebelliousness)⁹⁸ on the part of those agencies in charge of guaranteeing governability. On the other hand, in many cases, there has been distrust towards those supposedly “revolutionary” ideological and iconic forms of knowledge and a distrust of possible intellectualist and idealist mutations of knowledges that initially were born at the heart of the movements themselves. This distrust has lead to impotence in some occasions (Malo 2004: 4).

According to this view, both in the case of expert knowledge as well as in the case of revolutionary knowledge, what is at stake is the capturing of knowledges under the mechanisms of individual authorship and copy-right distribution. In contrast with the logic of capture, or what

⁹⁸ About the notion of minor knowledges, see works by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, especially, *Mil Mesetas. Capitalismo y Esquizofrenia*, [A Thousands Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia] PreTextos, Valencia, 1997

some have called “enclosure of knowledge” (Shukaitis 2009; *Compartir es bueno* 2008) militant research advocates for knowledge production authored by collective struggles themselves and free circulation of ideas. Militant research products in that sense are conceived from the get go to be used in a multiplicity of arrangements: from squatted buildings to union meetings to graduate seminars to grant applications. Such a desire of multiple uses and broad dispersion of the intellectual material clashes with the enclosure logic held by powerful publishing industries and their requirements around intellectual property for the fulfillment of profit making and the production of experts. In order to deal with the concern of modes of distribution, militant research results are under anti copy-right licenses, humorously named as *copy-left* licenses. These licenses allow for different forms of free re-usage and distribution.

The following chapters further develop this publishing practice. Here it is important to emphasize the radical difference with standard modes of publication by embracing a very controversial distribution practice, even in legal terms. This does not exclude participating in formal academic journals or major newspapers though. Additionally, there are also other specific channels of distribution such as the reliance on social movements’ own publishing houses (*Traficantes de Sueños* in Madrid or *Ediciones de mano en mano* and *Tinta Limón* in Buenos Aires) which are relatively fast in terms of publication launching. Their publications are quite stylish due to the regular involvement of designers (professional or not), and they are intentionally affordable. Formats range from paper cover books to small booklets, websites, DVDs, maps and public events.⁹⁹ As part of these self-published products, there is also the

⁹⁹ Some of the publications on militant research thus far are mono-graphics about a particular research project (eg. booklets by *Situaciones*; 700 pages textbook by *Observatorio Metropolitano* or collage-publication by PD) and others are edited volumes compiling different militant research experiences worldwide (*Nociones Comunes* and *Constituent Imagination*).

practice of ‘writing prefaces’ about each other’s work. Through prefacing, one collective engages with other’s work obtaining a regular sense of being mutually informed about ongoing projects. The multiple networking practices among the research collectives then range from preface writing to publishing each others’ work, to mutual visits to co-authorship. This speaks to how the practice of knowledge production itself has a potentiality of generating networks. The collectives are spread throughout different cities, countries and continents at this point, and are often articulated via decentralized networks in contact by email, international encounters, publication projects or mutual visits. Networking through knowledge production then is channeled by new technologies but also through more traditional practices such as sharing books, prefacing, personal exchanges. Nonetheless, the novel point is that there is an explicit politics of contagion, learning from each other and allowing ideas to travel, even to be copied and pasted. Usually, but not always, this logic of contagion tries to be aware of the specificities of each place and situation. While arguing for its specificity, in many ways these networking practices reflect university based networking. Perhaps the biggest difference here deals precisely with intellectual property and how to facilitate the spread and re-use of ideas in different context or by different groups.

This embracing of contagion, coping and tinkering as methods speaks to the attempt towards building a non-professionalized sense of the militant research practitioner. According to Holmes, the following would be the sole requirements to become a militant research collective:

[...] there is no intellectual privilege in the activist domain. Activist-researchers can contribute to a short, middle and long-term analysis of the crisis, by examining and inventing new modes of intervention at the micro-political scales where even the largest social movements begin. Who can play this great game? Whoever is able to join or form a *meshwork* of independent researchers. What are the prices, the terrains, the wagers and

rules? Whichever ones your group finds most productive and contagious. How does the game continue, when the ball goes out of your field? Through shared meeting in a meshwork of meshwork, through collective actions, images, projects, and publications” (2007: 43, my emphasis)

Yet, despite the horizontal connotations of *meshwork*, power relations exist within all kind of networks. This is not always openly recognized in the literature by activist researchers, although it is informally acknowledged how certain groups become more relevant nodes, hubs of some sort, within the net. The issue here is how to think about power in networks in ways that potentate, rather than vitiate, network dynamics. Nonetheless, the networking practices engaged by activist research practitioners directly speak to a desire for the democratization of knowledge. This is so specifically in two ways. First, by the development of certain infrastructures (eg. licencing procedures and autonomous publishing houses) there is an actual attempt at freeing ideas and information from current processes of knowledge enclosure. Second, the engagement with a series of concrete procedures of mutual exchange (eg. preface writing and co-authored collections) generates collaborative spaces of communication¹⁰⁰ among research groups and beyond. If democratization of knowledge is then a concern for activist research, what are the spaces of production more adequate to respond to such aspirations? What kind of institutional or non-institutional affiliations do these initiatives work from?

3.2.4. Autonomous Spaces of Enunciation

¹⁰⁰ However, communication is a controversial term for militant researchers. Both *Situaciones* and *Precarias* problematize the notion of communication and prefer to talk about *resonances*: “Communication produces abstractions of experience. The experience itself can only be lived [...] There is however the possibility of resonances between struggles” (*Situaciones* 2007: 78).

They are asking how to communicate place-based experiences and struggles born out of specific situations without a ‘global standpoint’ but rather an immanent one: “Communication is enunciation from the bottom floor, form a particular place, a producer of subjectivity and imaginary; we are interested in a communication that is capable not so much of generating recruitment as it is of shaking and producing unexpected resonances in others, how also search and ask themselves questions; we are interested in a communication that is the composition of different and for that reason the production of a new real at the edge of the existing real” (PD 2007: 86).

Following my argument, activist research practices are strongly influenced by their conceptual kinship with *autonomous* politics. In terms of the relationship with well-established institutions related to the state, capital or official expertise, autonomous politics advocate for processes of self-organization based on a logic of *within and against*. This implies a self-awareness of a positioning within an institutional or systemic framework that is nonetheless attentive to institutional constraints. From that positionality, an autonomous politics attempts to develop a stance which can bypass those constraints, especially those tangential or contrary to movements' goals. However, given the numerous pressures experienced in the practice when working within or with an institution, many autonomous initiatives have turned to an explicit choice for a non-institutional location. Nonetheless, the possibilities remain open, without rejecting institutional collaboration from a priori. In fact, there are multiple examples of autonomous initiatives working for or in collaboration with official institutions. The premise of acting within the system's circuits being that transformation is not possible if coming from a total outside: first, because there is no such a thing as a total "outside to the system"; and second, because self-isolation is not helpful nor desired. However, they are also very firm about how being completely "within the system" is ineffective for change.¹⁰¹

Where then does the production of knowledge from this kind of autonomous location takes place? Initiatives at militant research, either as long-term collectives or as temporal projects, are usually articulated beyond standard legal or institutional settings, outside regular structures such as political parties, government agencies, unions, universities or NGOs. They are, nonetheless, open to and often work in collaboration with institutional sites (for instance in the

¹⁰¹ This political stance of *within and against* is supported by autonomous sister-notions such as "exodus", "antagonism" and "counter-power". See Graeber (2004) and *Colectivo Situaciones*, Toni Negri, John Holloway, Miguel Benasayag, Luis Matini, Horacio González, Ulrich Brandt (2001).

case of *Precarias*, they have worked with the municipality of Madrid, major universities and research institutes as well as educational programs of the European Union). Activist researchers work in tandem with other ‘experts’, accept institutional funds or take advantage of publishing venues. Following this autonomous and antagonistic spirit though, even if there are relationships with institutions, for the most part, militant research projects bypass and contest the regular modes of production and channels of distribution associated with ‘expert’ knowledge. Some of the key specificities of the practice of militant research are evident when contrasting them with knowledge produced under institutional logics. The pressures from university labor markets for career building, through the development of an individual name as symbolic capital, are often absent in militant research. It is true that while militant research is usually produced under collective names, there is also some individual authorship (Marta Malo, Marcelo Exposito, Emmanuel Rodriguez, and Cristina Vega being some prolific authors in Spain). These might result in instances of popularity, producing protagonist figures. However, the political goals will be still the main purpose of the writing, rather than building a name. While there might be projects oriented at combining political goals with professional concerns, important divergences are seen when compared with academic kinds of research:

As far from institutional procedures as it is from ideological certainties, the question is rather to organize life according to a series of hypotheses (practical and theoretical) on the ways to (self-) emancipation. To work in autonomous collectives that do not obey rules imposed by academia implies the establishment of a positive connection with subaltern, dispersed, and hidden knowledges, and the production of a body of *practical knowledges of counter power*. This is just the opposite of using social practices as a field of confirmation for laboratory hypotheses. Research militancy, then, is also the art of establishing compositions that endow with *potencia* the quests and elements of alternative sociability.

Academic research is subjected to a whole set of alienating mechanisms that separate researchers from the very *meaning* of their activity: they must accommodate their work to

determined rules, topics and conclusions. Funding, supervision, language requirements, bureaucratic red tape, empty conferences and protocol, constitute the conditions in which the practice of *official* research unfolds.

Militant research distances itself from those circuits of academic production – of course, neither opposing nor ignoring them. [...] Militant research attempts to work under alternative conditions, created by the collective itself and by the ties to counter power in which it is inscribed, pursuing its own efficacy in the production of knowledges useful to the struggles (Situaciones 2003).

Rather, by this embracing of non-institutional pressures (including its consequent lack of regular financial support), what militant researchers actually want to achieve is a place from which to speak with independence. This is why it is said that militant research attempts to build “autonomous spaces of enunciation” (Escobar 2009). From a decolonial perspective, this positioning allows AR to challenge not only the content, but “the very terms of the conversation”, to use a Mignolo’s expression (2000):

“Autonomous inquiry demands a rupture from the dominant cartographies. Both compass and coordinates must be reinvented if you really want to transform the dynamics of a changing world-system. Only by disorienting the self and uprooting epistemic certainties can anyone hope to inject a positive difference into the unconscious dynamics of the geopolitical order. How then can activist-researchers move to disorient the reigning maps, to transform the dominant cartographies, without falling into the never-never lands of aesthetic extrapolation? The problem of activist research is inseparable from its embodiment, from its social elaboration” (Holmes 2007: 41)

This *uprooting of epistemic certainties* speaks to the last trait being identified as constituent of the activist research practice, that is, the embracement of an epistemology of uncertainty and ontology of unfixity.

3.2.5. A Not-Knowing made out of Questions

The challenge for a different kind of politics, re-invigorated by the Zapatista uprising, has given birth to a variety of experiments with and theories of the real. One of the conceptual

mandates of this contemporary wave of autonomous politics is the Zapatistas' call to "caminar preguntando" or *ask while walking*. This call suggests a form of intervention, or rather, a mode of engagement, that is more a proposition than a totalizing solution; it encourages creativity and transformation and constantly puts itself into question, always ready to self-correct (Villasante 2006).¹⁰² It is based on the practice of attentive listening (Other Campaign manifesto 2006). This Zapatista call has become one of the leading principles of militant research practice. In fact, there is even a metonymical use of this call to refer to militant research among European autonomous movements, becoming a clear inspiration for groups such as *Precarias*:

We think re-naming the world is central; and doing it from below, applying the Zapatista call to 'ask while walking' " (2004, public presentation at Universidad Internacional de Andalucía)

Again, how these political mandates of constant creativity, ability to self-correct and active listening translate into practices of knowledge production? First of all, it implies a research attitude not based on a complex set of *a priori* certainties, but on permanent questioning. This logic contrasts with many previous and current progressive movements, as militant researchers point out:

Unlike the political militant, for whom *politics always takes place in its own separate sphere*, the *researcher-militant* is a character made out of questions, not saturated by ideological meanings and models of the world. Nor is militant research a practice of 'committed intellectuals' or of a group of 'advisors' to social movements. The goal is neither to politicize nor intellectualize the social practices. It is not a question of managing to get them to make a leap in order to pass from the social to 'serious politics' (Situaciones 2003).

¹⁰² A brief and humorous engagement with the call for 'asking while walking' contends that this new form of doing politics resembles an intelligent system able to generate "collective construction of alternative and sustainable action and knowledge" in *Sentirse haciendo, caminar preguntando*, Tomas R. Villasante, in *Diagonal* n.27, 2006.

What is at stake is an embracing of a non-vanguard politics. It is important then to explicitly recognize that research is based on an attitude of “not-knowing”, pursuing an epistemology of uncertainty:

Militant research works neither from its own set of knowledges about the world nor from how things ought to be. On the contrary, the only condition for researcher-militants is a difficult one: to remain faithful to their ‘not knowing’. In this sense, it is an authentic *anti-pedagogy* (Situaciones 2003).

According to one of the members of *Colectivo Situaciones* speaking on a visit to the university of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, militant research is about “locating questions” (Diego Sztulwark, April 2009). Indeed, questions are at the heart of militant research practice. It is about detecting questions that are on the sphere of the real, questions that are coming from the everyday life of movements and sectors: for instance, the question of what to do when the unemployed do not want a regular waged job; or the question of how to conceive of a school for teachers that want something other than the conventional pedagogical model. Those questions become the main articulators of the research projects. They are not peripheral, but rather operate as enunciations and points of departure. This is the case of *Precarias*’ foundational question: “*what is your strike? What does your own strike look like?*” Coming from a situated experience, those questions are intended to provoke and *interpelar*¹⁰³ other subjects (PD 2004: 81) The embracing of research as “not knowing”, or better, the engagement with the Zapatista’s call for *asking while walking*, is an explicit mandate of militant research. However, rather than pessimist nihilism as a result of the impossibility of absolute knowledge, it bring along another

¹⁰³ To *compel* is the English translation of the Spanish term *interpelar*, however it does not seem to capture the meaning of putting someone’s common sense into question that *interpelar* entails.

political logic, other methodologies or, why not, a different theology¹⁰⁴: that of continuous searching and permanent experimentation.

3.3. Conclusion: Becoming a distinct community of research practice

The movement of activist research is advancing its own set of research methodologies, infrastructures and epistemologies based on a certain political logic, that of *autonomy*. Summarizing the five traits proposed as constitutive of AR, these are: methodologies facilitating everyday and pre-figurative interventions; as well as the building of alternative sociabilities; infrastructures oriented toward producing knowledge through de-centralized networks, attempting to avoid vanguard politics; spaces of production and distribution operating from a logic of within and against, bypassing institutional pressures; finally, the epistemological/ontological foundation is one based on the centrality of questions and constant experimental world-making. The hypothesis advanced in this chapter then contends that what makes activist research distinct is its foundation in *autonomous politics*.

Yet, these methods, infrastructures and epistemologies are not the basis of an individual and isolated group but rather they are shared by a growing set of initiatives around the world. Research understood in this way has become a central activity of political organizing coalescing among autonomous global movements, especially in Argentina, Spain, Italy, and France since the mid 00's. This eruption is evidenced by the proliferation of formal and informal initiatives such as international conferences (*Investigaccio*), newsletters (online *Activist Research Newsletter*), list-serves (*Bemgelada*), transnational workshops (held at the WSF, diverse universities and other

¹⁰⁴ This is in reference to the similar spiritual thinking expressed in the Quaker and Liberation Theology based book *We Make the Road by Walking. Conversations on Education and Social Change* (1990)

spaces), book publications (*Nociones Comunes* and *Constituent Imagination*), as well as magazine articles around the topic (*GreenPepper Magazine*, *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest*). The growing number of projects as well as the increased connections and collaborations among them speaks to the formation of a broader research community of practice.

My own participation in some of these experiences and encounters points to the different materialities that constitute the practice of militant research, such as *places* ranging from small coffee shops, squatted buildings, alternative publishing houses, to government-sponsored international gatherings. Other material practices include personal encounters, conference organizing, email communication, book exchanges, reading each other and writing together. Through the years of engagement with this practice, I have witnessed how the different militant research projects interconnect and cross paths articulating with each other via networking practices. These networks are decentralized *and* simultaneously hold an explicit commitment to their particular location and specific contexts. Those projects are usually deeply committed to their locales and thus speak from a place-based location, in that sense constituting a series of *rooted networks*. This is to say, working from and for specific places, analyzing and intervening in singular socio-political contexts they would also work and support the production of resonances somewhere else. These efforts at allowing their material and ideas travel freely are in fact generating a diffuse community of practice, a sense of belonging based on a series of shared affinities, common practices and collective genealogies.

Chapter 4

*Cual es tu Huelga?*¹

The Politics of Knowledge in *Precarias a la Deriva*

*Writing-with creates collectives: it actually produces the world (...)
It is both descriptive (it inscribes) and speculative (it connects).
It builds relation and community, that is: possibility.
Knowledge politics matter, because the construction of knowledge
is an active practice of shaping possible worlds.
Maria Puig de la Bellacasa in Thinking with Care (2008: 2)*

Introduction

This chapter follows the development of an activist research project since its inception, exploring the consequences of embracing research as a tool for collective action by focusing on this particular collective. The trajectory of *Precarias a la Deriva* speaks directly to the theoretical discussions about the nature of knowledge-making addressed in chapter one. The research principles and practices held by *Precarias* strongly resonate with the material, networked, situated, political and plural understanding of knowledge advanced by the *knowledge turn*. By engaging the itineraries of this feminist collective conducting their own research, I intend to show the role of knowledge in processes of social struggle: why they turn to knowledge? how they implement this production? what kind of specific procedures and devices are being used? what are some of the effects of embracing research as central to their self-

¹ English translation: “What is your strike?”

definitions and strategies? What is the notion of the political embedded in their research practices?

In particular, the first research project conducted by Precarias directly addresses those questions. While the case of Precarias is central to the development of the three contentions posited by this dissertation, the following engagement with the specifics of a concrete project constitutes the ethnographic basis that clearly responds to the second contention focused on the issue of how knowledge-making is put into practice: *Social movements are advancing their own set of research methodologies, infrastructures and epistemologies*. I identify what are those practices in the case of Precarias, how they are conceived and put to work, showing throughout how in large part, they have strong *autonomous* underpinnings. I also include material to show how *Precarias* is not an isolated group, without connections of any kind. Rather, far from being easily delimited and circumscribed to a particular location or audience, Precarias's own intellectual and analytical work produces a "research object" that is dynamic and networked, stretching both in terms of structure and function along local, national and transnational webs. The circulation of Precarias work is generating resonances and an unexpected popularity. This popularity might be due to both their unique site of enunciation: young women self-defined as precarious women writing collectively from a non-conventional place of knowledge production; *and* the very content of their research: fresh and distinct analysis about contemporary transformations in Europe. Notably, their conceptual contributions had a significant impact on the debates on *precarity* taking place in Europe to address the consequences of labor flexibilization and dismantling of the welfare state in the context of building the European Union. While they draw from theoretical schools that define our contemporary period as one

marked by a post-Fordist economy, they develop forceful critiques to this analysis building a less monolithic understanding of the transformations afoot. Additionally, they developed methods such as feminist drifting and conceptual contributions on issues of *precarity* and *care*, informed by post-structuralist theories of power and resistance.² This theoretical tinkering and experimental organizing has granted PD a referential site in the debates of activist research. PD's own intellectual political work has traveled through mostly European networks, excited about their innovative as well as grounded insights on the current conjuncture of European building. Despite the focus on a specific context, it has also generated resonances far beyond Europe. PD's concepts and methods are currently being discussed and appropriated by similar projects at least in New York City, Chicago, Buenos Aires and Chapel Hill, to my knowledge. Moreover, PD is recently becoming the object of scholarly attention, looking at their contributions in the fields of Cultural Studies, Art, Philosophy and Anthropology.

This chapter therefore addresses the complexity of an object of study that engages directly with the role and the practicalities of knowledge within social movements. There are two main parts. The first one, *Precarias a la Deriva*, provides a thorough background of this research project, starting with a narrative of their founding moment as a way to show the burning scenario that lead this women' collective to conduct research in the first place. I then review the group's trajectory and its modus operandi, including methodological innovations, epistemological foundations, purposes of research, modes of distribution and its resonances. My engagement with this assemblage of *knowledge-practices* is mainly based both on an early engagement with

² In terms of conceptual contributions there are two main ones: first, PD helps to expand the concept of *precarity* beyond production-centric understandings, and secondly, PD introduces the notion of *care* politicizing a series of sectors and activities previously neglected by conventional critical analyses. Each of these contributions is further developed in following separated chapters.

PD's main publication as well as on ethnographic research. The discussion that follows then weaves my own previous analytical material product of my first archival engagement with the group, together with recent fieldwork notes and interviews during a year and half of participation in PD's activities.

The second one, *Becoming a Networked Knowledge-Object*, addresses the epistemological consequences of engaging with an object of study that explicitly and prolifically produces knowledge. This is the case when the intellectual work developed by *Precarias* starts gaining increasing scholarly. Research from Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Art, Philosophy and Anthropology emphasize the contributions of a grassroots groups at the level of political theory, media, art, and research imaginations, taking social movements as sources and intellectual peers. The social life of their texts produced a series of recursive effects on the nature of an object of study, which besides traveling internationally has been able to transgress the expected epistemological roles given to the researcher on one hand, and the researched on the other hand, blurring well established boundaries.

4.1. Precarias a la Deriva

Madrid, June 2002: The main trade union federations of Spain called for a general strike as a response to the rollback of labor protections implemented under the economic parameters of the European Union. Gathered at a squatted social center in the *Lavapiés* neighborhood, and frustrated by conventional labor movement strategies, a heterogeneous group of women -- domestic workers, free lance journalists, translators, waiters, call center workers, all participants in social movements -- talked about how to respond to the call to strike. They started to think of different ways to understand their own labor conditions and ways of contesting the new set of

problems in the workplace. Constituting an improvised research team armed with cameras, recorders, and notebooks, this group of women dispersed throughout the city during the day of the strike in order to discuss and investigate the conditions of women who, like themselves, inhabited those sectors where the strike made little sense: the invisible, non-regulated, temporary, undocumented, and domestic sectors of the new economy. This team conducted several informal interviews with participants of those sectors, the quick off question being: “*cual es tu huelga?*” or “what is your strike?”. The point of asking people how they were following the national call to strike was to openly raise the disjuncture between traditional forms of labor organizing (eg. unions calling workers to stop laboring at factories and institutions) and the increasing reality of a transformed labor force, emphasizing the fragmentation of workplaces, as the following image in the book by PD evokes (see figure 4.1.).

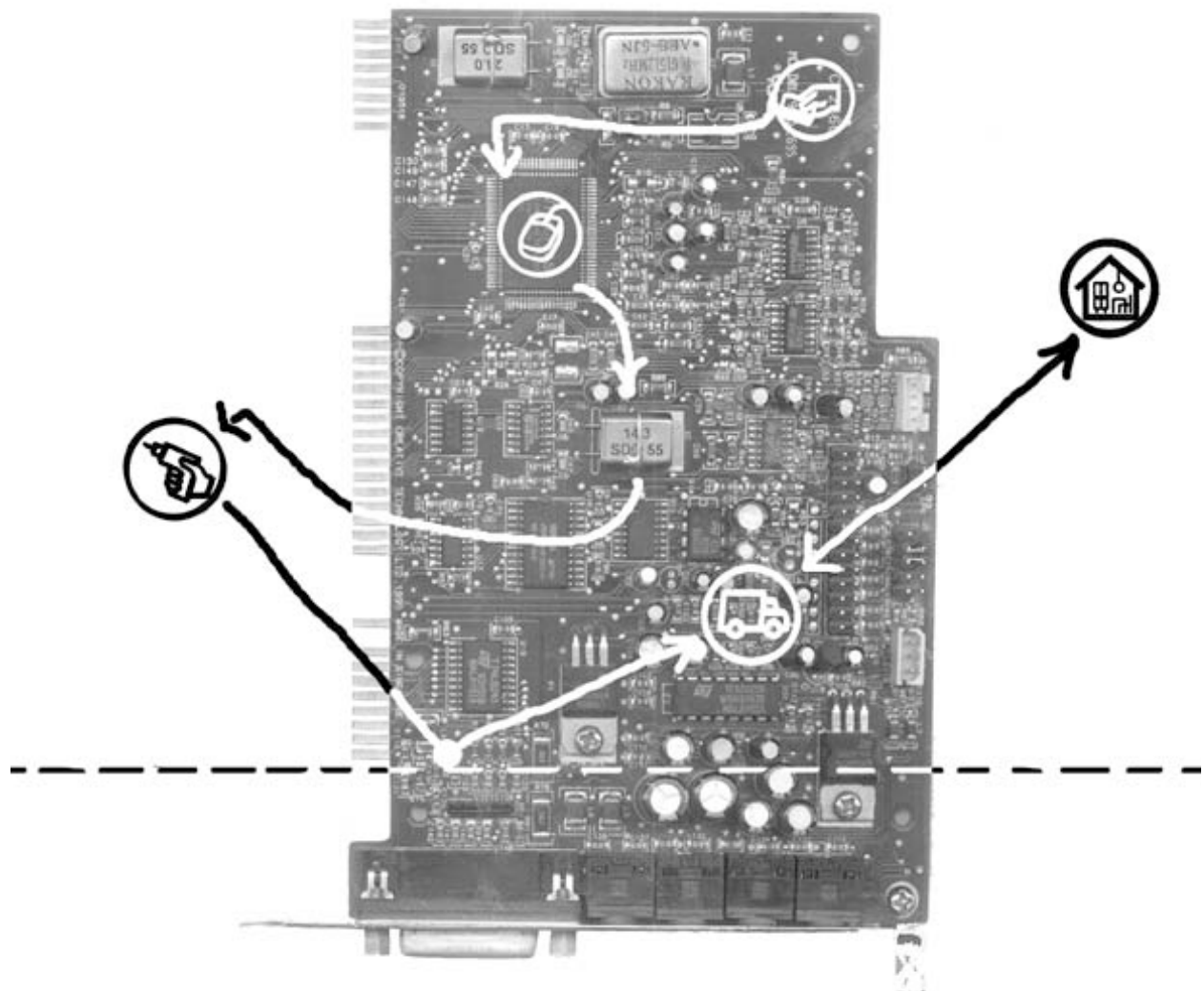


Figure 4.1. Diarios de viaje (travel diaries PD 2004:96)

This was the beginning of a year and a half long action-research project that explored the labor transformations taking place in a Europeanizing Spain; in particular, the ways in which these affect women with temporary jobs in an urban setting. The burning goal was to address the hyper-fragmentation lived by the growing number of these atypical workers. This initial survey with different women going through similar dilemmas and shared problems was followed by more encounters in form of mobile interviews tracing the everyday trajectories of each of them in order to articulate a better understanding as well as deepen relationships on the way. The

research project lasted from mid 2002 to 2004, when the publication of the results was released: *A la Deriva: Por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina*. As the previous chapter emphasized the centrality of texts for this knowledge-practice that is activist research, one of the main materializations of this particular research trajectory is a book, but also a DVD, a radio program, a series of workshops and performance shows as well as more academic articles. While the production of books is central to the practice of activist research, they are nevertheless quite unconventional. In this case, not only because of their anti-copy right licenses but also in terms of formatting, authorship, structure, and the overall feeling of a kaleidoscopic text. According to a Cultural Studies scholar writing on this book:

In a variety of micro-narratives, interviews, theoretical essays, and visual texts included in their book, the authors of *A la deriva* describe and examine the experience of precariousness from multiple points of view. Out of this examination there emerges a narrative of identity: a narrative that is rough, fragmentary, and sometimes even contradictory, as it tries to stay faithful to the conditions of postmodern capitalism. *Precarias* is not made up of professional authors but rather of women who are defined by the mobility of their temporary and part-time jobs, by their illegal status as migrants, or by their semiotic mobility between codes of language (Szumilak 2006: 168).

These women defined by their distinct mobilities and a common experience of *precarity*³

³ *Precariedad* is the term used by European social movements to refer to the labor conditions that arose after the transition from life long and stable jobs common in the well-fare state era of European industrial capitalism. “Precarious” is used to refer to the growing number of temporary, insecure, low paying jobs emerging with the globalization of the service and financial economy. According to *Chainworkers*, a Milan-based collective, one of the main references among precarious struggles: “The precariat is to postfordism what proletariat was to fordism: flexible, temporary, part-time, and self-employed workers are the new social group which is required and reproduced by the neoliberal and postindustrial economic transformation. It is the critical mass that emerges from globalization, while demolished factories and neighborhoods are being substituted by offices and commercial areas. They are service workers in supermarkets and chains, cognitive workers operating in the information industry, [etc]. Our lives become precarious because of the imperative of flexibility.” in *Precarias a la Deriva* (2004: 48 author’s translation). Thus what in English would be called flexible, casualized or contingent labor (without any kind of necessary critical connotation) is being politicized by social movements in several European countries as ‘precarious labor’, denouncing its fragile and exploitative character and promoting it as a new identity of struggle. The question of precarity is further contextualized in the two following chapters on Europe (5 y 6). Also, chapter 7 depicts a genealogy of the concept of precarity.

developed a distinctive methodological approach that took mobility as a corner stone, advancing a research technique called ‘feminist drift’, which gives the name both to the project itself and to the participants: *Precarias a la Deriva* (Precarious Female Workers aDrift), or “PD” as a shorthand. This is the name given to the nascent activist research collective at the time. The material production of this small group of women started to circulate first locally but very soon traveling in Europe and worldwide. By 2008, their book and numerous articles were translated in different languages, another DVD made in collaboration with European collectives was circulating in English, and the demand to participate in academic and non-academic conferences sky rocketed. During this time they were immersed in numerous public campaigns and political actions related to labor and housing abuses as well as questions of detention and deportation of migrants. Their textual and organizing work reflects on the shifts that European societies have undergone in the last few decades as a consequence of the dissipation of the Fordist-Keynesian mode of economy, the radical shifts on migration patterns and the emergence of the EU as a distinct institutional regime under which notions of citizenship, gender roles and racialized bodies are going through a process of intense re-definition.

Also, it is important to note its complex relationship with the university in the current context of restructuring the higher education in the EU and globally. *PD* is operating at the margins of the university although at the same time many of the participants have some degree of university training, which is not surprising in the context of free and massive access to higher education programs in Spain. Other participants have some kind of professional participation in the university system as adjunct professors, editors of university books or informal members of research projects and working groups. If asked about their kind of job, many would say

“independent researcher,” meaning researcher without long-term institutional affiliation nor permanent contract. On top of those working part-time for public and private universities, we also find free lance translators, postal workers, independent teachers of foreign languages, social workers and a well trained workforce combining several temporary jobs, ready to embark on any ‘pick and go’ remunerated task that can sustain the high cost of life in the Spanish capital, one of the most expensive cities in Europe.

4.1.1. A Particular Research Trajectory

PD was born out of a long-term cultivated frustration with the traditional leftist analyses in general and in particular with the two central unions’ calls for a ‘knee-jerk’ general strike when dealing with precarity. Tired of left politics as usual, PD’s research project started as a process of *partir de si* (starting from oneself) in search of novel political understandings and strategies. The point of departure is not “*un sí narcisista*” (a narcissistic self), but rather “*un sí propositivo*” (a self eager for proposing, suggesting, inventing):

PD’s trajectory is born out of being fed up with mainstream leftist narratives that did not speak about us or did not resolve any of our everyday problems. It is born out of the necessity of starting from our own experiences -“partir de si”- and start to think politically from that point of departure: a self, not individualized or absorbed in itself, but collective and open to connections. It was about making your own existence, your own material conditions, a theme of investigation, and start to name them by ourselves. We needed forms of self-representation. It was time to search for “un nosotras”, a *common we*, among a very fragmented population. We look for commonalities through the production of a shared lexicon, which will emerge as a product of conducting drifts, reflections, texts and images (PD’s member, May 4 2008).

The initial research project pursued this search for a new shared subjectivity and a consequent common political *lexicon*, able to provide novel names and appropriate tactics to the current transformations. PD’s foundational moment is explicitly dedicated to overt research

activity, per se. This is the period from the first survey conducted during the day of the national strike (coined as *picket-surveys*) in 2002 to the book publication in 2004. This research period consisted in a series of urban expeditions (*feminist drifts*), analytical workshops, performances and collaborative writing, thus conceiving this stage as a “collective path of research and action” (2004: 2). Their goal was to investigate shared commonalities of the reality of precariousness yet resist analyses too fixed or stabilized.

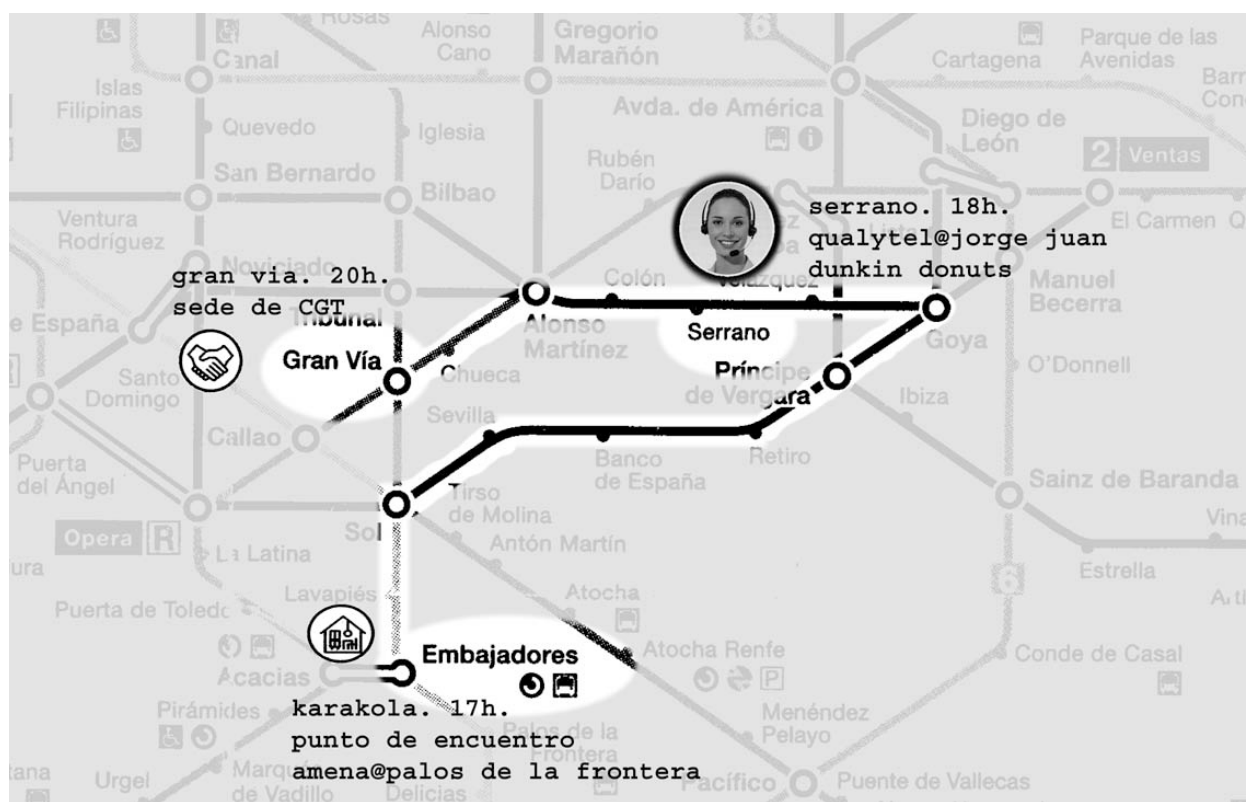


Figure 4.2. Urban expedition led by a unionized call-center operator (PD 2004: 111)

This first inquiry about the commonalities among those self-identified as ‘precarious’ led PD to another stage in their trajectory more attentive to the diversity of bodies and multiplicity of backgrounds within the world of precarity; and even more action oriented. This new phase takes

different organizational forms, from *escraches*⁴ to the exchange of resources through the email list-based initiative “*instinto precario*” (precarious instinct). The goal was to articulate a more solid capacity of collective response against the consequences of flexibilization affecting individuals, including problems not only at the traditional workplace but also in the domestic, legal, and NGO spheres. This ambitious goal of building a collective network of support and response was geared to address two related factors: 1) the question of extreme fragmentation that made structural issues looking like individualized problems; and 2) the absence of concrete and even discourse recognition on the part of the official unions of this growing atypical labor force in need of distinct support and strategies.

This period started with a focus on individual cases, responding collectively to particular incidents and working on one case-basis. Very soon though, there was a shift towards a more long-term process of alliance building among different groups. Attentive to the contemporary debates on bio-unionism and institutions building among social movements, PD opted to leave their previous practices of temporary expeditions and interventions to develop a more solid infrastructure able to articulate long-term connections and alliances among precarious sectors. This transition is marked by the new official sounding name of “Agency”: *Agencia de Asuntos Precarios*. I landed in Madrid when the name was just being coined and I was able to participate in this most recent process of grassroots organizing, realizing that this new stage of PD was also filled with the spirit and practices of activist research, although in a less overt form. Following

⁴ Argentinean social movements’ tactic consisting on targeting a particular person house with graffiti and demonstrations to publicly denounce human rights abusers immune by the institutional system of justice.

chapters address this new phase⁵, while this upcoming section focuses on the first stage of PD as an explicit research project.

4.1.2. Research Procedures and Cartographic Sensibilities

The “first babbles” of this project -as they put it- started in the context of a general strike taking place in Spain on June 20, 2002. As the initial quotation of this section suggests, several women in the space of the feminist social center called *Eskalera Karakola* started to share their unease with the general call by the big labor unions to stop all production for 24 hours. They wanted to be part of a generalized and explicit discontent against labor conditions, but the traditional tactic of the strike assumed an ideal-type of worker that was far away from the figure of the *precaria*. Striking in the context of a per-hour contract, domestic task or self-employed job would not have any of the expected effects. Nobody would even realize it. With this frustration as their point of departure, they started to brainstorm new ways of political intervention adapted to their circumstances.

The discussion ended up with a methodological proposal: the *piquete-encuesta*, which could be translated as the ‘picket-survey’. During the day of the national strike, this survey conducted on an by *precarias* stopped the productive *and* reproductive chain for some time and more importantly, offered a temporary opportunity to talk among and listen to an invisible population. The exchange resulting from that day was long-lasting: they opened a space for non-mediated encounters between unconnected women, among singular existences that at the same time, where sharing similar constraints (2004: 21, 22). Based on the excitement of the results of this initial engagement, a plan for reconnecting and exploring the diversity of experiences of

⁵ In particular, chapter 8 focuses on this new phase mainly based on ethnographic fieldnotes.

precariedad in a more systematic way started to take shape. Next, PD needed research methodologies that would fit their circumstances. Looking for a procedure that would be able to capture their mobile, open-ended and contingent everyday lives, they found inspiration in the Situationists.⁶ The original situationist technique of “*derive*” or “drifting” consists in linking different sites through unexpected urban itineraries, developing subjective cartographies of the city. This technique seemed a pertinent option enabling the interweaving of settings that *precarias* inhabit but which are not necessarily perceived as connected (settings such as streets, home, office, transport, supermarket, bars, union locals, etc.). *La deriva* presented itself as a perfect technique attentive to the spatial-temporal continuum that they were experiencing as *precarias*. Yet they were not completely satisfied with the situationist version, and thus developed a feminist version of drifting, a kind of ‘*deriva a la femme*’. Situationist researchers wander in the city, allowing for random encounters, conversations, interaction, micro-events to be the guide of their urban itineraries. The result was a psycho-geography based often 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 a random and exotic itinerary, the *precarias*’ version of drifting consists of a situated, directed and intentional trajectory through everyday life settings (2004: 26).

This practice of tracing affiliations and similarities, of constructing a common space in the shifting and fragmentary landscape of a contemporary metropolis has been called a *deriva*—a drift. Mimicking the unstable conditions in which *Precarias* is compelled to search for identity, the performance of a drift—groundlessness in drag—affirms and, at the same time, challenges the fragmentation and fluidity of postindustrial identifications. *Drifting* becomes an artistic practice, if we define art as a creative re-appropriation and

⁶ The *Situationist International* was a small group of international, mostly French, political and artistic agitators with roots in Marxism, Lettrism and the early 20th century European artistic and political avant-gardes.

de-familiarization of what is customary. A drift is a metaphorical performance of the mobility that saturates everyday experience, and, at the same time, it transforms this mobility, as *Precarias'* women move differently, move *together* within the circuits of the postindustrial environment (Szumilak 2006: 172)

Talking to one of its participants, this is how she described some of the original thinking as they embarked upon drifting as a methodology:

“as a part-time postal worker under a temporary contract with some free hours to do some paid translation, I feel like a part of the 21st century assembly line: one the one hand, the mechanical aspect of filing mail and on the other hand, the creative labor involved in translating, at the same time my factory is not an isolated and enclosed building but the whole city, in the open air... A lot of isolation and lack of solidarity among us...It was time to convert that alienation into analysis and research, starting to pay attention, to take notes describing everyday routines and what kind of encounters happen at 5am in the metro...writing in the commuting train everything I experienced allowed to not entirely normalize those realities... it was time to start posing and sharing hypotheses...” (Interview with member of PD/Agencia Precaria, October 12, 2007)

This brief testimony shows how she experienced the power of transforming ‘alienation and isolation at the workplace’ into analysis and research. The main difference with the reference model of the Italian “workers survey” being that there is not an expert in solidarity going to interview in the factory, but instead it is the very worker that engages by him/her self in the process of self-interviewing. The process would gain strength when these self-descriptions are put in common or the notes about a single itinerary are taken by a team or are shared with others. In this way, from the beginning of the project, it is possible to point to a spatial sensitivity in their analysis, giving importance to the itineraries of where you go and travel through your day, including three maps of three particular drifts in their book (see figure 4.3).

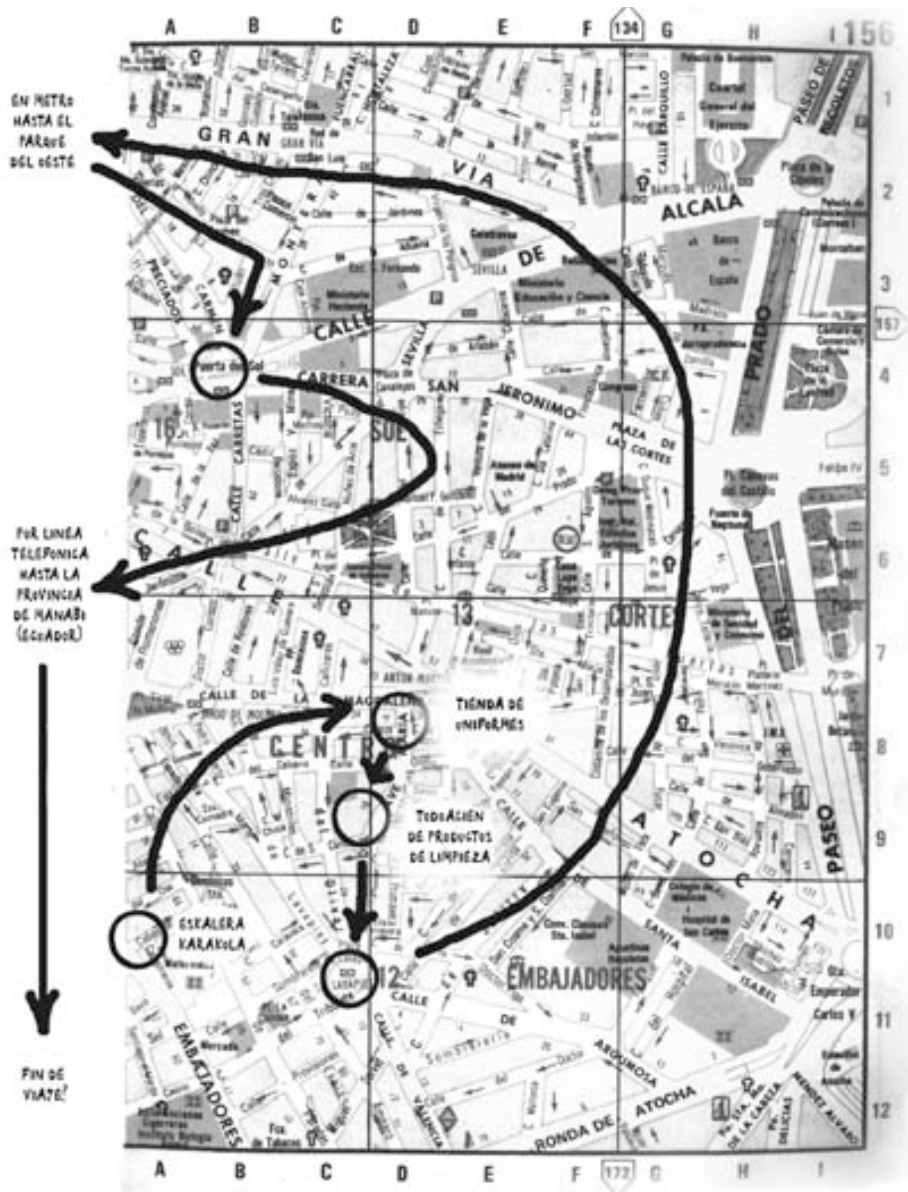


Figure 4.3. Drift with a domestic worker (PD 2004: 96)

According to one of its participants, it was not only spatial thinking but also a cartographic desire that was behind the project:

Actually the precarias research project started as a mapping project. We wanted to document the different everyday itineraries of women workers to put together another vision of the city of Madrid. But it did not work, logistically but also conceptually: all that colorful drawing somehow did not work, the message that came across was not so powerful, and it really did not provide ways of collective organizing. We found out that the idea of actually performing the itineraries together and talking on the way, on the

move, allowed for much more powerful communication and mutual understanding developing a sense for commonality and at the same time a sensitivity for diverse particularities (Interview with member of PD/Agencia Precaria, November 2006).

In this mutual interview held at Weaver St. Coop Market. (Carrboro, NC) between one member of PD and several members of 3Cs, we asked questions to each other and exchanged impressions about the methodology on drifting. Even if the overall PD project did not result in a mapping enterprise, the *Counter-Cartographies Collective*, which at the time of this interview was working on drifting through campus, was fascinated by the cartographic feeling of the project and the theoretical as well political possibilities of feminist drifting (See Figure 4.4. for another example).

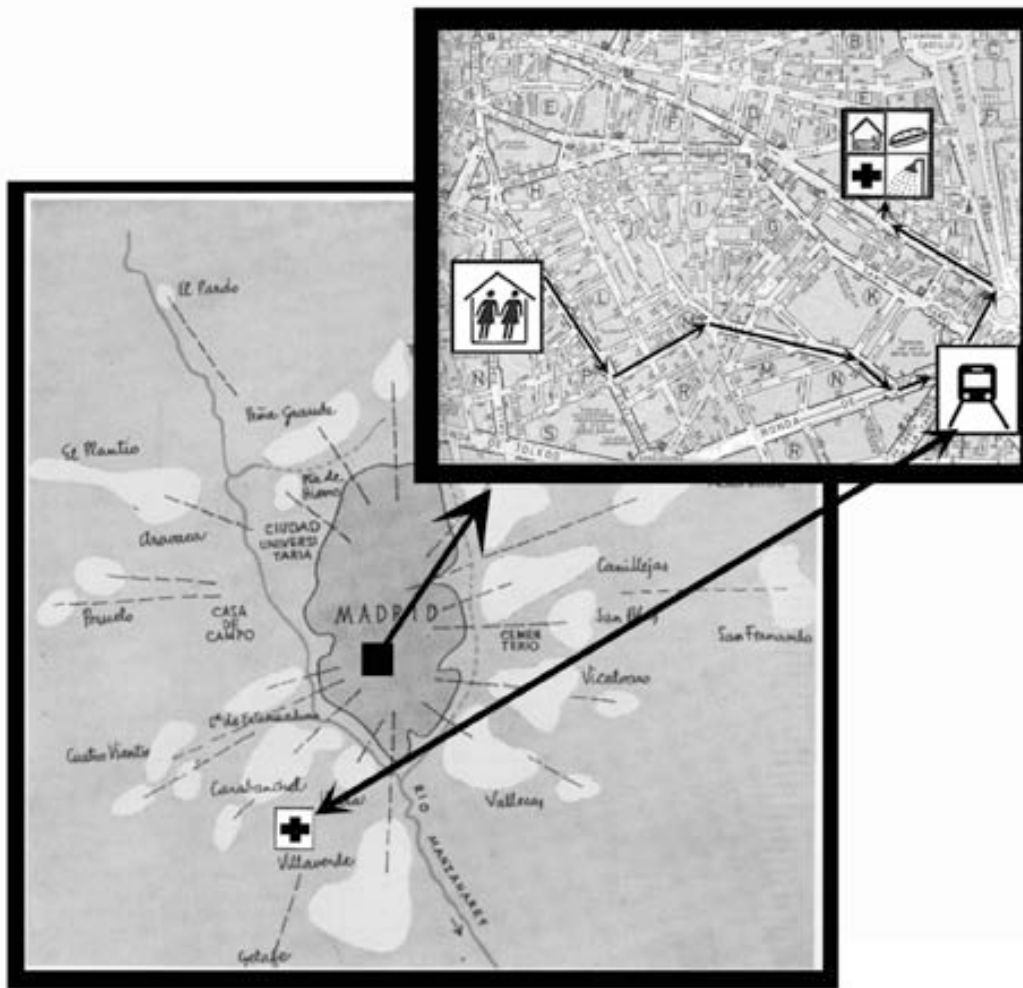


Figure 4.4. Drift with a nurse (PD 2004: 104)

PD's writing had a long-lasting influence in the foundation and the work of 3Cs, so the visit of one of the PD member to the Triangle was a great opportunity to find out about concrete procedures of mapping and researching:

3Cs: But really, how did Precarias a la Deriva go about doing, performing, making, putting together a drift? It is not so obvious when you really want to engage in drifting 'a la precarias' ...

PD: It is a long, but at the same time, predictable process...first, a deriva makes no sense if there are not previous discussions on the main themes the group is concerned about and wants to start investigating in a collective way. From a series of group discussions, a set

of thematic axes comes up as guidelines for the drifts. A couple of people linked to a particular axis, volunteer to organize one drift. These people know about that particular topic well because of personal experience –working in that sector for example- and have quite a few contacts. These point people strategize an itinerary identifying places that would speak to the issue in question, also contacting other possible participants that could also be interviewed/have a taped conversation with during the drift. That previous work is essential in order for the drift to work and be worthwhile. Then the rest is more or less explained in our different texts. Basically a group of people with note-taking equipment engage in an itinerary guided by a couple of guides who are experts in those spaces, those particular routines, that concrete sector. After visiting places, and having conversations within those locations and also in transition from place to place, each participant goes back ‘home’ and starts writing about the drift: being descriptive, emotional, reflexive, etc depending on the mood. Then all the texts are shared and collaged.

This cartographic touch is based on a kind of feminist psycho-geography that re-appropriates the Situationist drift as well as a fascination for the call to map by contemporary activist groups. Later on, we found out that an important local reference for PD’s spatial thinking was the tradition of *paseos comunes* (common walks) through the very same neighborhood of Lavapiés. A large civil platform -named *Red Lavapiés*-, fighting against gentrification in the neighborhood, used to organized collective walks focusing on different aspects of the urban development plan for the neighborhood in order to better understand and criticize the consequences of such plan. The cartographic sensitivity and spatial experimentation exhibited in PD’s project will be the source of direct inspiration for many other initiatives, including the *Counter-Cartographies Collective* itself. This speaks to the question of resonances and unexpected popularity addressed later on in this chapter.

4.1.3. Theoretical inspirations & epistemological foundations

Precarias' research project constitutes an innovative analysis of contemporary political economy well informed by contemporary theoretical debates.⁷ Precarias's project reviews, criticizes, rescues and combines different bodies of work in order to develop a consistent framework attuned to their circumstances. They then pick and choose, without reverence to authority but with reverence for efficacy, eclectically combining diverse theories. It could be summed up as a combination of feminist debates on reproduction, neo-Marxist notions of affective labor, post-colonial insights on taken-for-granted supremacies (based on 'race', language, ethnic origin, etc), post-structuralist theories of power, and Deleuzian understandings of subjectivity. Going back and forth between this variety of sources and their actual conditions allows PD to find an analytical framework attuned to their circumstances and desires. This framework allows for an analysis that helps explain the phenomenon they are looking at: *precariedad femenina*. It is an approach that allows finding common material conditions (e.g. temporary contracts, mobility, insecurity) and simultaneously acknowledging radical differences (e.g. a sex worker and a free lance journalist are both flexible, temporary, part-time, and self-employed workers; although there are huge differences in social status, salary, rights, risks, etc). It is a theoretical body that is able to capture the complexity of this condition, a condition which cannot be reduced to only oppressive labor conditions. This is how they define themselves, emphasizing its *ambivalent* character:

“We are precarias. This means some good things (such as the accumulation of knowledge, expertise and skills through our work and existential experiences which are under permanent construction), a lot of bad things (such as vulnerability,

⁷ It could indeed be considered as part of the wave of alternative and creative economic analyses that is rethinking mainstream economics, such as the new working group on 'Cultures of the Economies' at UNC-CH, in USA. This interdisciplinary working group is applying cultural studies to 'the economy' in order contribute with analyses that embrace the complexity and contingency of economic processes, criticizing the economic reductionism that characterize much of mainstream Economics.

insecurity, poverty, social instability), and the majority, ambivalent things (mobility, flexibility).” (2004: 17, author’s translation).

The importance of identifying one’s own conditions is crucial for the situated kind of thinking that permeates *Precarias*’ work, an approach inspired by the old feminist practice of “*partir de si*” (starting from oneself). *Precarias* names it as “research in the first person”, focusing on the everyday experiences of each of the researchers. Thus their lives constitute the object of study, making researchers coincide with informants, breaking the traditional separations assumed in research settings. Subject and object are so interwoven that the researcher becomes the researched. Reflexive solutions would not be enough in this case, needing to be substituted by new forms of articulation between object and subject. *Precarias* will practice a “situated epistemology” inspired in feminist empiricism (Haraway’s “Situated Knowledges” is one of their main references). It is about going beyond both positivism and relativism. This research modality is based on a rejection of putting too much emphasis on *a priori* hypotheses and theoretical frameworks as starting points. On the contrary, they advocate for the feminist principles of “taking experience as an epistemological category” (PD, 2004: 26). What kind of research is envisioned to match this type of situation where researchers coincide with researched, where all speak in “first person”?

4.1.4. Rethinking the purposes of Research

The purpose of the *Precarias*’ study was not directed towards an intellectual battle over who offers more insightful economic analysis. Knowledge production by social movements –and activist research in particular- was understood as embedded in struggles and rooted in everyday

life politics.⁸ The purpose of producing better analysis has to do with contributing to processes of resistance, imagination, resonance and effective organizing. In this particular case, some of the explicit purposes that guided the research project were the following: 1) facilitating networking processes in a very fragmented sector, 2) contributing to an empowering reading of emergent but still hidden subjectivities, and 3) increasing chances of finding possible sites of intervention. Research questions were thus oriented towards those transformative goals, for example: what possibilities could different women have for articulating with each other, who shared the common experience of flexible and temporized labor with a lack of social rights yet were ‘employed’ in extremely different types of work (from university professors to sex workers to domestic servants)? How could they acknowledge their differences and yet struggle together? What particular forms would their organizing take?

According to their writings, *Precarias* conceives research as a political practice itself, able to introduce concepts and analyses of the present in order to nurture ongoing process of collective aggregation and individual empowerment in the contemporary condition of dispersion. Research is rethought as a powerful alliance builder in order to re-invigorate both individuals and collectivities for effective struggles. This understanding of research resonates with a notion of the political grounded on both, feminist principles of connection and autonomous theories of everyday politics, self-organization and world-making from below. This notion of research and politics stands in contrast with other initiatives of research for social justice purposes. For instance, this is the case of the numerous studies developing macro analyses of major political-

⁸ For further development of this understanding of activist research see edited volume *Nociones Comunes* (2004), material by Argentinean activist group *Situaciones* (www.situaciones.org), and a Barcelona produced *Activist Research Newsletter* (www.euromovements.somethingelse). Also, chapter 3 of this dissertation directly address this question.

economic processes. Oriented towards political ends, this kind of data might appear more objective and sharable, and as such, findings look like easier to communicate and circulate. This allows calling institutional actors as well as public opinion into question through means such as court cases, mainstream media, and mass campaigns. Normally, this kind of research is empirical sounding, with a sociological touch and filled with statistical data.⁹ The risk of this approach though is the possibility to generate a paralyzing kind of knowledge, according to what I gather looking at different political research projects (Casas 2008). By providing such overarching presentations of those macro processes, a strong sense of inevitability seems to be inscribed in those producing and receiving the information. What kind of political agencies arise from this research approach? On the one hand, the power of the data provides indispensable and strategic utensils to put together solid political campaigns supported by empirical argumentations. However, that macro point of departure not only may lose some of those mini-realities that fracture any kind of social reality; but, might additionally convey a sense of impotence. Also, the notion of the political behind this research design suggests a more state-centered or representational approach, where civil society puts forward demands and delegate the ultimate power to under take those changes to the authorities.

By attending to the micro and to everyday life, by speaking in first person, and capturing mundane conversations, the research material is able to connect directly with people's experiences allowing for mutual recognition and the discovery of previously unthinkable

⁹ Examples of this kind of research by social movements are numerous and actually quite successful in their campaigns, such as all kinds of watchdog-based projects (Observatori del Deute en la Globalització, Corporate Europe Observatory, CorpWatch).

combinations/possibilities.¹⁰ Also, by engaging methodologies that acknowledge the limits of the observer, or better, that embrace the incompleteness of the *data*, cheering situated objectivity and assuming the unfeasibility of capturing the whole picture, other kinds of political possibilities may be opened. In the case of Precarias, there is an explicit politics of fueling the imagination, a *constituent imagination* aiming at processes of *re-subjectification* and generation of solidarities with others, producing mutual *resonances*, collective *lexicons*, and ultimately, organized interventions by unusual *alliances* at the moment of addressing the question of precarity from different *singularities*.¹¹ Nonetheless, one might query about the level of impact by this kind of studies at the public level, in terms of mass media, government policies or even identifying effective targets. Both approaches seem equally necessary and complementary for solid political organizing. Rather than cheering for one in particular, I try to call attention about the specificity of each approach, emphasizing the different politics embodied in each of them. For that reason, there are activist projects that need from one approach more than the other and vice versa. In regards to Precarias research, despite being more discrete in their reach and potential influence, constitutes nevertheless, a real *machine of re-subjectification and connection*, after seeing its empowering effects on the participants and receivers of the investigation. The power of this kind of research is based on the ability to connect fragmented populations and weaving networks of struggle outside party-based politics.¹²

¹⁰ For example, when the *Situationists* described the city through their unconventional wanderings, the monolithic rhythm of ‘metro-bureau-do do’ (the taken for granted way of life based on commuting-office work-private space) was broken. The findings were suggestive of other forms of inhabiting the city, provoking the imagination to reinvent oneself and create a new/other sense of collectivity.

¹¹ Terms with emphasis on italics refer to Precarias’ own usual vocabulary

¹² This understanding of research as a process of re-subjectification and potential articulation is further developed in the concluding chapter.

4.1.5. Resonances and Unexpected Popularity

This research process resulted in a variety of audio, visual and written materials, which were shared and worked out during a series of internal workshops and public performance shows. Once the material was discussed, the opportunity for publication came out. This was unforeseen and pushed the group to gather all the material in a more formal format and think the project in a more linear and intentional trajectory than had originally been the case (Interview PD member April 2008). The final result of this research project was the release of a book, a DVD, a website, conference presentations and several online and paper publications, some of them being translated into other languages. The book itself is a kind of kaleidoscopic collage made up of diary entries, theoretical pieces, transcriptions of conversations, pictures and random drawings. The authorship is collective, *Precarias a la Deriva*. The publishing house's name, which consists of a play of words, is: *Traficantes de Sueños* (dream traffickers), a play on drug traffickers, a cooperative publishing house and bookstore based in Madrid, just across the street from Eskalera Karokola, *Precarias'* headquarters. The book is under a Creative Commons license, which marks the intellectual property as held in common, allowing *copy-left* (the opposite of copyright) for non-commercial use, only requiring correct citation. This series of practices, including the variety of supports for the research results, reflects a clear intention to spread the ideas, to let the research material travel, be inspirational and be re-appropriated by others, as the following vignette shows:

Paris, Abril 2008. It was surprising to see this book in so many activists' home bookshelves. Again, this was the case at the house of a long term feminist activist living Paris. When I asked her about why *Precarias'* book was in her personal library, she replied: "*Elles sont mes favorites! Precarias'* work is one of my main inspirations.

They help us here to organize in a different way, by connecting more intensively among dispersed struggles” (April 2008).

Very quickly after the book release, their work was traveling locally, nationally and internationally through paper copies or free online pdf versions of the text. *Precarias* members were invited to travel to present their work both in academic as well as activist encounters:¹³

This was not expected, but the moment when our material was released was the boom of precarity debates, so people were looking for something on these questions. I guess we brought along some freshness and direct style that made it sexy. This traveling generated multiple encounters and opened the possibility of future alliances with people otherwise impossible to reach. But the project started to “ossify” itself (cosificarse). It became an exchange coin. This produced tensions in the group about who travels and who is unable to, who is becoming the spokesperson....Also, instead of creating productive resonances, this process of traveling generated a series of replicas with no sense, ... groups elsewhere would try just to imitate the project, just copying our modus operandi but ignoring completely the specificities of their own territory...(Interview PD’s member May 4, 2008)

Producing resonances was one of the main goals of publishing and distributing their work. This was in part similar to the philosophy of *mytho-poiesis* undertaken by many global resistance movement groups.¹⁴ It consists in generating poetry, beautiful stories out of concrete battles, in order to generate contagion, enthusiasm and hope about the movements’ activities and foment proliferation and inter-relation:

¹³ To my surprise, the list of invitations continues today. The amount of invitations to speak in different cities and at different venues is really high. This was a recurrent item in the meetings during my time with them. There was always someone interested about their work and wanted them to come visit or visit them. Just in one meeting, the following list was mentioned: invitations from the feminist assembly of Vitoria; a citizens’ coalition against precarity of Jaen; a squatted social center, with an independent university (ULEX) in Malaga; a radio program of the Madrid neighborhood of Vallecas to talk to political party members before the elections; AECI to show their video in Peru; NYU, through the Juan Carlos program, to again show the video and have guest speakers. On top of that list of invitations, two researchers, one from the US, and another one from the Basque country, wanted to visit them...

¹⁴ On *mytho-poiesis* or the production of myths as the role of social movements see Wu_Ming

We wanted our work to generate inspiration...providing tools to identify previously unseen specific precarity problems in your own place and open potential spaces of intervention...(Interview PD's member May 4, 2008)

However, many of the resonances become “replicas without foundation on specific contexts”.

The unexpected excess of popularity led the collective to go for a long period of self-criticism deciding next steps:

We decided that this phase of exclusive focus on the production of texts and graphics towards the creation of a new imaginary about precarious people was getting to its end. We wanted to move from the production of codes to the production of an everyday: focusing on how we live and struggle precarity, not only ourselves as a group but making alliances with others. Being sensitive towards certain populations without so much access to formal theoretical or technical training (most of ourselves were the products of mass education in our respective countries of origin), but nevertheless with other modes of expression and new lexicons able to communicate, question, compel –interpelar- others (Interview PD's member May 4, 2008).

Starting from some of the findings of this initial research project –such as the stretching of precarity or the introduction of care - PD embarked on a process of grassroots alliance-making among precarious people, working first on strengthening the connections made during the expeditions and then opening the alliances to new populations. Under the new name of *Agency*, the same core group of women –including new additions and attritions- started to work mainly with two collectives and its broader networks: the first one made out of migrant domestic

workers, and the second one, focused on the question of mental or physically disability.¹⁵ This phase of alliance building is yet another manifestation of this necessity for networking, this time taking a different shape: from book releases and distribution to a process more oriented to build everyday practices of mutual support and foment articulation among disperse struggles. This more recent phase of *Precarias* will be reviewed in chapter eight on care. The following section further develops the theme of the unexpected popularity and multiple recursivities of *Precarias*' work.

4.2. Becoming a Networked “Knowledge-Object”¹⁶

¹⁵ This new phase was just beginning when I arrived to Madrid. The group was going through a transition process where different names, steps and strategies were being tested out. While the group was very active and enthusiastic about the new phase, the image of the group was not so obvious from outside: some people kept referring to *Precarias* as if nothing had changed, others were wondering if *Precarias* existed anymore. The popularity of their previous material still attracted many visitors, among them, a PhD student in Arts from the University of the Basque Country. Being fascinated by their publication and videos, she was studying PD as an example of feminist art. However, she was not able to find any more new texts or images by *Precarias*, asking about the new phase:

PhD student: I understand that your name is not *Precarias* anymore, there is not much information on the website, so what do you do now?

PD: Well, we don't want to create so much expectations about such small group, filled with limitations... sometimes, the texts and images on the web project an illusionary image of who you are...so we are still working on how to introduce ourselves and our work...In terms of our current phase, we decided to finish that initial project of textual production: *Precarias* as such is over, but keep working in a different way...

PhD student: What kind of activities are you doing now?

PD: we started by opening up an *office* for precarious people... we opened every Saturday afternoon, but this experience has not very productive thus far. Then we focused on *case-work actions*: Inspired by the Argentine tradition of “justicia popular”, that is, a self-organizing response to when the law does not pay attention to certain realities, we started to react to certain situations of exploitation that are not coded as such yet in this transitional moment between labor regimes...e.g. we performed *escraches* to state institutions or housing companies. This had a cathartic effect on the affected person, but also building a sense of collectivity and also serve as public denounce because it called media attention.

PhD student: I heard you are working now as an Agency putting in conversation different populations affected by precarity, can you explain this further?

PD: Finally, we entered in the phase of *alliances*: departing from the question of *care*, as one of the main conclusions from the research project, we continue to work on our previous relationships with different sectors and developing alliances able to have significant interventions: 1) Domestic Workers' Organizing: although being one of the more precarious sectors, and the cross-roads of gender & migration issues, minimal political work or activist theory on the question. Also, as a not desired effect of feminism...we felt obliged to understand and work on this question...and 2) Disability Struggles: because of their discourse on the fragility of life gave an existential approach to the question of precarity. Their renaming of disability as “functional diversity” claiming the right to be diverse from such a radical reality, re-inspired our own discourse on the importance of singularity.

¹⁶ This term comes from the panel for AAA 2009 co-organized by D. Powell, M. Osterweil and myself.

This section addresses the ramifications of an object of study that explicitly produces knowledge: conducting research, publishing a series of texts and images, coining new terms and advancing approaches to contemporary debates in a variety of topics such as flexibilization of labor, migrant work as well as autonomous organizing and feminist politics. Moreover, this prolific work does not remain in dusted archives, but actively travels through European and transnational networks via physical presence, internet or translated publications. Far from being easily delimited and circumscribed to a particular location or audience, *Precarias*'s own intellectual and analytical work produces a "research object" that is dynamic and stretches along a variety of readers. The convoluted fact of "researching research" in my case was even further complicated by an object of study that was itself increasingly becoming a referential researcher. Since first encountering the work by *Precarias*, I witnessed how their words and ways of speaking were able to generate resonances or simply attract people's attention. After all, it was my brother who in the first place pointed me towards *Precarias*, being himself captivated by a newspaper's review of their main book. This ability to communicate produced an unexpected popularity among movements' actors, eager to go beyond conventional 'left' readings of the current scenario of labor transformations as well as to move forward in the autonomous politics spread during the high peak of the global justice movement. The resonances and contributions made by *Precarias* in the growing precarity struggles in Europe are further developed in chapter 7. Here I address how there is also a growing attention towards *Precarias*' work among the scholarly world, this phenomenon becoming part of my object of study as well.

As the following literature review suggests, the material written by this miniscule women's group has been discussed in peer-reviewed journals, circulated in academic

conferences, been cited by renowned scholars and even included into US university syllabi.¹⁷ *Precarias* has not only acted as an interlocutor within some academic spaces, but also has recently become the subject of worthwhile study and funded research. This section overviews some of the incipient literature about *Precarias a la Deriva* encountered during my engagement with the group. The sub-headers point to the different scholarly readings of *Precarias*' work so far, including my own. Specifically, I bring along one of my earliest interpretations of *Precarias*' contributions also to show how myself, as a researcher, became part of this stretched object of study. The fluidity of this knowledge-object would have interesting effects on the conventional division of 'researcher' vs. 'researched', multiplying the ethnographer's positionality into many sites. These are some of the readings I encountered thus far:

Re-inventing Civic Engagement

According to a paper published in *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, the work by *Precarias a la Deriva* speaks to the challenge of articulating democratic politics today, this case located at the heart of one of the European nation-states. PD is found to be fully aware of current conditions of fragmentation, and at the same time, exploring those to find emerging possibilities:

“In the very center of Spain we are faced with a post-national landscape of shifting and fluid identifications. The grand narratives of nation and labor as foundations of identity become radically destabilized. The groundlessness experienced by our narrators is an effect of the changing makeup of the European nation-state. It is a consequence of material and discursive mobility, of human migrations and transnational economy. Yet, what is original about *Precarias* is not the recognition of groundlessness, but an effort to refigure commonality from within the fragmented experience. By tracing connections, investigating similarities of condition and experience, creating new platforms for public

¹⁷ PD's texts were mandatory readings for a graduate seminar on Neoliberalism dictated by Prof. Pickles at UNC (2006) and for a graduate class on Urban Resistance and Modernity in Spain dictated by Prof. Larson at University of Kentucky (2007).

coexistence in a reality that all too often propels us to withdraw into seclusion, *Adrift* creatively re-appropriates post-Fordist conditions.” (Szumilak 2006: 176, 177)

Monika Szumilak points out how this re-appropriation of Post-Fordist conditions is precisely the source of a new understanding of civic engagement:

“*Adrift* [...] searches to revive and bring out into the open the political potential of post-Fordist flexible labor. *Precarias'* creative work comes from a conviction that enactment of truly political action can emerge only from an investigation and understanding of one's conditions, which are shared by others despite, or rather within, the mobility and fragmentation of experience. And the conditions in which identities are shaped today are largely described by labor, which in the new economy invades the most intimate spheres of body and psyche. [...] Politics [becomes] an experience intimately connected to the prevailing forms of contemporary labor, as it appropriates its flexibility, mobility, and emphasis on communication” (2006:177).

The author argues how innovative projects such as PD are providing rich material of both infrastructures and language for reinventing public engagement forming a new, emergent and in process “communicational space”. However, this communication is not based on abstract ideals of civic collaboration. These enactments of deliberation take place in concrete life-circumstances of situated subjects, reformulating some aspects of theory of democracy. The concreteness and uniqueness of human situations, which the PD project emphasizes, are necessary for enacting and continuous reenacting of democratic practices according to the author. Drawing on PD's own texts as well as a research visit to Madrid, this author points to the main particularities of PD:

Recognizing the disruption of individual and, consequently, collective identities, *Precarias* takes instability as the very basis of their work. They embrace a cyborg-like fragmentation and heterogeneity of social imaginaries instead of creating myths of uniformity. It is from within hybridization that new, more inclusive of and more responsive to a multinational social makeup, imaginaries can arise. *Precarias* is conscious of the fact that on this hybrid social landscape that Spain is becoming in post-Fordism, links and connections can only be created by establishing a rich space for deliberation and exchange. They explore in their artistic and political work the

possibilities that acting and creating in common can provide to establish a common context, which always remains a context-in-the-making (Szumilak: 2006).

Precarias intervention, according to this analysis, is framed as a form of cultural agency that reinvents democratic participation within the complex material-semiotic circumstances of post-Fordism. This piece emphasizes the singularity of an unconventional research group and its worth while conceptual contributions at the level of political theory. This reading struck me in that much of the author's writing draws from *Precarias*' own terminology and analysis. The researcher seems convinced by *Precarias*' arguments about how to read and approach Post-fordism in Europe.

Alternative Artistic Practices

The cultural aspect of *Precarias* project is emphasized by ongoing arts dissertation research at the University of Basque Country. Garbine Larralde is a PhD candidate working on "Feminist and cooperative forms of performing situated art in the everyday and the local". She focuses not only on the texts, but also the videos and performances conducted by PD. The working hypothesis contends that those artistic forms being explicitly feminist, cooperative and situated provide a new form of performing art. These alternative artistic practices challenge the restricted limits and the cultural hegemony of institutionalized art.

While this dissertation was still underway, I had the opportunity to personally meet the author during her visit to *Precarias*' main headquarters, the feminist social center *Eskalera Karakola*.

Another *Precarias* member and I were in charge of hosting this researcher.¹⁸ The irony of the scene is that the framework was set up as a formal recorded interview by the PhD student of two representatives of *Precarias*, one being myself – also a PhD student– temporarily transformed into one of the informants of her case-study. According to my fieldnotes,

The three of us were sitting around a tea table when she asked for permission to conduct a recorded interview. After preparing some teas, a long hour of questions and answers followed. From the beginning, even introducing my academic trajectory and explaining that my participation was very recent, this researcher took me as fully participant in the project as if I have become part of her object being asked as so during the interview... (Eskalera Karakola, May 4 2008, 6pm)

She introduced her work as being at the intersection of politics, art and feminism. She mentioned Nancy Fraser and her concepts of “representation” and “redistribution” in order to use them to think through how art is produced collectively. The *Precarias*’ member responded with another piece by Fraser and also added a new author, a feminist Deleuzian from Brazil, in order to improve what she considered insufficient understanding first developed by Fraser. It was quite intense to see how the ‘object’ of study was giving the researcher references and theoretical critiques of the authors the researcher was using. This encounter speaks to the earlier methodological discussion on blurred boundaries between researcher and researched.

Media Activism

During my time participating in *Precarias* activities, another graduate student, this time from University of Kentucky, also contacted *Precarias a la Deriva* in order to conduct further

¹⁸ It is important to mention that PD was used to this practice of being visited by national and international researchers. There was no formal “research protocol” but they extensively talk about these sporadic but permanent research visits. During their monthly meetings or via the very active list-serve, PD members made cynical jokes about how some would build their professional careers based on their existence, and also evaluated the goals or approaches of a particular research project in order to think through what kind of relationship they wanted to build with that potential researcher. In my case, I think the kind of entrance was different than the usual in pronto emails requesting a visit. It was a relationship made out of many summer visits, material exchanges and mutual translation.

research on media resources among social movements. Rebecca Pittenger develops her work in a brief piece entitled “De la calle a la autopista de la información: Precarias a la Deriva y sus sitios de resistencia,” in the special volume of *Letras femeninas* “Families Under Construction: Migratory Female Identities in the Remaking of Hispanic Cultures.” Pittenger’s focus on the use of new technology by social movements emphasizes how *Precarias* is acting politically at different registers, beyond classical street mobilization or lobby logics. By acting both in the virtual world as in everyday problematics the work of PD is circulating and being re-appropriated in other contexts.

Re-Centering the question of Care

The next work focusing on *Precarias* it is a fascinating piece by a young activist scholar part of the politically minded academic network *NextGeneration*, a network working on re-radicalizing Women Studies.¹⁹ Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, after finishing her doctoral dissertation about feminist epistemology, has recently published a piece entitled “Thinking with Care” as part of an edited volume on Haraway’s work. In her writing, itself an example of activist theorizing grounded in concrete experience, she talks about *Precarias a la Deriva* as an example of bringing the question and the practice of *care* into the collective process of knowledge production:

“By researching these patterns, by “drifting” in the city, encountering its people and re-encountering themselves, they are also re-creating webs of care and solidarity, practicing care in-situ, building (other) possible connections and caring knowledge” (2008: 8).

¹⁹ I met this young scholar by participating in the elaboration of the “Precarity Map,” a trans-European cartographic research project bringing together different European collectives working on issues of precarity, including PD.

In this analysis, practicing care is part and parcel of the research process. This focus on methods reveals a belief that “*how* we know is often as important as *what* we know” (Ibid, 2008: 14). That is, knowing is not just about discovering worlds but creating relations and even alternative worlds. This generative potential of research based on practices of care brings along notions of the political based on everyday experiences of mutual support, leading to solid and sensitive networks and alliances. This piece was helpful to realize the conceptual relevance of the more recent debates on care advanced by the new phase of *Precarias*. Over the course of my stay, the initial focus on precarity will shift to the question of care as a transversal problematic for *Precarias*’ analyses of labor, gender and migration. Somehow the centrality of care and their arguments about it become one of my ‘findings’ about the prospects of precarious struggles in Europe and feminist politics in Spain further developed in the last chapters (7 and 8 in particular).

Decolonial & Feminist Research Methodologies

Finally, in a similar line about focusing on the *how* we know, I wrote a piece for the *World Anthropologies Network E-Journal*, pointing to how the World Anthropologies Network (WAN) has a double point of articulation with the project of PD: experimenting with both decolonial and feminist research logics. Catherine Walsh, one of the members of the Modernity/Coloniality (M/C) research group, (an intellectual paradigm centered in Latin America that deeply influences WAN), once posed to me the following question: is activist research, and PD in particular, a decolonial research project? My argument, developed further in the WAN piece, is that the M/C double effort of de-colonizing and pluralizing knowledge is indeed present in the work by *Precarias a la Deriva*. The explicit attempt to go beyond the canon is shown in the

variety of sources used in their project, paying attention to who is speaking. In other words, PD exhibit a de-colonial treatment of sources of enunciation which involves as much sensitivity to who speaks and from where they speak (geographically and politically) as to the substantive aspect of the utterance

Actually, *Precarias* is aware and inspired by the M/C paradigm and its politics of decolonial thinking. In an introduction to an edited volume called *Otras Inapropiables* that compiles different feminist texts, *Precarias* members refer to Walter Mignolo (one of the central M/C scholars) to support their desire to challenge intellectual hierarchies based on racial classification: “La supresión de esa frontera de color en nuestras genealogías políticas e intelectuales ha sido una constante” (2004: 20). This piece then goes onto elaborate how the feminist politics behind PD could be an inspiration for the M/C group and WAN collective’s search for concrete research methodologies attuned to decolonial politics.²⁰

The Socio-political value of critical ethnographies of the everyday life

One of the leading anthropologists in Spain, Manuel Delgado,²¹ was commenting a recent publication of a militant research project about the global transformations in the metropolis of Madrid. The title of this 700 pages bright orange book was *Madrid: ¿la suma de todos? Globalización, territorio, desigualdad*. As part of the multi-disciplinary team of experts working on it under the collective name of *Observatorio Metropolitano*, a few members of *Precarias* authored the chapter on migration. Interestingly, Profesor Delgado focused his presentation on this chapter because of their ethnographic approach. I take his presentation and the discussion

²⁰ This was part of my initial reading of *Precarias a la Deriva*, this dissertation further elaborate on the contributions and specificities of this activist research experience.

²¹ Professor of Urban Anthropology at the University of Barcelona, author of books such as “El animal urbano”.

following as part of this series of scholarly voices on *Precarias*' work. I had the opportunity to attend to this public event, a book presentation after its release at the end of 2007. It took place at one of the most emblematic cultural institutions of the city, *el Circulo de Bellas Artes*, in downtown Madrid with all the pedigree surrounding high culture buildings. More than a hundred people filled the room for a presentation by two researchers from the Observatorio Metropolitano and a famous academic figure. Some *Precarias* members were part of the audience. Delgado, after pondering the excellences of the book, ended his intervention with a theoretical/methodological question. Despite the insightful statistical and cartographic information about Madrid, he wanted to know how this city, which according to the authors was being planned by and for the ones who dominate, was being accepted and made familiar by those dominated. Without intending that the book needed to include everything, he found missing a section about the everyday life of that 'mass' of people that were living with a hegemonic common sense in the Gramscian understanding: for him, the book lacked a look at the urban itineraries of those actually living and 'believing' Madrid as the publicized great global city, starting from the very moment of a *porras&churros*-based breakfast at the bar. In order to capture those hegemonic constructions, a study more attentive to practices and the micro level was necessary, according to Delgado. The approach taken in the chapter by *Precarias* members, which shows the most attentive look to the micro, should be applied not only to the migrant population, but to the overall mainstream population. The anthropologist insisted on the necessity of the micro, the everyday, in order to apprehend how the city that is being planned from above is lived, reinvented, ignored, subverted from below. Instead of the sense of impotence provided by the

macro-approaches, this approach would allow for a better communication and connection with the readers. According to Delgado,

“critical ethnographies of the everyday, such as the ones conducted by *Precarias*, provoke the readers to identify with what it is being described and hopefully incite for the articulation of individual and collective agency” (Madrid, February 2008).

This incipient scholarly attention to *Precarias*' work shows how “my object”, whose main identification is as researchers, increasingly becomes the target of outside research, becoming researchers under inquiry. These voices coming from Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Art, Philosophy and Anthropology emphasize the contributions of a grassroots groups at the level of political theory, media, art, and research imaginations. The object then is treated as *subject*, in that while it is still *object* of attention is taken as a *source*, not as a *case* in the typical Social Movements Studies fashion. What these scholarly voices encountered during my dissertation research, including the incident of myself being interviewed by one of them, are signaling is not only a blurring of boundaries between researcher and researched. They also speak to the epistemological consequences of engaging social movements as knowledge producers, fractalizing the expected linear relationship between object-subject into multiple combinations, making both the research process and the research products more complex. These literatures also confirm how engaging movements in their own right allow a much richer appreciation of their contributions enriching our own understandings, in this case, of contemporary politics, labor transformation and research practices.

4.3. Conclusion

The main goal of this chapter has been to introduce in great detail the intellectual and political work of *Precarias a la Deriva*'s research project as an exemplary case of the current

wave of activist research. The chapter pointed to their distinct research practices as well as the project's immersion into multiple audiences, including scholarly studies. The social life of their texts produced a series of recursive effects on the nature of an object of study, which besides traveling internationally has been able to transgress the expected epistemological roles given to the researcher on one hand, and the researched on the other hand. Instead of the sociological focus on the professional, gender, and age composition of the group, I follow an approach to social movements studies informed by recent debates on knowledge. In this way, the case of *Precarias* gains further relevance. Rather than a case-study to support previous analytical frameworks, the interest of this activist initiative resides in its own conceptual and methodological contributions as well as the political impact of their research. Thus this chapter has tried to fully engage *Precarias* as a knowledge producer in its own right, looking at the group's research modus operandi itself, tracing its trajectory, inspirations, and know-hows. At stake are the contributions made to broader political and research imaginaries by a grassroots political group. The next thematic section contains chapters on the context of emergence of *Precarias*, addressing the question of Europe and the particular case of Spain (chapter 5). It also includes a further engagement with the conceptual contributions made by this activist research group, first their contributions to the recent debates on *precarity* (chapter 6), and second, their theoretical and political development on the question of *care* (chapter 7).

PART II.
Europe Adrift

Conceptual and Political Transformations by
Social Movements

Chapter 5

*Ya Somos Europeos!*¹

Conflicting Perspectives on the Spanish Miracle

Introduction

During the years of the conservative administration lead by President Aznar (1996-2004), a media buzz coined the term “Spanish economic miracle” praising all the successful positive consequences for the economy of the recent reforms enacted by the Aznar administration. Spain was presented to the upcoming EU members as an exemplary model of rapid and successful economic growth, modernization and development. According to a member of the European Commission, “Spain has been the reference model for the twelve countries that joined the EU since 2004”.² During that same year of EU enlargement, a critical publication came out with a quite different diagnosis about current transformations in Spain entitled *A la Deriva por la Precariedad Femenina* (Drifting through Feminine Precarity).

“The entire 1st Edition: SOLD OUT” read a sign over the last copy of the book when we visited the bookstore of its publishing house some years ago. This book was the product of an action research project focused on the gendered effects of labor transformations in Madrid. The findings about the economic transformations underway conflicted with the mainstream view. In

¹ English translation: “We finally become Europeans!”

² Quote from journalist article “El milagro económico español” by Andreu Missé appeared in El Pais, March 22, 2007

contrast with the neutral sounding term *flexibility* used by the official discourse as one of the main bases for economic success, the name chosen by the authors of this book to refer to the current transformations was *precarity*.³ The heterodox publication –signed by a collective with a curious name, non copy righted, with many drawings and random photos- was object of numerous reviews, going from the mainstream press to academic journals, both at the national as well as international level. The readership of this book seemed not to be very happy with the celebratory diagnoses provided by mass media and politicians, and looked for another portrait of Spain and EU policies. The publication was a success: it traveled from city to city, from sector to sector. I actually encountered it at my hometown, Palencia, in my parent’s house during the first Christmas break of my doctoral program. My brother was praising the book, mentioning to us how much he felt identified with the analysis. Since then, I have been following the trajectory of this heterodox research collective.

These two conflicting discourses on the same phenomenon might indeed be read as a battle over the notion of development. There are actually two diametrically opposed visions of globalization, economic progress and social well-being: the first one claims flexibility as the paradigmatic solution for the infamously rigid Spanish labor markets. Flexibility, free market, deregulation become the key words for national progress to be able “to catch up” with the most

³ The most common understanding of *precarity* among critical social movements refers to the labor conditions that arose after the transition from life long, stable jobs common in industrial capitalist and welfare state economies, to temporary, insecure, low paying jobs emerging with the globalization of the service and financial economy: “The precariat is to postfordism what proletariat was to fordism: flexible, temporary, part-time, and self-employed workers are the new social group which is required and reproduced by the neoliberal and postindustrial economic transformation. It is the critical mass that emerges from globalization, while demolished factories and neighborhoods are being substituted by offices and commercial areas. They are service workers in supermarkets and chains, cognitive workers operating in the information industry, [etc]. Our lives become precarious because of the imperative of flexibility.” Chainworkers in *Precarias a la Deriva* (2004: 48 author’s translation). Thus what in English would be called flexible, casualized or contingent labor (without any kind of necessary critical connotation) is being politicized by social movements in several European countries as ‘precarious labor’, denouncing its fragile and exploitative character and promoting it as a new identity of struggle

developed and more globalized countries. The second one identifies a series of profound transformations behind the miracle that go beyond the successful macro-economic data: a general tendency towards social fragmentation, individualized victimization and self-exploitation. According to one of the working hypotheses of this research project, this tendency constitutes a process towards the “precarization of existence”. It is a process, which despite its negative consequences, it is still full of potential, opening possibilities for a new socio-political arrangement and a redefinition of progress. What to do with these two incompatible portrayals of Spain’s trajectory and its future prospects? A strong interest in this contradictory conjuncture as well as a political curiosity about the practice of activist research lead me to critically re-examine the recent political-economic history of my home country, as its relates to the European Union and the globalization of markets as well as the globalization of social movements. This search for alternative genealogies to contemporary Spain and critical approaches to the European Union was the beginning of an investigation on the “queered”⁴ notion of *precarity*, examining its conceptual and political repercussions.

This chapter offers a situated overview of recent transformations in Spain and the EU based on a variety of sources: from auto-biographical data, as a Spaniard with most of her post-graduate education abroad, coming back to her homeland to conduct fieldwork; to academic literature as well as journalist accounts and official statistical data. The first two sections focus on Spain. Section 1, *Spain Goes Global*, speaks about the transition from a semi-peripheral autarchic country under a dictatorship to become a ‘main global player’, headquarter of key multi-national corporations and a major receiver of international migration. Section 2, *The*

⁴ See *Transatlantic Translations* for an explanation of precarity as *queered* notion for an American audience. Casas & Cobarrubias. (2008)

Spanish Economic Miracle, depicts a double response to economic contemporary transformations. On the one hand, the emergence of an official discourse praising the macro-economic achievements. On the other hand, a series of critical voices contesting such a portrait from the experience of such said miracle on an everyday basis. The last section of this chapter on contemporary contexts addresses the process of building the European Union. Section 3, *The European Union Adrift*, provides an introduction to the construction of the European Union. After briefly reviewing the Spain-EU relationship, particularly in terms of labor legislation, I focus on some of the basic background for understanding EU integration and how it varies in different national contexts. To conclude I address the question of Europe as an anthropological object.

Rather than offering an exhaustive analysis of some of the European realities, the goal of this chapter is to present some of the key actors, discourses and events that make up this conjuncture of apparent ‘economic success’; and how it gets partially deconstructed and re-conceptualized by a series of happenings –from TV programs to counter-summits, from heterodox research projects to general strikes- by the hand of critical social movements that point in another direction: toward the question of *precarity*.

5.1. Spain goes Global: From Semi-Periphery to the G-8

First of all, a clarifying note because speaking about “Spain” as a unity is rather problematic.⁵ Anthropological studies focusing on Spanish society constantly point to its regional diversity as well as the acute unevenness among regions (Narotzky and Smith 2006). More than an analytical unit, the purpose of using Spain in the singular is rather to evoke the actual discursive use of the term. With politicians, the media and through popular imaginaries there is definitely a national identity to be mobilized in different registers: either for claiming first place in the race for development, for obtaining the hallmark of ‘being European’, for depicting pejorative ascriptions (such as PIGS), or even for announcing the arrival of a precarious Spain.

5.1.1. *The Politics of Feeling Developed: Ranking #1 in the EU*

The housing problem may not be as acute an issue in other countries of the European Union, but urban development is a big deal currently in Spain. Just to give you an idea, the EU cannot complete the Kyoto protocol on CO2 emissions because of the cement production that is used for construction in Spain. Despite these high rates in housing construction, the lack of access to housing is one of the most striking in Spain’s recent history. It has actually been denounced by a UN representative on housing as one of the worst countries of the EU in terms of access to housing. Young people and migrants with precarious labor situations are suffering these current contradictions the most. (Blog post February 2007)

⁵ The term “Spain” is unable to capture the internal diversity of this country, a tense mosaic of divergent languages, political structures, economic cultures, gastronomic traditions, etc. This term also hides the acute regional unevenness as well as the urban-rural divide, both processes accentuated since entrance into the EU. As a term, Spain not only conveys a monolithic understanding, but it also carries a rather large political load. From the times of Ferdinand and Isabel up until Franco, “Spain” has been a tool to erase internal differences and to mutilate historical experiences of multiculturalism. It has been so closely ascribed to Franco’s regime that even today wearing the colors of the Spanish flag or saying I am from Spain –without specifying your region-, can have right-wing connotations. Actually, this is why, among progressive circles, the politically correct term is: “el estado español” (the Spanish State). For the purpose of this dissertation and having in mind an American audience, I will mostly use the term Spain, aware of its limitations and connotations. The reader must bear in mind this country’s internal frictions and disparities.

Our first post on the shared blog among the participants of the *Counter-Cartographies Collective*⁶ since our arrival in Madrid addressed the housing situation in Spain. After a challenging search for an affordable apartment in one of the European countries with the worst access to housing, we finally got a one-bedroom, not exactly a cheap one, smack in the middle of downtown Madrid. It was situated between two distinctive neighborhoods: the tourist driven *Barrio de las Letras*, where famous writers from the 15th century onwards have lived and written world-renown pieces; and *Barrio Lavapiés*, known for its very high migrant presence and the concentration of activist collectives and political projects. This was the social laboratory in which we participated during almost two years of fieldwork.

It is very common to go out for coffee or hot dark chocolate accompanied by *churros* for breakfast in Madrid. We tried to limit ourselves on such gastronomic temptations, and go once or twice a week to nearby cafes, especially to the one downstairs: *the Bar Esfera*. It was a great opportunity to test the climate on the hot issues going on. People –ranging from postal-workers to students (both mainly Spaniards), from Romanian construction workers to Caribbean sex-workers- were loud in their conversations, and even make you participate in their endless debates.⁷ We also took advantage to read the newspapers, always freely accessible at the bars and cafes in Spain. The *Bar Esfera* became our personal mini library for getting up-to-date pictures of the country. In the media portraits of contemporary Spain, we found a quite striking leitmotiv: regardless of the diverse array of news, there was something repeated day after day:

⁶ Before starting our fieldwork, my research partner and myself committed to write updates on the *Counter Cartographies Collective*' blog as a way to keep track of our research impressions as well as to keep in contact with our collective back in Chapel Hill.

⁷ Little Gabriel had his role in opening up conversations. The currently uncommon presence of a baby facilitated a large number of random interactions that would otherwise have been difficult to create intentionally. Actually, Spain is number one again (or close) in terms of the lowest birth rate among EU members, and thus worldwide.

Spain was “number one winner” not only in the *Euro-copa* soccer games; it surpassed the rest of European countries in many other spheres: construction, migration, unemployment, pollution, standard of life, low birth rate, etc. Regardless the positive or negative implications of claiming first place, the point was to be number one.

This discourse of “Spain as number one” in reference to other European countries, speaks to a reaffirmation of a national reality inserted in the multi-state framework of the EU. Also, it might be a way to grasp the rapid transformations taking place, transitioning from an enclosed country during the long years of the Franquist dictatorship into a laboratory of globalization. This new status as a highly developed EU member, active participant of contemporary global market dynamics, will be both praised by official actors as well as boycotted by hidden stories of resistance. The following are some of the main scenarios from which the social movements under consideration are both emerging and engaging.

5.1.2. A Country of Rapid Transformations

While carrying out this project of research and immersion in contemporary movement practices, especially militant research and activist cartography, the research team encountered more information about the transformations taking place within the territory of the Spanish state. Much of this background information would be relevant for any deeper understanding of current movement practices as well as why it is important to search for innovative forms of activist intervention. Indeed, re/constituting the specific historical context becomes an important part of this inquiry. The current period named as *the Spanish Miracle* somehow speaks to the cultural studies notion of *conjuncture* as “a social formation fractured and conflictual, along multiple axes, planes and scales, constantly in search of temporary balances or structural stabilities

through a variety of practices and processes of struggle and negotiation” (Grossberg 2006: 4)

Two key questions arise here: how do we describe and theorize the contemporary conjuncture? What are the key problematics of the present moment? I highlight some, by providing a synthetic historical review of the recent past. This is a socio-economic timeline *a grosso modo*, which should not be understood as a succession of linear stages, but rather evocative of certain waves:

1975: Democratizing Spain. This year marks the beginning of the political transition from Franco’s regime to a democratic electoral system. This historical period called “La Transición” is used as the foundational myth of current Spanish democracy.⁸ As a result of this tense period of political disagreement among the main political actors, a consensus to inaugurate a parliamentary monarchy was achieved. Part of the consensus was also rearticulating the idea and structure of Spain as something more than a nation-state. While maintaining a central government, this move delegated many responsibilities to the seventeen new regional government units, especially those named as ‘historical nations’ (Catalonia, Basque Country and Galicia). This far-reaching consensus was not free of contestations, which continue to endure: anti-monarchic sentiments, re-emergence of nationalist demands from multiple regions, pro-unitary Spain statements and separatist attacks.

The transition period condensed intense political moments: democratic general elections in 1977, a constitution adopted in 1979 and last attempt at a coup d’etat in 1982. At this point

⁸The discourse around *La Transición* is mainly articulated through star figures: from the role of king Juan Carlos I negotiating with Franco; to the leader of the illegal Communist Party, Carrillo, coming back from Franco’s exile to negotiate a series of viable labor reforms and political compromises. This version of La Transición has been popularized mainly via media and textbooks. National celebrations during the 30th anniversary of the first democratic elections that coincided with our fieldwork period, emphasized the ‘good will’ of these key institutional figures. This account erases the massive movements against Franco, with demands that surpassed the official consensus in terms of regional autonomy, workers rights, anti-monarchism, etc. We are actually writing a short piece to tell these hidden stories of *La Otra Transición*.

Spain is considered well “behind” in terms of the rest of Europe and the First World. In fact a popular phrase referring to Spain and Portugal was “Africa begins in the Pyrenees” (i.e. once you crossed the border from France into Spain, you were in Africa not Europe). On top of such political uncertainty, the world-wide oil crisis stopped the incipient growing economy that characterized the end of the Franquist regime. During the last stage of the dictatorship, in part thanks to the support of the US government and to a technocrat-driven economic plan signed in 1959, *Plan de Estabilización*, a large process of industrialization took place. In contrast with the post-civil war scenario –hunger, corruption, frozen production, economic autarchy-, the promotion of certain services sectors such as tourism and the opening to foreign investors developed during the last stage of Franco’s regime, defined the transition to a modern economy. Relevant demographic re-arrangements such as massive rural migration to the industrial areas as well as more international presence are some of the main consequences of the *Plan de Estabilización*. This incipient economic growth under high state protection was severely affected by the international oil crisis. In 1976, Spanish economy was quite stagnant: the GDP shrank, the unemployment rate was growing and inflation levels circulated between 20-40% (Quintana 2002; de la Dehesa 1993). Trying to address the crisis, the government as well as political parties in opposition and a main union faction signed a new economic plan (*Pactos de la Moncloa*) in 1977.⁹

1982. Europeanizing Spain. Since the state-wide victories of the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE) in general elections, this Euro-Socialist Party pushed for a ‘politics of modernization and industrial restructuring’ –known as *la Reconversión*- during its thirteen years

⁹ This was designed in the early stages of the “La Transition” period, only two years after the death of Franco.

in power. During this time, two quite large scale processes begin to get underway in Spain: A) the construction of a welfare state based on the “European” model (with its own peculiarities); and B) the beginning of political and economic integration into the European Union/Community.

A) Welfare State in Spain: This was understood as part of ‘modernizing’ Spain and as a way for the PSOE to do its part as a Socialist party of Europe. Building on the social protections already existing under Franco’s regime, some of the mainstays in the PSOE’s construction of the welfare state in Spain include: rising public expenditures for contributory pensions and unemployment benefits in the 1980s; the creation of a noncontributory assistance scheme for disabled people and other groups least likely to fulfill contribution conditions for insurance, such as women, young people, and long-term unemployed people in 1984; the establishment of a universal National Health Service to guarantee all Spaniards and foreigners in Spain a right to health care in 1986. It should be remarked that the ‘welfare-state’ in Spain is often considered as ‘lagging-behind’ other EU cases (Navarro 2006).

A careful treatment of this comparative analysis is found in a polemical book entitled *Social Underdevelopment in Spain* by a renowned critical sociologist, Vincent Navarro. His main argument goes like this: current public expenditure does not correspond to recent positive economic growth rates. The welfare state in Spain is less developed than in other European Union countries mainly because of two historically traceable causes: “the hierarchies of both class and gender” (2006:16). This is due to the legacy of a dictatorship (a similar process to Portugal and Greece) that officially supported the prevalence of the conservative and privileged classes, as well as the contemporary establishment’s discourse that undermines the necessity of a welfare system, permeating into the general common sense. It is not only about class, however.

Women maintain the services that the state does not provide, bearing the burden of an unfinished welfare system. When comparing percentages of public budgets spent on things such as medical care, elderly care, women's programs, education, employment, etc. Spain is often behind the average of the EU-15¹⁰, according to *Eurostat's* measurements of welfare state development levels. For example, public expenditure in social protection in Spain was 19,7% of GDP in 2002 compared to the average 26,9% of the UE-15 (Navarro 2006: 35). The author refers to this lack of public money spent in social protection as a 'social deficit' causing a notable disjuncture between Spain and a 'Social Europe':

“The increase in the revenue of the Spanish state, due to larger economic growth and growth of its fiscal responsibilities, was not invested in reducing the social deficit, but solely in eliminating the state's budget deficit, converting Spain into one of the EU-15 countries with the lowest budget deficit and the highest social deficit, obtaining the first at the cost of the second” (2006:37, my translation).

Though it has been said that the Spanish welfare-state 'still lags' behind Northern European nations in terms of scope and benefit levels, it would probably be incorrect (and derogatory) to attribute this to its recent creation, lacking the necessary time to catch up with those developed ones. The 'stunted' development is likely correlated with the need to enact EU economic directives on issues such as public spending and inflation.¹¹ It might also be connected to Spain's role in the 70's and 80's as a production platform for other parts of Europe.

¹⁰ EU-15 is an official expression to refer to the number of European member-states up until 2004.

¹¹ EU public policies based on high interest rates imposed by the European Central Bank and reduction of public deficit mandated by the Stability Pact (Navarro 2006: 39)

B) *Entrance in Europe*: two key moments open the door to a more solid relationship with Northern European countries: in matters of defense, the polemical membership in *NATO*¹² in 1982; and in political and economic matters, the *Adhesion Treaty*, by which Spain becomes a full-right member of the EU since January 1st 1986. In this process, Spain solidifies its role as a second-tier industrial country producing goods (such as cars & textile/apparel) for the European market. Labor was still cheap and European capital began to flood in.

It should be stressed that these processes were already beginning in the latter part of the Franquist period such as through manufacturing outposts for large industrial groups (including US capital like Ford and General Motors). Massive rural to urban migration really began in the 50's and 60's. During the 60's and 70's Spain was a net exporter of people, mostly people going for a period of time to Germany, France, Argentina and several other destination countries to work. From that period a number of state-owned companies and elements of a fascist-planned economy were inherited while favoring powerful industrial groups. As the 1980's begin, one can see a picture of a country that had recently passed from being primarily rural to primarily urban; served as a manufacturing base for foreign companies to sell in foreign markets (the domestic

¹² In response to the party in power's close positioning with NATO during the late 70s, the still marginal Socialist Party developed a public campaign against Spain's adhesion to NATO during the early 80s. Felipe Gonzalez and other key socialist figures criticized Spain's eventual entrance to NATO as a "historical act of barbarism" and "the transformation of Spain into a US colony". The PSOE made a political strategy out of the rejection to Spain's integration into NATO in order to weaken the party in power at the time –UCD- and obtain victory in the following general elections. Massive "anti-OTAN" mobilizations criss-crossed the country (even if I was four years old, I still vividly remember the huge and loud street demonstrations). This generalized rejection was based on an anti-American sentiment, product of the negative image of North American foreign policy at the time and due to the US' unconditional support to Franco's dictatorship. The PSOE also argued that entrance in NATO would intensify cold war tensions, Spain having received previous warning from the Soviet Union about not entering NATO unless Spain wanted to become a major target in the case of nuclear attacks. Despite the general rejection, the party in government signed the entrance into NATO in early 1982, just some months before the general elections. PSOE promised in its electoral program a general referendum about the permanency in NATO, criticizing the decision of the UCD as being anti-democratic. However, once the PSOE was in power with an absolute majority, it became increasingly less critical towards NATO, ironically promoting a more positive attitude. This story finishes with the referendum giving a slightly victory to those saying yes to the adhesion to NATO. "El Referéndum sobre la permanencia de España en la OTAN" in <http://www.monografias.com/trabajos10/otan/otan.shtml>

market was building but still much smaller); and a very frugal population and consumption culture (consumer capitalism had not hit, financial mechanisms like credit cards, mortgages etc. were rare and seemed exotic). The capital Madrid was “an industrial city in crisis, capital of a semi-peripheral country” (Rodriguez 2007: 14). No powerful multinationals of Spanish origin existed.

The entrance of Spain in the *European Economic Community* (predecessor of the EU) in 1986 had a transforming effect on the economy (Garmendia 2004). On the one hand, Europe had been pushing towards a more liberal market through a series of concrete economic measures such as the progressive privatization of public industries, de-regulating labor markets and an increasingly conservative fiscal politics. On the other hand, Spain received large amounts of capital from the EU through the *European Regional Development Funds* and agricultural subsidies. These large funds had conditions on them as to how they were to be applied. Agricultural subsidies in particular had strong impacts in the reorganization of agricultural work, greatly transforming the rural landscape of Spain.

1990: Globalizing Spain. At the beginning of the nineties, several processes already signaled toward current globalizing tendencies. The five-fold approach towards globalization as framed by Inda and Rosaldo (2002; 2008), who were themselves inspired by Appadurai’s *five global scapes* (1996), would be a helpful analytical exercise here. What follows are a few examples of how Spain is inserted in global processes, based on the “five global cultural flows” already canonized as such in the subfield of Anthropology of Globalization: people, finances, commodities, ideas and media.

· *Globalization of People: A Champion on Migration*

During the long period of Franco's rule Spain was a net exporter of people, continuing a trend that was ongoing since the latter part of the 19th century (Ministerio de Trabajo e Inmigración). Movement was primarily uni-directional, out of the country. Tourism was negligible until the end of the dictatorship and immigration was practically non-existent. In 1956, toward the middle of the dictatorship period, emigration was officially managed through the National Institute of Emigration through which work contracts were negotiated in other NorthWestern European countries and emigrants became a source of official revenue for the national economy (Ochaita 2004). A large number of these emigrants were laborers from poor rural areas working in the flourishing West German industry.

Instead of being a net exporter of people, in recent years Spain becomes a net importer: migrants begin to arrive in the 1990's mainly from Eastern/Central Europe, North Africa and Latin America. Initially Spain serves as a transit country, but as the years pass people begin to settle and form communities.¹³ For example, in Spain as a whole, within the ten-year period between 1995-2004 the total number of immigrants from foreign countries entering the country per year jumped from 19,530 in 1995 to 645,844 in 2004 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística 2005). As a percentage of the entire censured population, the foreign-born category has gone from about 2-3% in the mid 1990's to above 10% now¹⁴, from one of the lowest to one of the highest rates in the EU. Actually, this shift in migration is so strong, that in the years 2006 and 2007, Spain ranked second, only after the US, in absolute number of migrants entering any

¹³ It should be noted there existed regions where migration has been a reality for decades though, often it was temporary migration or limited in geographic scope, it is only in the 1990's & 2000's that it becomes more of a country-wide phenomena.

¹⁴ The estimates for 2008 suggest that foreigners account for 5.22 million people out of a total of 46.06 million (only counting legal migrants).

country (BBVA 2008). The numbers in Spain recently have been much higher than other countries in Europe that have historically been immigrant destinations (i.e. France, Germany or the UK) (INE 2008).

Immigration has grown exponentially almost every year without a break from 1994 on, until the past couple of years. It continues to increase though more gradually. Spain has outpaced other EU countries that have also recently changed from net exporters to net importers of population (such as Portugal, Ireland, Greece) in sheer numbers of people, in proportion to the overall population and in rates of growth. In 15-20 years Spain went from a country of emigration, to being the number two destination country for global immigration after the United States. A radical cultural and demographic shift is underway. This should also be read in the context of Spain being an EU “border” country: while its borders with Portugal and France are opening, the border with Morocco is militarizing heavily, beginning to look like the US-Mexico border. While Spain’s visa system is friendly to other European citizens, it is increasingly aggressive towards other migratory waves, mainly those coming from Latin America, South Asia and Africa (Martinez Veiga 2006).

• *Globalization of Finances: the New Spanish Armada*

Large Spanish state-owned companies began the privatization process in the nineties following the European directives on liberalizing the market towards a more competitive system: the telecommunications sector run by *Telefonica*; the energy sector run by *Repsol*, *Endesa* & *Iberdrola*; the airline industry run by *Iberia*. As the decade continued, regional and national banks began to become global players: *BBVA* & *Banco Santander* in particular. The privatization of public industries, and the take-off of an unleashed private sector, has also lead to the creation

of what are sometimes referred to as the “new Spanish Armada” (or the “new conquistadors”) especially in reference to their entry into Latin American markets. Due to the opening up of those markets through IMF & IADB adjustment plans, Spanish corporations took advantage of linguistic and cultural facility to rapidly enter those markets during the mid-late nineties becoming main players of key sectors such as: telecommunications, commercial air transport, energy/petrol, and banking, in quite a few countries.¹⁵ This increased presence in the global market, also has a corollary in the landscape of Spanish cities: “From not having any multinationals based in Spanish capital to note in the 1980’s, nor having many headquarters of global corporations hosted in Madrid... to being the eighth city of the world for large corporate headquarters (Rodriguez 2007). Madrid, once an industrial platform, is now a center of finance, urban speculation and service industries. The capital of the country is one of the most acute manifestations of the overall tendency of the Spanish economy.¹⁶

· *Globalization of Ideas: Spain as a Global Cultural Icon*

Most Americans that I encountered during my several years living in the US have visited or wanted to visit Spain. Tourism has been one of the major development poles of the Spanish economy. About 10-11% of the GDP is from tourism currently. In 2007 Spain was second only after the US in number of tourists and second to France in the amount of money generated from tourist dollars/euros. Increased employment in the tourism sector may help explain the decrease in unemployment in the late nineties on the one hand, and the skyrocketing of precarious forms

¹⁵ Ironically now the third largest stock market of Latin American stocks is in Madrid and is a specific subsidiary of the IBEX (the Spanish stock market) called the LATIBEX.

¹⁶ Five out of the ten top European construction companies are based in Madrid. A very notable construction and housing boom had taken place in Spain that has only just recently begun to burst in late 2007. Some say that it was this boom that was helping the economy keep afloat. Many of these top companies though are also huge global players and much of their earnings come from foreign contracts.

of employment on the other (temporary, no benefits, seasonal, low unionization, etc.). According to some critical anthropologists, the latest urban and cultural developments in Barcelona were intentionally designed to make of the city a brand capital (Delgado et al. 2004), becoming one of the hallmarks of this commodification of *some* of Spain as a global tourist destination. Spain, as an idea floating in current global cultural flows, is also exported through other commodities. The Spanish label is becoming a cache especially for international fashion, luxury wine and gourmet food.

· *From Donkeys to High Speed Trains, Cell phones and Shopping Malls*

The fact that the passage from rural to urban was conducted in the span of a generation has its paradoxical corollaries. Within my age group, most of us were said to “have villages”. These were our parent’s towns lost in rural areas, where we used to religiously visit grandparents and participate in the summer festivities focused around each village’s patron saint. Our parents still tell us endless stories about their rural lifestyle as children and teenagers: the adventures of traveling by donkey, the difficulties of communication, and the consumption patterns based not entirely on cash but on one’s own agricultural production and local commerce. In curious contrast with this austerity, today the globalization of commodities and technical devices is notably extended: cell phones¹⁷, computers, cars, designer clothing at accessible rates; increases in the use of credit through cards as well as loans, mortgages and other financial devices. Also, Spain is the top in Europe in terms of new Commercial Center “malls” being built, beginning to compete with the type of local commerce for which the country was so famous.

· *The Intimacies of Spanish Cinema: New family structures and sexual identities*

¹⁷ Spain is, after the UK, the country where people send more text messages per capita.

These changes have also translated into other social practices: from being a country of fairly traditional and solid family structures to being one with diverse family formations, normally less stable. Spain is second in Europe in terms of separations of marriages. Spain currently has one of the lowest birth rates in the EU (EUROSTAT 2008; PUBMED 1998), and thus the world, mitigated primarily by immigrants and their families. Also, the question of diverse sexualities is increasingly a topic of public debate. While this affects a small sector of the population, topics such as gay marriage nevertheless make the national news and are put forward as part of the political agenda. The Oscar-awarded movies by Almodovar have internationally spread a portrait of contemporary Spain that emphasizes these gender changes in dramatic, even distorted ways (Goss 2008; 2009).¹⁸

5.1.3. The Black box of the Spanish Labor Market

After this brief depiction of contemporary Spain according to these global cultural flows, one might miss a relevant feature of the current situation: that is, the turbulent labor panorama. There have indeed been solid and constructive critiques to the absence of (see Freeman 2000). The proposal is to add to those other observations questions such as: what is the country's role in the international division of labor? What are the resulting transformations in the emerging national labor regimes and beyond? This dissertation is inspired on those attempts that bring the

¹⁸ All these current transformations are built on previous historical developments towards a particular "Spanish Modernity". According to Larson and Woods (2005), the origins of this globalization of Spanish culture is based on the historical period between 1868-1939. This period, according to the authors, marked not only the beginning of the formation of a modern economy and the consolidation of the liberal state in Spain, but also the growth of some urban centers and spaces made possible by electricity, transportation, mass production and the emergence of an entertainment industry. These authors examine how mass print culture, early cinema, popular drama, photography, fashion, painting, museums and urban planning played a role in the way that Spanish society saw itself and was in turn seen by the rest of the world.

two perspectives together, the anthropology *and* the political economy of globalization (e.g. Freeman 2000).

Some have argued about the advancement of a post-fordist state when talking about the politics of labor market flexibility in Spain (Martinez Lucio and Blyton 1995). The transition from standardized, mass-production production to the logic of flexible specialization and differentiated production, based on smaller batches and competitiveness requirements has its impact on labor markets. In the case of Spain, the late economic developments described above (from the national plan of industrial re-conversion to the rise of Spanish multinational corporations) had a series of paradoxical manifestations in the sphere of labor. The celebrated modernization plan led by the Socialist government (called “industrial reconversion”) triggered a profound de-industrialization process based on the “rationalization” of companies. The effects of this major economic transformation flourished by the late eighties with an unemployment rate of 20% across the country, higher in some region, and much higher across the board for youth, and especially women. Prospects looked grim for an entire generation. Right after the ephemeral boom created by the expectations of entering the European market, the crisis of the early nineties hit, dashing many of those hopes.

During the late nineties, the epitome of the globalizing Spanish companies, while the unemployment rate had been significantly corrected, new labor patterns become increasingly dominant: diverse forms of functional, numerical, temporal and financial flexibility.¹⁹ These emergent labor patterns were more present in booming sectors such as domestic work, construction and services. These flexible labor forms are associated with a decrease in the quality

¹⁹ A brief description of this typology is found at Miguel Martinez Lucio and Paul Blyton 1995: 341.

of actual working conditions, ‘hire and fire policies’, a multiplication in the types of contracts, as well as variable pay structures. The increase of this type of employment –baptized as *precarious labor*– combines with years of salary stagnation, the skyrocketing of prices due to the entry into the euro-zone as well as speculation within the housing market. I identify two key historical moments where this flexible labor pattern is incorporated in Spain, concretely, two labor reforms popularly known as: A) the arrival of *garbage contracts* in 1984; and B) the legalization of *ETTs* (Temporary Work Agencies) in 1992.

A) The arrival of garbage contracts

The first labor reform in 1984 puts an end to full time, indefinite and permanent contracts (“trabajo fijo, a jornada completa y por tiempo indefinido”) as the generalized framework of labor relations. In contrast, this labor reform welcomed a great variety of atypical contracts: part-time, training and fixed-term contracts (“contratos a tiempo parcial, de formación y de duración determinada”). Today the latter have become the main mode of insertion into the labor market comprising the vast majority of new contracts. These and other mechanisms of labor market flexibilization brought along new kinds of labor relationships and conceptualizations of work. The measure was proposed by PSOE and supported by one of the main union centrals, UGT. In 1988, the Socialist government pretended to generalize this type of contract, (popularly known as “garbage contracts”), under the *Youth Employment Plan*, targeting especially young workers. However, this legal proposal was strongly contested. A general strike shook the country on December 14th, to the point that the law was not able to be approved. This massive mobilization showed the general discontent with the overall economic plan developed by the Felipe Gonzalez

administration. Despite this successful wake up call to the government, Gonzalez continued his process of economic modernization and more legal efforts at flexibilizing labor markets.

B) Legalizing Temporary Job Agencies

After another labor reform in 1992 cutting down unemployment benefits, in 1994 *Empresas de Trabajo Temporal (ETTS)* are declared legal in Spain. An ETT -Temporary Work Agencies- can be defined as a service firm that hires temporary workers and sends them out to do temporary work on the premises of and under the supervision of client firms solicited from the business world.²⁰ That is, their basic function consists of connecting labor demand and labor supply. However what makes the difference with respect to other labor market intermediaries (such as, for example, employment agencies) is the fact that workers contracted through ETT remain on the ETT payroll while under the direction of the client firm, giving way to a triangular relationship between the client firm, the worker and the ETT, breaking the traditional bilaterality of labor relationships.²¹ In a context of strong economic recession with the unemployment figure touching 25%, this labor reform would have direct consequences on already affected sectors of the population. On top of legalizing ETT's, the type of "garbage contracts" previously rejected in 1988 gained strength and significant presence in the labor market, affecting mostly youth and women. This reform was highly contested as well. However, despite another general strike –not as massive as the last one- the government achieved its purpose. Despite this open confrontation between unions and government, these episodes would mark the beginning of a weakening process of strong union contestation toward new rounds of labor reform.

²⁰ These are basically the same as Temp Work, Day Labor or Labor Pool agencies in the US (and in fact some of the actors in the Spanish labor market are global players well-known elsewhere such as ManPower).

²¹ Fernando Muñoz Bullón 2003 "The Economics of labor contracting through temporary help agencies" doctoral thesis, Universitat Pompeu Fabra. Unpublished manuscript, accessible at <http://www.dart-europe.eu/index.php/record/view/21461>

The shift experienced in both the framework of labor regulation and in labor conflictivity is quite drastic. Historically, Spain was known to have a strong workers' movement. In the midst of the international crisis of the 1970s the workers' movement nonetheless managed to continually raise salaries (often above the inflation rate) and dictate the "*Ley de Relaciones Laborales*" in 1976. The Labor Relations Legislation defended stable full employment in 1976. By 2008, and in the midst of a historic economic boom, Spain had become the country with the highest rates of temp work (around 30% of the total workforce) of all 27 member states of the EU (Massarelli 2009) and with very muted/limited labor unrest when compared to its own history. How to grasp such rapid transformations? Many activists working on precarity struggles do their own histories identifying key historical dates. They point to the process of massive industrial restructuring (known as *la reconversion*) started by the Socialist government in 1982. These were argued at the time as being necessary requirements for "modernization plans". This painful closing down of shipyards, mines, metallurgic industries, and other heavy industry is considered the epicenter to understand upcoming economic and labor changes. After such a deep restructuring, it was necessary to transform society in general, especially the labor relationships of the time. It was time to reform one of the most progressive labor laws in Europe (Sanchez 2006). El "Estatuto de los Trabajadores" -the main norm governing workers' rights in Spain- has suffered from continuous labor reforms for twenty years towards a significant redefinition of the juridical status of the worker (Sánchez 2006).

Nonetheless, the national economy around the year 2000 was said to be in excellent shape, this time under the new administration lead by the conservative party. The macro-economic data was surprisingly outstanding. Also, the unemployment rate dropped, maintaining

a high number of job offers, mainly sub-contracts in sectors such as construction and services.²² The first minister, Jose Maria Aznar, continuously used the expression “Spain is going well”, and business papers welcomed the “Spanish Economic Miracle”.

5.2. The Spanish Economic Miracle

“Take Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain, sometimes described as the PIGS. It is a pejorative moniker but one with much truth. Eight years ago, Pigs really did fly. Their economies soared after joining the eurozone. Interest rates fell to historical lows – and were often negative in real terms. A credit boom followed, just as night follows day. Wages rose, debt levels ballooned, as did house prices and consumption. Now the Pigs are falling back to earth” (“Pigs in Muck” in *Financial Times* August 31st, 2008).

This *Financial Times* article was promptly replied to in the same newspaper by the president of the Spanish Association of Communication Directors (Dircom), a professional body representing 500 senior communicators from Spain’s private and public sectors:

“Spain is the eighth-largest economy in the world and our country has led the longest growth period in recent times. Several Spanish companies have demonstrated their ability to adapt to the most competitive economies of the planet, such as the British economy – many of whose citizens, by the way, choose our country as the premier destination to enjoy retirement, restful holidays or lively weekends. I am sure they do not feel that, here on Spanish soil, they are “stuck in muck” (“Derogatory acronym is more than just a bad joke” in *Financial Times* September 5, 2008).

This Spanish businessman was clearly upset at the term ‘pigs’ to describe Spanish economy. His arguments about the success of the Spanish economy worldwide are familiar sound bites appearing both in mainstream media and academic publications on the Spanish economic miracle. Where is the necessary data to back up a claim such as Spain being the 8th

²² It is only now with the financial crisis that even those are starting to shrink as well.

largest economy in the world? Under which criteria and measurements can such a claim be sustained?

5.2.1. Spain: the 8th Largest Economy in the World?

Macroeconomic indicators were signaling the arrival of a dynamic and powerful economic player on the European and global stage. In numbers, the level of economic growth during the last years was around 4% to the envy of other Western European counterparts such as Germany or France (OECD 2009; EUbusiness 2007), and Spanish companies (such as Repsol, Telefonica or BSCH) become big global players, fusing with and gobbling up many other enterprises all over the world. These companies were in fact often referred to as ‘campeones nacionales’ (national champions) or as ‘nuevos conquistadores’ (new conquistadors).

Other economic signals though pointed far from that successful picture. The everyday life of many Spaniards was determined by a series of economic hits: banks ready to offer loans, but at a 25% interest rate; the freezing of salary raises²³; housing prices rocketing sky-high as well as significant price rises of all goods²⁴ since the entrance of the Euro. This is how Fernando Berrendero, a critical journalist, explains the paradoxical situation: “Our growth model is based on low salaries and high prices. This has allowed companies to obtain big profits, which are translated into an increase of the GDP” (2007)

²³ According to the Indicador Laboral de Comunidades Autónomas (Regional Labor Indicator) IESE-Adecco, the average salary remains at the “same level that it had in 1997” . Consequently, as businesses obtained record numbers, “over the last nine years, Spaniards have not enjoyed a general improvement in their purchasing power”.

²⁴ Just during our fieldwork time, we noticed el aumento de precios de los servicios básicos. A comienzos de 2007 la mayoría de ellos subía por encima de la inflación. La luz se encareció un 2,8% para usuarios domésticos. La cuota de abono mensual a Telefónica, un 2%. Para estrenar el año Renfe también hacía subir los servicios de cercanías un 3,7% a partir del 1 de enero. Y la vivienda es capítulo aparte. En 2007 aumentó su precio en un 7,2%, aunque el Ministerio de María Antonia Trujillo lo ha mostrado como una buena noticia : no deja de ser la menor subida desde 1998.

The Gross National Product, the statistic used by analysts to measure the goods and services produced in a country, has not ceased to grow over the past five years. But according to the Confederation of Consumers and Users, 55% of the population confesses finding it difficult to break even at the end of the month. In addition over the past several years the margin of family savings has continually decreased. More than 60% of households “cannot save anything” (CECU 2008). At the same time, according to *Forbes Magazine*, Spain is part of the list of countries with higher numbers of rich people. However, jobs created in recent years have been largely temporary and increasingly lacking protections normal only a decade ago, the acquisitive power of salaries has gone down to its lowest level in ten years and most of the home-owning population is chained to a life-long mortgage in a country with a dismally small rental market:

“In this manner, while the Spanish state is situated in fifth place in Europe in regards to its GNP, its population is number 13 amongst EU members in what refers to purchasing power. And the Spanish economy is situated third in “largest income gap”, an indicator calculated by dividing the number of times that the wealth of the richest 20% of the population supersedes that of the poorest 20%. Concretely in the Spanish case that difference is 5.5%: the distance that mediates between the who are fascinated by Spanish growth and those who have to fight, on a daily basis, the temptation to give in to the torrent of advertising for easy credit that grows in lockstep with household debt (De Lucas 2007).²⁵

Despite such disparate data, this is how Zapatero, president of the government, defined 2006 in his report before the major shareholders and investors in the Madrid stock market: “the best economic year of the democratic period”. However, some question if this miracle remains enclosed behind the stock market’s doors (De Lucas 2007). Based on those successful macro-economic indicators, some want Spain to have a major role not only in the international

²⁵ Some of the main economic sectors responsible for the Spanish boom, such as construction, banking and media, show this growing disparity: the historical benefits of the companies and the growing salaries of managers and executives on the one hand; and most of the of employees losing acquisitive power and labor protections on the other hand. See <http://www.diagonalperiodico.net/spip.php?article3925>

conversations about the current financial crisis (e.g. as the media showed during the G-20 meeting in late 2008), but also become part of the G-8 (Borger 2009).

5.2.2. Miracle or Curse? Early Discontents

How are these transformations being lived in different way? Are there any discontents? What are the critical expressions responding to the negative consequences of some of these transformations? What are the arguments, strategies and tactics being used in order to deal with this new order of things? The Spanish economic miracle could be seen as the most celebratory instance –at least in the official discourse- in the chain of profound economic and political changes taking place in Spain since the end of Franco’s regime back in the late seventies. However, from early on, a series of discontents have diversely responded to some of the social consequences of those changes, especially those in the labor terrain.

After the general euphoria of the democratic transition, certain critical voices expressed their disappointment with the ongoing political-economic scenario. Many PSOE followers abandoned the party’s ranks after the government’s engagement with NATO as well as the new economic reforms aimed towards increased privatization and less market regulation and oversight. One of the most interesting critical voices at the time was a popular children’s TV program. *La Bola de Cristal* (the “Crystal Ball”) was emitted every Saturday morning from 1984 to 1988. It was a cutting-edge childrens’ program and a barometer of the socio-political climate of a society in transformation. It is a Walt Disney kind of icon for those of us who were children at that time. One of the most popular sections of the program was the *Electroduendes* (“Electro-dwarfs”). These electro-dwarfs developed fun yet stinging critiques towards the government, capitalism, war, terrorism, etc., targeting the presidents of the time, mainly Felipe Gonzalez,

Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. According to the screen-writer of “Electroduendes”, he wanted the program to be a series of “fables of satiric Marxism for kids” (Alba Rico 1992). This program is currently acknowledged as one of the precursors in coining and critiquing the question of precarity. One of the characters, a mean but fun witch -*Bruja Averia*-, represented the best of capitalism, the wonders of bureaucracy and the nice face of the state. *Bruja Averia* destroyed inoffensive little beings –precarious workers, unemployed, poor mums, etc...- all the while screaming her famous saying: *Viva el mal, Viva el capital, Viva la precariedad laboral!* (*Long live evil, capital and precarious labor!*)



Image 5.1. *Bruja averia*, main character of the popular children’s TV program *Bola de Cristal* (1984-1988)

This popular children’s TV program truly acted as a critical analyst of early Spanish Democracy. The speeches by *Bruja Averia* were indeed an early expression of social discontent within the-context, introducing the term precarity and making an impact on a broad audience, especially little ones. Many of those have now become the activists working on precarity struggles, make references to *Bruja Averia* and these eccentric figures in some of current

examples of political propaganda. This early use of precarity in a children's TV program explains the familiarity with the term, if not the concept itself, among Spanish society. In fact, the adjective *precario* has become a term of everyday use to refer to certain kind of labor contracts, workplaces, or even rent contracts.

5.2.3. The Politicization of Flexibility: Social Actors in Dispute

Regulation theorists call attention to the important role of the political in the processes of economic transformation, mainly state politics (Aglietta 1979). Some regulationists have called not only to appreciate the politics of state intervention and its role in conditioning labor market developments, rather, they also pointed to the necessary analytical emphasis on how structural relations are mediated in and through the strategic conduct and routine activities of other social forces (Jessop 1990). In the case of Spain, social actors in resistance must be taken into account in order to understand the current development of labor policies:

The fact that state intervention has to be constantly structured and restructured through politically relevant discourses, with this restructuring emerging from the way state intervention can be refereed to and rearticulated by *social actors*, gives rise to the argument that regulation is problematic, involving constant political 'negotiation' (Martinez and Blyton 1995: 245)

The landing of labor market flexibility in Spain has been an arduous and contested process. One of the main mechanisms used by the state is the legal device of labor reforms. A series of major changes in labor legislation have been able to fracture the previous social contract on labor organization and labor rights. The numerous labor reforms passed after the democratic transition in Spain have been normally discussed and approved by three counterparts: government representatives, national employers associations and the main unions' presidents. This was the format initially stipulated during the later years of Franco (*Ley de Convenios Colectivos*) in 1958 and more developed during the historical agreement *Pactos de la Moncloa*

(October 1977). In the reconciliatory and stabilizing spirit proper of the Transition time, it was important to change the contentious union organizing model towards one more willing to negotiate, based on unions delegates and bureaucratized union structures. According to some, this change was needed in order to please all social parts in the delicate process towards democracy, but also to control the belligerent and successful workers' movement at the time. This is a movement that operated outside most union or party structures, often referred to as the years of worker autonomy (Quintana 2002).

Labor regulation under Franco plays then an important role in the intricacies of the Spanish labor market. The overall thrust of the dictatorship with regards to worker organization from 1939 to 1975 was the subduing of labor representation and the denial of independent institutional relationships at work. According to Bengoechea, these state interventions, such as the establishment of a set of 'worker guarantees', created 1) a tradition of relying on the state to solve industrial problems; 2) a protectionist attitude towards individual workers rights in order to avert industrial conflict; and subsequently, 3) an extensive degree of rigidity in the labor market (1987). The role of labor reforms towards flexibility has been framed by some social actors as a corrective to this interventionist and paternalistic labor regime in order to achieve a more efficient one (Martinez Lucio and Blyton 1995). Voices from governmental positions as well as employers associations articulated this passage as a historical necessity for the development of the country based on the premise that labor market flexibility would help the viability of the national economy as a whole, would promote national companies' competitiveness and would facilitate the achievement of the economic indicators stipulated by the EU in terms of growth, zero deficit, or efficient job markets. Also, the large trade unions wanted to undermine the

previous totalizing regulatory role of the state, especially since this was detrimental to independent collective labor representation. However, unions did not totally agree with the premise that flexibility was the path towards total efficiency for all actors involved. Some of the union discontents were expressed in 24 hour general stoppages, starting with a spectacular one in 1988 against the entrance of youth temporary contracts. Increasingly, the recurring theme in employer discourse emphasizing a common problem- that is, the rigidity of Spanish labor markets- has contributed to the ideological re-articulation of unions' discourses. This shows the degree of politicization of the debate on labor market reforms throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s (Martinez Lucio and Blyton 1995).

Unions (in particular the two large trade union centrals) had a key role in the transition process, seen as the cornerstone of democratization. The government was interested in unions' participation in political debates as a strategy for coping with social conflict and generating consensus. Also, the unions initially supported concertation (a neo-corporatist process of negotiation and agreement between government, employers and unions), as a means for consolidating representative democracy, and legitimizing themselves as actors within the new regime. However, around the mid eighties, the unions' negotiating power was severely reduced. On the one hand, due to employers' lack of commitment to concertation. On the other hand, due to the new orientations of the PSOE government towards a Thatcherite economic and monetary discipline where concertation had no place, especially in the context of a deepening recession (Martinez Lucio and Blyton 1995: 356, 357). The general role of the main trade unions since the late 1980s has been read by some as one of *inability* to systematically alter or oppose the developments in labor market deregulation; or as other interpretations goes, as one of total

submission to other social actors' arguments, completely abandoning the politics of confrontation. The first reading, from a more institutional view of politics, is nostalgic for a corporatist and strategic location of the unions within the state. The second reading, from a more autonomous understanding of politics, wants unions to be independent from formal institutional structures because of its restricting consequences in workers' organizing power. In either of those readings, unions are seen as conceding to measures such as the stagnation of workers salaries, as well as the spread of temporary employment contracts, contributing to the generalization of temporary, part-time and training contracts as the main source for new employment. Despite some recent iconic moments of general strikes, the two central union federations have lost their legitimacy as representatives of workers' interests to many.

5.2.4. Fractured Resistance: The Residual and the Emergent

In this context of lost of legitimacy, another labor reform is passed in 2002 that reinforced some of the previous mechanisms of labor market flexibility via an increase in the types of contracts with less labor protections, an easing of the process of firing, and making the unemployment subsidy more inaccessible among other measures (FID 2001). Unlike the labor reforms of the 1990's that were not able to produce notable contestation, this time a series of factors coalesced to generate different responses: its attacks on labor rights, justified as necessary to match reforms stipulated by the EU; but also because it was not decided upon in the traditional corporatist triangle. This time it was declared by Aznar's executive government through 'decretazo' (translated roughly as 'super-decree'), without the expected collective negotiations. Here, two different sets of actors and modes of response are introduced in the context of this labor reform passed in 2002, with the goal of evoking how traditional and novel social

movements are dealing with the changing situation. While *precarity* will pop up in many of the responses, it is important to note the different conceptual approaches and repertoires among for example, historical actors such the trade unions on the one hand, and the growing unconventional constellation of precarity struggles on the other. In response to that labor reform then, the main unions responded with a forceful call for a General Strike, which would coincide with the end of the Spanish presidency of the EU, and concretely on the day before the key meeting of the European Council in Sevilla. One of the main trade unions' manifesto entitled "Employment and Social Protection are your rights, don't let them to take them away from you!" (UGT 2002) shows the traditional unions' demands for a situation of full-time, life-long and highly protected employment as well as a return to a solid welfare state regime. The term *precarious* was used once to name the type of contract that the government was pushing for.²⁶

However, a historical tactic of the workers' movement such as the 24h general stoppage, and the familiar discourse about the return to welfare state, did not resonate with much of the population. Instead, in response to the increasing labor market flexibility in Spain, a series of atypical workers –from subcontracted architects to babysitters– engaged the concept of precarity in order to understand their individual situations collectively. The sprouting uses of precarity went beyond the critique of particular types of labor contracts towards a broader understanding of labor transformations, as chapter 6 further explores. These actors identified something different about the current situation that made the central unions' demands less viable and less relevant. The unions' analyses seemed obsolete to many, as unable to respond to a radically different conjuncture. Thus unions' historical strategies were deemed as less useful, as lacking in

²⁶ <http://www.ugt.es/huelga/manifiesto.htm>

their capacity to produce significant impacts. Rather than resisting the transformations, these *emergent* actors critically embraced the challenging circumstances, identifying themselves with the context –claiming themselves as flexible workers. The goal then being to improve or demolish the new regime from within, first understanding the situation and then intervening with appropriate strategies. Thus during the day of the general strike, many of these atypical workers did not join the stoppage in the conventional fashion, just because the characteristics of their type of contract, quality of labor and uniqueness of the workspace did not allow them to do so in an effective or representative way. This is the case of a heterogeneous group of women --domestic workers, free lance journalists, translators, waiters, call center workers, who decided to launch a picket survey on that very day, giving birth to the activist research project *Precarias a la Deriva*. The fracture among actors in resistance was inevitably increasing. Some describe these two responses as one representing the ‘residual’ and the other, the ‘emergent’, following Raymond Williams conceptualization of the diversity of engagements with a given context (De Rota 2008b) ²⁷

5.3. The European Union aDrift

“Ya somos Europeos!” (We are finally Europeans!) Ever since I was a child, this is how TV commercials, newspapers, and popular lingo reminded us of Spain’s new status as an EU member. The mantra that Spaniards have to *become European* is still everywhere, from major policy changes to tiny instances of everyday life.²⁸

²⁷ This Spanish anthropologist makes use of Raymond Williams’s notions on the residual and emergent to think through contemporary social movements in Europe. Presentation at *Workshop on Anthropology of Collective Action* held in A Coruna, December 14-17, 2008.

²⁸ For instance, the non-siesta rules by companies heavily engaged in European and global markets. In these cases, employees are asked or required to replace the traditional siesta with what is called an “horario europeo” (a European schedule) in order to adapt to office and market hours across the continent

5.3.1. Spain: from Africa to Fortress and Sustainable Europe

Spain joined the European Community in 1986, soon after the political transition that put a legal end to almost forty years of Franco's dictatorship. Since then, the popular saying of 'Africa starts in the Pyrenees' has been challenged as the country constantly tries to become as "European" as its northern neighbors. A Europeanizing Spain has been celebrated without significant questioning, except for a few instances, when entering the 'European' bloc implied certain controversial moves, such as joining NATO or implementing agricultural policies that harmed local production systems. Despite massive protests and widespread contestation around those particular issues –anti-NATO pacifist movements and farmers' drastic mobilizations trashing fresh produce and blocking the French border- the general consensus during these years of EU membership has been one of approval towards the discourse of 'becoming European'. Spain recently said YES to the European Constitution in striking contrast with its rejection by two core European countries. The ratification of the European constitution project by referendum, yet marked by high abstention rates and accompanied by a remarkable lack of debate on the issue, symbolized this general sense of approval -but also apathy- about the idea of belonging to this particular Europe.

However, there are increasing critiques to the current development of the EU and its effects at the national, regional and local levels. Besides the workers' responses to many of the labor policies it promoted by EU policy convergence, there is attention to the humanitarian effects of the racialized and colonial aspects of the EU's foreign policies. The Spanish southern border was mostly absent from political attention not so long ago. As recently as the late 1980's, the Spanish border with Morocco was relatively open, the only requirement being valid ID and

the ability to afford the ferry ticket (Cobarrubias 2009; Ferrer-Gallardo 2008). Nowadays, what it is at stake is the rampant militarization of the Straits of Gibraltar and the ‘politics of death’ (through electrified razor-wire, paramilitary police forces, and motion-detection systems) surrounding this geographical point of contact between the two continents. Spain thus becomes one of the main guardians of what has been critically termed “Fortress Europe”, the Spanish government vigorously enacting such a mission.²⁹

Another acute critique towards EU policies is focused on the reforms of higher education. The Bologna Treaty of 1999 designed a European Space of Higher Education with a sharable credit system and easy compatibility of degrees. The ultimate goal was to promote the mobility and the employability of European citizens. For Spain this implied a profound restructuring of the previous undergraduate and graduate system as well as a transition from static internal bureaucracies towards a more fluid structure. Those changes were welcomed as positive by many who suffered from the vicious of a very enclosed system, however the market-oriented vision of the university and its consequences³⁰, is currently the source of public debate and numerous university protests (Moreno 2009).

The EU though is not only object of criticism by progressive movements, but also a space to be taken advantage of. For many groups, the EU has opened new possibilities for efficient political strategies. For instance, the EU has made the environment into an object of legislation and governmental attention. Using institutions such as the European Court of Justice or the European Court of Human Rights to deal with environmental questions has become a great

²⁹ For specifics on the growing movement against European migration policies see chapter 7.

³⁰ For example, one of the consequences of reforming the national university system under the criteria of Bologna implies offering disciplines with a high probability of employment. In this context some universities are contemplating the disappearance of degrees in Philosophy, Art History and Anthropology.

platform to strengthen ecological struggles locally.³¹ The EU has furthermore supported a variety of environmental standards conflicting in many instances with national and local authorities.³² Also, the EU's explicit positioning and numerous laws on-food quality as well as sustainable energies has definitely had a "greening" impact on many European landscapes, through think tanks such as "Sustainable Europe" and interlocutors such Joan Martinez Alier, Alain Lipietz, Josefina Fraile and Wolfgang Sachs. Some of these intellectuals are both active in environmental grassroots struggles and holders of EU positions, mainly through the European Green Party. One could argue that countries like Spain, both in terms of social movement activity as well as government policy, has become more environmentally conscious thanks to the EU legislation and Northern European pro-ecology practices. Spain is now thoroughly equipped with recycling infrastructures and has one of the highest public investment allocations in sustainable energies – especially wind and solar production- among EU members. The rise of organic agriculture and "pueblos ecologicos" (ecological towns)³³ also speaks to this increasing greening effect. However, the EU also harbors sharp ecological contradictions shyly or fiercely contested by those affected locally. While there is a green face for issues such as recycling, there is no compassion towards entire regions that through top-down decision making are designed to act as dumping areas of dangerous toxics. Among long-term local ecologists there is actually notable skepticism about the politics of sustainability by the EU.³⁴

³¹ This is the case of local initiatives at sustainable energy projects such as "La Serna Solar" or instances of place-based movements against dumping industries such as Dueñas. These two cases are based in my home province, Palencia.

³² This is the case of the polemical Tránsito del Ebro.

³³ Amayuelas de Abajo is one of the most referential cases: see *The Ecologist* XXX2005

³⁴ This is the case of groups such as *Ecologistas en Acción* or eco-journalists such as Flaviano Casas and Ramon Fernandez-Duran.

5.3.2. *Is the EU a Free Trade Agreement? Basics on European Market Integration*

During one of the warmest nights of our last summer in Madrid, we were having a conversation at a bar with some old friends from high school. One of them posed the following innocent yet profound question: “knowing about NAFTA and its effects, I wonder if the EU is actually an FTA?”

The perception of Europe as mainly an economic project, and of a certain kind of economy (usually associated with a narrow understanding of a free market model), is quite common in Spain. Why is that the case? The EU is a broad and multi-layered project, including different forms of integration, although some of them are indeed more prominent than others. Despite all the spheres of policy making and implementation, the creation of an internal market is nevertheless the EU’s main development and asset so far. Jorge Monnet, declared as one of the ideological founders of the European Union, did state that the main need for European countries was economic integration:

“There will be no peace in Europe if the States rebuild themselves on the basis of national sovereignty, with its implications of prestige politics and economic protection (...). The countries of Europe are not strong enough individually to be able to guarantee prosperity and social development for their peoples. The States of Europe must therefore form a federation or a European entity that would make them into a common economic unit. (...) They must have larger markets. Their prosperity is impossible, unless the States of Europe form themselves in a European Federation. (...). Via money Europe could become political in five years (...) the current communities should be completed by a Finance Common Market which would lead us to European economic unity (Monnet 1943).³⁵

By looking at some of the treaties and general policies it is possible to identify a strong interest in economic integration itself. Since the *Single European Act* signed in 1986, the focus was on creating a common market –the European Economic Community as an area without obstacles to free movement of goods, people, services and capital. There have been additional

³⁵ The history of the European Union and the European Citizenship. By Jean Monnet Association, in *Historia del Siglo XX*.

concrete policies towards economic integration: dropping tariffs within internal borders; bringing along a common monetary unit –the Euro- as the general exchange currency among member states; facilitating the free movement or relocation of companies; and stipulating equal treatment, or national treatment, for firms from other parts of the EU. While not all these measures must necessarily fall under the category of “free trade agreement”, there is actually a strong similarity, making our friend’s innocent remark a relevant point of departure for a less mystified analysis of the EU. Instead of drawing a linear portrait of the EU as a smooth process of socio-cultural, political and economic integration, a more meticulous analysis is needed, looking at concrete policies, actual mechanisms of implementation, influential although unknown decision making actors, global pressures and discourses, inter-state conflicts and civil unrest. The growing field of Anthropology of the European Union is trying to face these kinds of methodological challenges: “how do we go about studying something that is both an organization and an idea with uncertain and contested connotations?” (Borgstrom 2002: 1231). According to Borgstrom, institutional analysis and anthropology of the state are appropriate, while he is aware that too much stress on institutions and structures might hide relevant processes.³⁶

It has to be clear then, that the EU does not only comprise economic integration, building up towards the constitution of a global trading bloc. Rather it is to be analyzed as an emergent and multifaceted entity. Through the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) by modifying the previous treaties -Paris, Rome and the Single European Act-, the initial economic objectives of the Community, building a common market, were outstripped and, for the first time, a distinctive vocation of political union was claimed. Other spheres of integration were included such as

³⁶ There is indeed a growing body of anthropological studies of the EU reviewed in the next section addressing these aspects of the EU.

developing a *Common Foreign and Security Policy* (CFSP) and police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters among state members. Other examples of this ‘beyond the market’ integration include: the development of coordinated border and migration policies and the creation of the FRONTEX agency to facilitate multi-state border controls; the creation of EUROPOL; the EDA (European Defense Agency) and increasing cooperation between European militaries in questions such as arms development (the famous ‘euro-fighter’), or joint missions (such as those of 2008 in Chad and Somalia); and the European Court of Justice (one of the main and only ways that citizens of member states can leverage the EU to challenge rights abuses in their home countries). Also, it is important not to take institution building and policy development for granted, but rather look at the processes and the different and unexpected actors involved. For example, how do those general EU economic guidelines we just reviewed begin to ‘trickle-down’ and function at the national level? How is the process of decision-making carried out and how do policies become implemented?

Official decision making bodies at the EU level –especially the European Commission and the COREPER (Committee of Permanent Representative to the Council of Ministers)- are often in charge of drafting or even enacting (oversight by the European Parliament or European Court of Justice is still a work in progress) future Union-wide legislation, requirements (i.e. for new members), and regulations. This process of drafting is often strongly informed by unofficial research groups and think-tanks (such as the Stockholm Network) and influenced by increasingly powerful lobbies such as the *Eurochambres*, *Business Europe*, and the European RoundTable of Industrialists-*ERT* (Coen 2007; Pickles 2006; Balanya et al 2002).³⁷ These groups develop a

³⁷ Journal issue all related to lobbying at the EU level: “Empirical and Theoretical Studies in EU Lobbying” (Guest editor: David Coen) in *Journal of European Public Policy*, Volume 14 No. 3 2007

series of reports and proposals, many of which directly inform the debates of the EC and COREPER or become initial drafts for legislation themselves. They can thus find their way to eventually become one of the many EU ‘directives’. Most directives are mainly suggestive; technically speaking they are not legally binding.

Yet, these directives enact certain pressure on governments to adapt national legislations by acting as benchmarks or paradigms for national legislation on certain topics. Other types of legislation decided in this manner do involve sanctions, like the infamous *Stability Pact*.³⁸ Having this background on decision making at the EU level, let’s briefly focus on the question of labor legislation and how it trickled down to the concrete case of Spanish labor markets.

Flexibilization and the European Union

Among the significant socio-economic transformations configuring the EU, the changing labor regime is an important one for policy, academic debates as well as for the activist organizations under study. The large scale economic shifts under the new EU institutional arrangement have tended to move away from the national welfare-state democracies that characterized an idealized European political economy for much of the post-war era. This move had produced significant effects in the sphere of employment. The 1980’s, and the acceleration of EU construction, saw the beginnings of delocalization and deindustrialization of manufacturing in many countries.³⁹ Guaranteed employment no longer seemed certain, and by the early nineties chronic high unemployment was costing politicians their support. For example,

³⁸ This agreement requires that the fiscal expenditure of member states does not exceed 3% of the GDP. This pact though is enforced often according to political and economic weight of a member state, thus showing how dynamics of center-periphery operate within the EU itself, not only vis-à-vis non-members or former colonies (Duran 2005).

³⁹ This process continues to a large degree today and at a rapid pace, to the point that a research group called the European Restructuring Monitor has been formed. The ERM reports on more than ten cases of company restructuring (that can entail downsizing and delocalization of production as well as job creation) in a normal week.

during the year 1994 unemployment in Spain reached 19-20% of the labor force and in many countries it passed 10%: in Finland 16%; in Ireland 14%; in France 11-12%; and in Italy 11% (EurLIFE database). Important and militant movements of the unemployed began to emerge in several countries. These began to network at the European level as the “European Marches against Precarity and Unemployment”. Labor market reforms followed in many countries entailing large changes to how employees could be hired or fired, what counted as a legal contract, rights to collective bargaining, and unemployment insurance. The main goal of these reforms was to *flexibilize* the labor market to adjust to a new economic model. Labor policy reform in this regard has occurred at the level of the EU as a whole often by elaborating reports and providing the parameters for individual nation-states through instruments like the GOPE’s (Grandes Orientaciones de Politica Economica, or General Economic Policy Guidelines). Some of the key EU institutional moments with regards to labor policy are the *Lisbon Agenda* (2000), *The Sapir Report* (2004) and the *Bolkestein Directive* (2006).

The *Lisbon Agenda*, also known as the Lisbon Strategy or Process, is an action and development plan for the European Union. Its aim is to make the EU "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010". It was set out by the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000. Key concepts of the Lisbon

Strategy include those of the Knowledge Economy, Innovation, Techno-Economic Paradigms, Technology Governance.⁴⁰

The *Sapir Report* stated that in order to successfully face the challenges brought about by globalization, the EU needed to “profoundly reform” its labor markets and social model, especially those continental and Mediterranean countries, which are the most “inefficient and less adapted –underdeveloped- to compete at the global scale” (Duran 2005). The Anglo-Saxon and Nordic social and labor models are in contrast the most flexible ones and better adapted to take advantages of the opportunities opened by globalization, although they have to continue deepening their respective structural reforms (Duran 2005). Labor reform is then considered and advised by the EU as the *sine qua non* condition to reinvigorate growth and accumulation. Within this framework, the *Bolkestein Directive* focused on the liberalization of the service sectors. It was based on the ‘principle of the country of origin’ by which the freedom of a company operating within any member state of the EU would only be subject to the labor legislations of its country of origin. This measure caused a lot of controversy because its introduction could cause ‘social dumping’, meaning, supporting the reduction of social protections, labor rights and retributive levels in the rest of the countries. The foreseen dynamic, already happening in some cases, was transmitted by the media icon of the “Polish Plumber”. Especially in France, the fear was that many Polish companies entering with less labor protections and salary stipulations under recently reformed Polish law (made to adjust to EU

⁴⁰ “In this regard, the matrix university-firm-intellectual property protection becomes central, as does the reorientation of public spending, by the state and the EC, towards these objectives and the creation of large infrastructures (transport, energy, telecommunications). It is central, they say, to obtain universities that can compete with the USA, and to obtain not only businesses and a workforce that are qualified and competitive but that the territory itself also be qualified and competitive. In this new global scenario, it is argued that emerging economies will need European technology, goods and services especially those emerging from the so-called *new economy*. Thus, flexibility (one of the magic words) is needed in order to bet on the future.” (Garcia Maurino 2006)

requirements before accession), would prompt new waves of workers to unfairly compete with local workers and lower labor and environmental standards.⁴¹ The whole *Bolkestein directive* has provoked so much debate and criticism from social movements in Europe and EU parliamentarians that the process of ratification was interrupted several times (Duran 2006; Cassen 2005). This directive, key to developing the Lisbon Agenda, was criticized as one more signal of the overall process of ‘European neoliberal drifting’ (Duran 2006).⁴² How does this process take shape in the particular case of Spain?

European Economic Policies & Spanish Labor Reforms

Many of the contested labor reforms in Spain were explained by the Spanish government as mechanisms to achieve the same level of modernization associated to central and northern European countries. However, this pressure of being like the ‘big brothers’ was also stimulated by certain EU directives. As a way to coordinate a general economic framework for the smooth functioning of the Economic and Monetary Union and to facilitate convergence in economic policy among member states, the European Council has been adopting General Economic Policy Guidelines (Grandes Orientaciones de Política Económica GOPEs) since 1993. These orientations are not legally binding policies, since there are no sanctioning mechanisms (officially) in place. The compliance is voluntary and is based on parity and peer pressure. These

⁴¹ “The voracity on the part of some Eastern European countries to liberalize their services, instead of socially protecting their workers and even compatriot emigrants, left unprotected thanks to lax social and fiscal legislation, negatively impacts the entire European working class. It is furthermore worrisome that those governments will continue asking for more aggressive deregulations that will only favor multinationals in the medium-term. . “Lavado de cara de la Directiva Bolkestein en el Parlamento Europeo”. From Attac espana. Accessed at http://www.attac.es/portaattac/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=66&Itemid=46

⁴² As part of this overall process of flexibilizing and de-bureaucratizing the EU, there has been intense debate about the upcoming directive of the 65 hour work week. The achievement of the 40 hours work week won by historical workers’ movements is slowly disappearing, as well as the 35 hours work week demanded by more recent movements, that gained strength at one point in France and Germany among other places. Finally, parallel to labor reforms there is the privatization process of public companies and public services with its concomitant effects on labor.

policies of economic coordination includes a broad spectrum of political, monetary and fiscal actors as well as a great range of methods including: information exchange, political dialogue and debate, *paritarian* review, informal decision making and collective agreements. With the exception of binding norms, such as the deficit norm or the Stability Pact, the macroeconomic coordination within the EU is said to be mostly based on consensus.

Most of these norms are stipulated by the European Council, which brings up the problem of transparency and the lack of participation in the decision making process about economic coordination and employment policy both at the national and European level. Many have criticized the absence of other social actors, such as national parliaments and the European Parliament itself in both the adoption of the general orientations as well as in the yearly evaluations of those implementations in each of the member states.⁴³ The European Council then is in a privileged position in the process of coordinating the economic policy of the UE. It provides very concrete guidelines, adapted to each member state and oriented towards improving growth and generating employment. Both goals are oriented towards enacting the visions within the Lisbon Plan. These goals translate into an EU employment policy based mostly on labor flexibilization, in contrast with the inherited labor structures of the welfare state model achieved in different European countries. The IMF managing director during 2004-2007, Rodrigo Rato (ex-minister of the Economy of the conservative party in Spain), reinforced that line of policy: “labor market liberalization, through a profound labor reform, is a necessary step to generate employment in Europe”.⁴⁴

⁴³ “Coordinacion economica en Europa” document by the European Socialist Party, accessed at <http://www.socialistgroup.eu/gpes/policydetail.do?lg=es&id=410>

⁴⁴ “Rato defiende una reforma laboral para la Unión Europea”, in *Periodico La Voz de Asturias*, accessed at <http://www.lavozdeasturias.es/noticias/noticia.asp?pkid=140430>

Within this framework, in the last pack of orientations focused on employment, the EU urges Spain to reform the labor market in order to increase productivity, stating in 2005 that labor flexibilization in Spain was still very limited.⁴⁵ In contrast with that diagnosis though, Spain in fact holds the highest proportion of workers under temporary and part-time contracts in the European Union (Massarelli 2009; Sanz 2008). Are there other readings of the current developments of the EU and in particular of its flexibilization policies?

5.3.3. Europe as an Anthropological Object

The field of Anthropology has also been paying careful attention to the latest developments of the EU. After a mostly political economic reading of the EU, this last part re-situates the question of Europe as a cultural construction. The previous section lays out some of the historical specificities of the EU project via the Spanish case. This one offers a brief literature review of current anthropological studies of Europe, with the goal of further contextualizing social movements' current developments. This engagement brings the question of Europe as an anthropological object to the fore. The challenging historical relationship between the discipline of Anthropology and Europe as an object of inquiry, speaks to the prevalent notion of Europe as the universal center of thought, as Chakrabarty reminds us:

The phenomenon of 'political modernity' –namely, the role by modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise- is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even the theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignty, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burn of European thought and history...These concepts entail an

⁴⁵ *Cinco Dias* news journal, January 28, 2005

unavoidable –and in a sense indispensable- universal and secular vision of the human...[which] has been powerful in its effects. (Chakrabarty 2000: 4)

If European intellectual traditions are indispensable for thought to occur, what would it mean to make Europe into the ethnographer's fieldsite and rejecting the idea of Europe as the unquestionable library, origin of abstract and generalizable knowledge? This putting of *Europe* upside down might be one of the main contributions of the field of Anthropology of Europe. This section reviews some of the early disciplinary approaches, but mainly the contemporary literature focused on the institution of the EU as such.

Within this literature there is an explicit concern about de-veiling the homogenous gloss of the EU, and identifying what particular model of development is being put forward including the multiple contestations it has provoked. This dissertation addresses the transformations of a globalizing Europe. As such, it is important to recall the troubled relation of the discipline of Anthropology towards Europe. Being the discipline's place of origin, 'European thought' –from Freud to Marx to Foucault- has provided the theoretical apparatus for the discipline. The explanatory power of these authors would be used to interpret any given reality, including those that are distant. Nevertheless, for a long time, the discipline avoided making the 'European' into a very object of study. There was no need to study the mechanisms behind the notion of *Europe*. Rather, the goal was to focus on the "savage's lot" (Trouillot 2003), leaving Europe as the unquestionable source of knowledge and morality. However, anthropology has been deeply influenced by the late twentieth-century philosophical endeavors at deconstructing Europe as the mother of universal thought and universal values such as democracy and human rights. Deconstructivist and also Post-Colonial approaches have contributed largely to this critique (Amselle 2006). This speaks directly to anthropological as well as geographical debates which

attempt to decolonize Europe as a cultural construction able to claim the universality of particular traditions, histories and geographies (Wolf 1982; Pickles 2005).

The radical action of bringing home the methods and research tools reserved for “primitive” societies started by looking for the exotic in small and marginal communities in Europe -such as the gypsies, rural peasants, ethnic minorities- within Europe. Despite multiple studies about these different communities in Europe, it was not until recently that a field specifically on ‘Europe’ as a socio-political region was formed in the discipline. This is the turn from ‘Anthropology *within* Europe’ towards ‘Anthropology *of* Europe’ (Goddard, Llobera and Shore 1996). These authors provide a very comprehensive introduction to both anthropological studies in and of Europe.⁴⁶ According to them, the appearance of ‘Europe’ as an object of study in Anthropology was due to both political and theoretical/methodological changes since the 70s. Some literature focuses on the nation-state based disciplinary trajectories in Europe, conducting a kind of anthropology of European anthropologies, signaling how ‘domestic questions’ become relevant and contested objects of study (Narotsky 2006; Berglund 2006; Archetti 2006).

Deconstructing the Gloss of the European Union

Yet there is actually a growing field of Anthropology of the European Union *per se*. Within the ‘studying up approach’ or ‘institutional anthropology’ there is an increasing focus on the bureaucracies and policies that make up the EU. The general scholarship on the EU has for a long time marginalized culture and identity as factors in their analytical portraits of the construction of the EU. However, the processes of ‘Europe-building’ (the term normally used to

⁴⁶ For the sake of this work I am not entering on the older “classical” or “ethnological” tradition, which in a way was a tradition of studying “internal others” within Europe. Each country had one variation of such tradition, often times mixed in with folklore. Also, I am not reviewing the budding anthropology of eastern Europe, especially that of “post-socialism.” My focus is on the most recent trends associated with the creation of the EU and a globalizing Europe.

refer to the strengthening of the institutions of the EU and to the expansion of its membership), and its concomitant process of *Europeanization*, are both largely dependent upon cultural questions. Bringing culture and identity to the study of the EU is one of the hallmarks of anthropologists of Europe (Bellier and Wilson 2000).⁴⁷ The EU becomes more than an institution:

The EU is not only a collection of political and bureaucratic institutions, nor simply an umbrella organization for the articulation of member state policies, but it is an arena of cultural relations, an entity creating and recreating its own culture, its own sets of representations and symbols (Bellier and Willson 2000: 4).

The project of the EU largely depends upon a sense of belonging that is currently in conflicting construction. What are some of the challenges of this politics of persuasion about feeling European? One of the oldest challenges has been the articulation of long term nation-state histories to a supra-state entity. These nation-states have not historically shared common institutions nor even a collective overarching identitarian process towards “Europeanization” (Borneman and Nick Fowler 1996).⁴⁸ The challenge of creating “community effects” not based on nation-state but a supra-state entity is currently afoot among the “homo nationalis” in Europe (Balibar 2004). In fact, one of the actors that has become one of the most fearful opponents to the EU project are right-wing nationalist parties and sentiments (Holmes 2000; Gingrich 2006). Also, not all the nation-states share the same affinity with the European Union project, the most “eurosceptic” being the UK. The recent referendums about the European Constitution speak to the increasing skepticism towards the EU among different European

⁴⁷ Although some geographers of Europe are increasingly dealing more with cultural questions (Pickles 2005; McNeill 2004; Sidaway 2002)

⁴⁸ For an early anthropological study of the Europeanization process and its challenges see Borneman and Nick Fowler 1996, “Europeanization” in *Annual Review of Anthropology*.

countries. The challenge of gaining public support for the EU project is definitely at stake (Krouwel and Abts 2007; Berezin and Díez-Medrano 2008).

Anthropologists then have critically pointed out the fragile political legitimacy of European integration. By bringing in the anthropological repertoire of identity construction, symbolic culture and politics of memory, they have looked at the institutional cultural attempts to foster a 'European identity'. Shore provides an analysis of the European Commission's *People's Europe* campaign in the 1980s, where various cultural strategies (such as EU information policy; the creation of new Euro-symbols: a flag, national anthem, number plates; the invention of European statistics through the *Eurobarometer*; and, most shockingly, the re-writing of history) are all being used to encourage a 'European consciousness' among the citizenry (Shore 2000).

Another additional dispute pertains to the internal nationalist projects within each of those nation-states. The political mobilization of ethnic differences is currently afoot in many European countries (Kockel 2000). One of the most current challenges afoot concerns the process of enlargement, that is, the process of adding (and rejecting) new member states to the EU, especially countries from Eastern Europe. Who deserves the highly desired nomination of 'European' then? Those that are formally being included into the EU structure, or all those inhabitants of the geographical region delimited by the Ural Mountains and the Straits of Gibraltar? How is this process of becoming officially part of Europe received by society at large in each of those countries? Anthropologists have been working on these questions and the process of cultural negotiations afoot within those recent Eastern European members of the EU and how they articulate with the rest of 'officially European' countries and the broader pursuit of becoming European: for instance, by looking at processes of subversion or support towards the

EU by Eastern countries (Donnan and Wilson 2003); and focusing on the everyday experience of higher hybridity in terms of languages, religions and cultural diversity (Byron and Kockel 2006). Also, many anthropologists are focusing on the phenomenon of increasing migration from countries outside Europe and its different local configurations. The constant tropes about migrant populations are made across race lines and colonial reminiscences (Silverstein 2005).

All these factors –diversity of well established nation-states, intense nationalist projects, enlargement process as well as increasing migration- enhance an environment which increases cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. How is this diversity articulating with the unitary call for a European sense of belonging? Anthropological skills and spheres of anthropological expertise, are brought together to engage this constant re-definition of Europe, pointing how there is a great difficulty and disparity at imagining Europe (Abeles 2000; Gingrich 2006). The way Europe is imagined and lived by the ‘EU civil servants based in Brussels –colloquially named ‘EUreaucrats’– will be quite disparate from other European inhabitants. Actually, some anthropological studies have focused on the discourses and practices of this population (Shore 2000). Also different intra-institutional processes of the EU building are increasingly the object of anthropological engagement such as following political actors, lobbies, think-tanks, legislations, and contestations (Bellier and Willson 2000)⁴⁹. One of the most ambitious institutional projects was to create the notion and legal category of European citizenship. Some anthropological studies and discussions (Neveu 2000; Harmsen & Wilson 2000) and also social theorists such as Balibar have theorized about the EU and new notions of citizenship (2004).

⁴⁹ As part of this anthropological work on the EU internal institutional dynamics, there is a specific study on EU labor policies quite pertinent for this research as in showing some parallelisms with activist analyses on the connections between flexibility, globalization and certain understanding of the neo-liberal subject. See Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak. 2000. Debating Europe: Globalization Rhetoric and European Union unemployment policies. In Irene Bellier and THomas Wilson (eds). Anthropology of the European Union. (pp. 75-93)

As a direct response to an excessive focus on the institutions, and to actually see how these notions of citizenship were actually put in to practice, there have been some scholarly efforts at engaging more with the everyday life and subjective experience of becoming part of the EU (Linnet 2002). As part of this phenomenological approach, questions arise about the political subjectivities emerging in this transitional period from nation-statehood to a pan-European affiliation? What are the new political practices and concepts of those called European citizens? How is the notion of citizenship being implemented by the mosaic of civil societies in Europe? What about those not coined as Europeans but de facto actual inhabitants of Europe? There are actually some studies focusing on the emergence of social movements in Europe that are dealing with transformations at a European scale. Particularly relevant for this thesis are those working on labor and migration policies (De Rota 2008a; Suarez-Navaz 2008).

This dissertation follows this scholarly trend at engaging the construction of Europe from an anthropological and critical perspective. What I would like to contribute to this exciting and growing literature is the possibility to think about an Anthropology of Europe from/by social movements. What are collectively organized groups in Europe saying about the current process of Europe-building, especially those conducting “in-house” research and explicitly dedicated to systematic knowledge production about current transformations? Are their analyses useful to complement this scholarly literature on the EU? The interpretation of current European employment policies worked out by different activist groups, unions and social organizations in different European countries is re-naming the question of *flexibility* with the term of *precarity*. This term has a radically different function than flexibility; rather than cheering and justifying a more efficient system, it is about denouncing its new and old forms of exploitation and to be able

to contest them with adequate demands. This process of contestation and the production of counter-meanings is reviewed in the next chapter.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter engages the current conjuncture of a Europeanizing Spain. The goal is to provide recent historical background to understand the current developments of a Southern European country -until recently considered closer to Africa than to 'Europe'- by looking at key historical episodes such as the democratic transition or the entrance into the EU. The focus centers around transformations of labor relations, since this is one of the main questions of concern for the social movements under study. By looking at the history of labor reforms, EU policies in support of flexibilization as well as the role of the unions, I provide the necessary background for understanding the development of the concept of *precarity*. I identify two main tendencies for the particular case of Spain: 1) increasing institutional support towards a flexible labor market, both at the EU and national levels; and 2) the progressive loss of protagonism on the part of the traditional workers' movement. While focusing on the case of Spain, the European Union is also examined as an object and process. I do so by analyzing the processes of economic integration afoot in the EU and introducing some of its institutional composition and decision making process. Finally, I also bring some of the cultural readings of the European construction being put forward by the burgeoning field of the Anthropology of Europe. This overall discussion on the EU and the contesting visions of the Spanish Economic Miracle constitutes the background that makes *Precarias a la Deriva* understandable and to contextualize their conceptual and political contributions.

Chapter 6

Precariedad:

A Cartographic Genealogy of a Concept

Introduction

What do an immigrant worker and a young, unemployed female architect have in common?¹

Pre-car-i-ous \pri-'kar-e-as\ *adj.* precarious obtained by entreaty, uncertain—more at PRAYER] 1: depending on the will or pleasure of another. 2: dependent on uncertain premises: DUBIOUS. 3 a: dependent on chance circumstances. Unknown conditions, or uncertain developments. 3 b: characterized by a lack of security or stability that threatens with danger. Syn, see DANGEROUS

Lack of stability. Uncertainty regarding one's future and the fear of that very uncertainty. Our precarity is felt in all aspects of our lives: work, housing, health, emotions, human relations. Precarity has to do with the ways we work and how life itself has been transforming with the new global economy; the new kinds of jobs it offers, the new ways of production that come associated with these jobs. Perhaps all this precarity is not new. What is new though is the use of this concept to create a common understanding for people to organize around. For many people it no longer makes sense to organize around their work situation. Our work is constantly changing, it is never really defined. At the same time an interesting possibility opens up to organize/resist/struggle (something like that) or maybe disobey around the different aspects of life: housing, health, emotions, human relations, food, leisure. Because our work, housing, health, emotions and relations are on constantly shifting grounds. Because we feel alone in our situations. Because work and life have oozed into each other to the point that one cannot be distinguished from the other. Are we living a life of total leisure or of 24-7 production?

YoMango activist (2004) *Precarity Explained to Kids* (a medley).

The question of precarity has come out as one of the preeminent objects of study within the processes of in-house research by social movements in Europe. This is especially the case in *Precarias a la Deriva* whose initial project focused explicitly on investigating what precarity meant for young women in Madrid. In order to appreciate the relevance of their contribution to the concept, this chapter traces the conceptual genealogy of precarity showing the process of

¹ Title of public presentation by Teresa Benito Magallon and Antonio Casas Cortes's presentation at Congreso de Arquitectos de Espana. July 2009, Valencia.

meaning-making engaged in by precarity struggles. The introduction of precarity as a concept from which to think, live and fight among certain European movements has led to a re-politicization of current conditions, and the generation of a common language and a distinct subjectivity among certain, especially young, people. The figure of the ‘precariat’ has grabbed hold of many parts of global justice and autonomous movements in Europe, resulting in experimentations in new forms of organizing. This ‘new terrain’ of social struggle has also produced many efforts at understanding current labor transformations and the new articulations of power more broadly. This high degree of experimentation and theorization around the notion of precarity are causing a flurry of research activity among autonomous social movements in Europe today. Struggles around precarious conditions constitute a growing social movement in certain European countries, rich in the creation of language, aesthetically creative in actions and quite grounded on in-house research efforts.

This chapter addresses the process of inventing the concept of precarity (and related ones, such as “gratuité”, “immaterial labor” or “basic income”). What kind of analyses, interventions and subjectivities has precarity helped to produce? What are the antecedents or points of reference from which precarity struggles draw conceptual and organizational inspiration?² This chapter then speaks to the overall argument of the dissertation that proposes social movements as knowledge producers, specifically responding to the first contention as articulated in the Introduction: *Social movements’ research is developing concepts that enable intervention on issues of public concern in specific contexts.* Here I examine the emergence and development of

² The origin of this genealogy of precarity was one of the PhD exam questions posed by my advisor Professor Arturo Escobar: “I want you to comment further on the theoretical process of inventing this analytical category (and perhaps related ones, such as ‘immaterial labor’?). What are the main landmarks (say, texts, meetings, debates) in this emergence?” This chapter further develops the initial response provided during the PhD exams.

the concept of 'precarity', tracing a genealogy of its multiple uses and re-significations. This genealogy of a concept in-the-making speaks of processes of knowledge production within social movements. Deleuze's notions of *nomad thinking* and *concepts as toolboxes* might help here to discern what kind of knowledge is produced and what are its effects, in the case of inventing precarity.

Precairity as a toolbox concept?

The concept of precarity has been producing itself in a series of flows as it travels through a variety of actors, events, texts and sister-notions. In the process it has developed a series of functions and uses throughout its trajectory resembling the following Deleuzian understanding of theory:

A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. *It must function.* And not for itself. If no one uses it, beginning with the theoretician himself (who then ceases to be a theoretician), then the theory is worthless or the moment is inappropriate. We don't revise a theory, but construct new ones; we have no choice but to make others. It is strange that it was Proust, an author thought to be a pure intellectual, who said it so clearly: treat my book as a pair of glasses directed to the outside; if they don't suit you, find another pair; I leave it to you to find your own instrument, which is necessarily an investment for combat. *A theory does not totalize; it is an instrument for multiplication and it also multiplies itself.* It is in the nature of power to totalize and it is your position, and one I fully agree with, that theory is by nature opposed to power. As soon as a theory is enmeshed in a particular point, we realize that it will never possess the slightest practical importance unless it can erupt in a totally different area (Deleuze in Foucault 1977: 208).

This Deleuzian notion helps to frame this chapter's engagement with precarity as it is circulating among different movements, recomposing inherited categories such as labor or class, and interacting with the current conjuncture of building the European Union. Nonetheless, this is not a claim that precarity is in and of itself, hands down, a nomadic, un-stratified and un-ossified concept *a la* Deleuze. It is not about assessing its Deleuzian affinity, rather Deleuze's notion of

concept is used here to better apprehend the specific character of the theorization process around precarity: its immediate placing into use and its desire for non-fixity. Let's briefly review some of the Deleuzian remarks on concepts as toolboxes in order to frame the following genealogical engagement with the conceptual production of precarity:

Deleuze's own image for a concept is [] a "tool box." He calls this kind of philosophy "pragmatics" because its goal is the invention of concepts that do not add up to a system of belief or an architecture of propositions that you either enter or you don't, but instead pack a potential in the way a *crowbar* in a willing hand envelops an energy of prying (Massumi 2004: xv, my emphasis)

The *crowbar* speaks to the opening potential held by concepts. Specifically, those concepts generated from what Deleuze and Guattari calls "nomad thinking" (1987). Concepts understood in this way are able to break down previous categorical structures and make room for different and changing ways of thinking and inhabiting the world. The concept of precarity plays this crowbar role in the context of inherited systems of belief, both coming from the 'left' and the 'right'. The value of the concept of precarity then does not rely solely on the accuracy of its analysis, but rather on its potential to regenerate imaginations and lifestyles:

The question is not: is it true? But: does it work? What new thoughts does it make possible to think? What new emotions does it make possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body? (Massumi 2004: xv)

In regards to the analytical role of precarity, Massumi's interpretation of Deleuze's notion of concept as having a distinct relationship with the world, particularly acting as a *brick*, might also be useful:

[Concepts] do not reflect upon the world, but are immersed in a changing state of things. A concept is a *brick*. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window. What is the subject of the brick? The arm that throws it? The body connected to the arm? The brain encased in the body? The situation that brought brain

and body to such a juncture? All and none of the above. (Massumi 2004: xiii, my emphasis)

Concepts exist as tools to develop unfixed understandings of the world and fluid ways of inhabiting it:

Rather than analyzing the world into discrete components, reducing their manyness to the One of identity, and ordering them by rank, it sums up a set of disparate circumstances in a shattering blow. It synthesizes a multiplicity of elements without effacing their heterogeneity or hindering their potential for future rearranging (to the contrary). The modus operandi of nomad thought is affirmation, even when its apparent object is negative (Massumi 2004: xiii)

Without claiming that precarity is always able to do this kind of non-reductionist analysis, this genealogy points to how the concept of precarity unfolds as a process of ‘summing up’, engaging and re-combining distinct circumstances and emerging problematics (*and, and, and...*). The contribution of this chapter consists then on developing a genealogy of precarity under this Deleuzian framework. The concept of precarity has spread, grown and added new understandings and applications to its history but not in a hierarchical move from inferior to superior or from less to more, rather a move from “this-to-that-to-that-to...” as in the different points of a rhizome.

Overview of the chapter

The first part, *Prewhat? Towards a Cartographic Genealogy of Precarity*, briefly reviews some basic definitions to familiarize the reader with the uses of the term precarity and emphasize its multiplicity of meanings and actors. Due to this multiplicity, I explain the challenges in tracing a linear narrative and the necessity of using cartographic thinking in order to accomplish my goal of developing a conceptual genealogy of precarity that allows for relational multiplicity. This section explains the rationale of a *cartographic visualization of*

precarity as a series of bubbling processes, each of them evoking a wave of conceptual development. Four bubbling processes have been identified within the trajectory of precarity. The rest of the chapter is then organized according to these four conceptual waves, describing the particularities of each one: the first bubbling up of the concept being ***Precarity as a Loss of Labor Rights***; the second one, ***Precarity as Qualitative Transformations of Labor***; the third, ***The Intermingling of Precarity and Migration***; and finally, ***Precarity as Everyday Vulnerability***. Each conceptual wave, represented as an amorphous bubbling process, develops a series of conceptual-political proposals represented by *different tools* following Deleuze's image of theory as a tool-box. Finally, besides those amorphous bubbling processes, there is one more protagonist in the map, *several Archipelagos of Criss-Crossing Bubbles*, a series of actors tinkering with the multiple conceptual-political proposals advanced thus far, and developing what they consider a necessary *new charter of social rights*.

Where would Precarias be in this map? In other words, how did this activist research group contribute to the expansion of the meaning of precarity? Precarias' contributions are principally situated at the heart of the more recent debates of precarity as everyday vulnerability, as well as around the question of migration. Precarias, coming from a feminist perspective, would criticize the two initial waves as too production-centered. Feminist critiques argue for going beyond capitalo-centric analyses of labor, breaking the pervasive binarism of production and reproduction. The different spaces of reproduction actually become the basis for understanding current transformations in labor, introducing notions such as "the feminization of work". Going further, according to Precarias, it is *life* itself—understood in broader philosophical, existential and phenomenological terms— that is being paradigmatically transformed. This is what

they name the “precarization of existence”. In order to assess the nature of these changes in the everyday and effectively intervene in them, *Precarias a la Deriva* would focus around the question of *care*, in the process developing a series of political proposals. The migrant question also points to the limitations of the excessive analytical weight given to class in the original meaning of precarity, neglecting important matters such as questions of legality, ‘race’ and ethnic background. Sharing the critique articulated by the migration movements, *Precarias* points to the centrality of racism and current configurations of *coloniality* in order to rethink labor, gender and power.

The conclusion, *Recapitulations and shortcomings of the concept*, addresses possible analytical limitations of precarity. It reviews a series of internal criticisms made among the different moments of conceptual development (or babbings), as well as elaborate my own critical query into the current notion of precarity.

6.1. Prewhat? Towards a Genealogical Cartography of Precarity

It is a term of everyday usage as *Precariedad*, *Précarité*, or *Precarietà* in a number of European countries, where it refers to the widespread condition of temporary, flexible, contingent, casual, intermittent work in postindustrial societies, brought about by the neoliberal labor market reforms that have strengthened the right to manage and the bargaining power of employers since the late 1970s. Precarity is a general term to describe how large parts of the population are being subjected to flexible exploitation or flexploitation (low pay, high blackmailability, intermittent income, etc.), and existential precariousness (high risk of social exclusion because of low incomes, welfare cuts, high cost of living, etc.) The condition of precarity is said to affect all of service sector labor in a narrow sense, and the whole of society in a wider sense, but particularly youth, women, and immigrants (Wikipedia entry of precarity)

Precarious literally means unsure, uncertain, difficult, delicate. As a political term it refers to living and working conditions without any guarantees: for example the precarious residential status of migrants and refugees, or the precariousness of everyday life for single mothers. The world of precarious work includes all those employment

forms, in which the employer consciously limits the security of the workplace, e.g. the term of the contract. (PGA website)³

Although exchangeable, *flexibilization* is the term usually used in dominant discourses – from economists, politicians or IMF representatives to critical academic writings. Flexibility, rather than precarity, is also the term more commonly used in English.⁴ The notion of precariousness/precariety refers both to the critical analysis of current trends in the new economy, *as well as* the rethinking of heterogenous class formations. It is used both as an analytical tool *and* as a strategic point of departure to produce political subjectivities and re-invent different alliances and ways of struggle:

Why Precarity? Developing and discussing precarity as an analysis of contemporary capitalism and the role of work through a cross-cutting issue. Historically, precarity has been the rule rather than the exception. It doesn't grasp all factors involved, but perhaps it can be used as a strategic focus term for political work in the present situation. However, for that we have to be aware of what it means for different people in different places in geopolitical space and on the social hierarchy. How can the multiplicity of realities and the unity of political thrust converge? (People's Global Action_Europe)⁵

This statement points to two key aspects of precarity that are often the cause of misunderstandings: first, precarity is not claimed to be new; second, precarity is about work and labor, but it is conceptualized in a broader sense, as a cross-cutting issue. Finally, this paragraph

³ These two definitions are provided by 'insiders' from within precarity struggles: the Wikipedia entrance on precarity is currently authored by the co-founder of Chainworkers, a key referential group in precarity struggles; the second definitions is by PGA Europe, the European section of the Peoples Global Action Network, one of the main international coordinating bodies of global days of actions. PGA has been involved in diverse activities related to precarity including actions and conferences, see http://europe.pgaconference.org/en/greece_08/topics/precariety_issues

⁴ The language of "precariousness" –*precariedad* in Spanish, *precarité* in French or *precarietà* in Italian- emerged initially as a criticism to flexible labor markets, having a critical connotation not suggested by the neutral, even positive, sounding term of flexible or casual labor). However, precarity in English does not work so well because it is not a familiar term of everyday use as it is among those other languages' speakers.

⁵ http://europe.pgaconference.org/en/greece_08/topics/precariety_issues

points to the variety of understandings of precarity and the plurality of situations from which it is lived. This multiplicity implies to difficulties for a straight forward definition of the concept.

6.1.1. The challenges of telling or representing precarity struggles

My exploration of the multiple actors, practices and discourses of the European movements around precarity, is mainly based on a privileged observatory from within: the ongoing research and cartographic project undertaken by a working group of the *Precarity Web_Ring*.⁶ My research partner and I were invited to participate in the construction of a *Map of Precarity Movements* in Europe.⁷ The process of assembling an archive of social movements and conflicts related to precarity has been long and challenging because of the very number and complexity of struggles around precarity. Even without a final map yet, the process itself has produced some interesting insights that help to illustrate the shifting and *queering* character of this concept. Thanks to the notable learning curve gained by participating in this experience, I am proposing a break down of precarity into different conceptual waves. As a continuation and contribution to the *Precarity Map* project, I advance a second cartography. While the first one focuses on identifying the actors of different precarity struggles and their social impact or relevance, in relationship to power fields; this second one is rather a conceptual genealogy of precarity. It emphasizes its multiplicity of meanings and, although not strictly chronological, its expanding development- conceptually, geographically and strategically. In the process of construction of this category we will see how precarity moves from labor specifically to expand

⁶ The *Precarity WebRing* is a multi-country research project emerging out of the EuroMayDay process in Europe.

⁷ The building of the *Precarity Map* involves both *research*, about groups, events and processes of social unrest dealing with precarity, as well as *graphic representation*, how to visually represent them, including their analyses and demands, organizing practices, and targets. For a further engagement with this cartographic project see Sebastian Cobarrubias dissertation “Mapping Machines: Cartographies of the Border and Labor Lands of Europe” (2009)

toward other spheres: the growing private and financial management of social services such as health care, education, transport and housing for example. It also moves to the territories of cultural production and immaterial labor. Precarity will try to escape the boundaries of conventional labor and point to the control mechanisms upon the growing underground economy. It thus attempts to link up with the question of migration, including the border regime. It also enters into more invisible spheres such as domestic spaces and even creeps into our own bodies. The goal of this genealogy is to show how the concept of precarity gets extended to multiple and even conflicting terrains of struggle.

Tracing the genealogy of this shifting concept is not an easy task, due to the multiple actors, different geographical locations, and the simultaneous meanings that make up this concept. Also, although there is a chronological aspect, it is not accurate to represent its emergence as a timeline. Walking through the paths of precarity is exciting but also quite dizzying. It is a concept that has produced many resonances, multiplying itself in different understandings and being linked to radically diverse issues. After having done three reviews of material related to precarity during the last three years, each time there have been surprises: unknown actors, novel texts, unexpected alliances. This genealogy draws connections among different movements, times and geographies, conducting my own clustering, and as such, it is deliberately and *avant tout*, an incomplete picture. As a *situated genealogy*, it is based both on autobiographical itineraries and the experience of working with *Precarias a la Deriva*. There are then, many actors, texts, and debates that will not be traced here. It remains open for others to plug-in their situated knowledges and articulate more ‘conic perspectives’⁸ into this cartography.

⁸ Conic perspective stands as the opposite to bird’s eyeview. This concept is developed by one of the cartographers of the *Precarity Map*. See her contribution “Mapeando Mad Madrid” (Observatorio Metropolitano 2007: 637-651).

If the notion of precariousness has been the object of processes of re-signification by different sectors of European social movements, given the fact that they are quite interlinked and messy, how does one apprehend those without boxing them apart, but at the same time able to clearly distinguish between them? After an analysis of the different movements that use to some explicit degree the notion of precarity, it is possible to draw some dotted lines among them though. I propose *four major thematic or conceptual waves evoked by a concatenation of bubbles and bubbling*. Each momentary bubble contains different –and some times super-imposed–, debates, actions, authors, demands responding to different policies and situations, posing a series of analyses as well as political strategies and demands.

6.1.2. A Cartography made out of conceptual bubbling

This cartographic visualization of a genealogy of precarity as a series of bubblings serves as the outline for this dissertation chapter. Hopefully, this cartography might help to *map, not to trace* –à la Deleuze and Guattari– the conceptual contributions and analytical interventions of precarity struggles. The main source of inspiration for this cartography is the map of “Inklings of autonomy” made by *Bureau d’Etudes* in an effort to sketch the non-state, non-political party, non-NGO, non-union movement actors of [mostly] European society. The cartography proposed in this dissertation uses the graphic dispositif of a long amorphous trace of *bubbles*. This meshwork-kind of representation would allow a better grasp of the mutable and multiplying concept of precarity. Despite the chaotic feeling, there is an order through graphic hierarchies, product of a careful exploration of the connections among struggles and the emergence of particular discourses. In addition to the image of the bubbles, the other main protagonists are *tools*. The Deleuzian notion of conceptual production as building tools guides this cartography

that tries to emphasize how social movements are indeed advancing concepts with real effects, and ultimately, certain kind of knowledge.

Bubbling as Method

The methodological approach to deal with the populated meshwork of precarity struggles has been one of *bubbling*. Bubbles, not as self-contained entities, but because of their amorphous, ever-changing and temporary nature seem to us quite fitting for a concept that resembles *nomad thinking* a la Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Bubbles as temporary constellations of energy that emerge and disperse leaving traces of material behind them that super-imposed with others will result in something different from the original shape and composition. Using categories –as in fixed and long-lasting boxes- would not work with this kind of toolbox-concept. Rather than driven by categorical classification, I intend to evoke certain connections among movements as well as conceptual productions emanating from each bubbling moment. These conceptual productions, captured by images of tools, are made up of demands back up by grounded argumentations. They might emerge from one or more bubbles of struggle, spreading in various directions, and being re-signified by other bubble with slightly new meanings.⁹ This evocative cartography –possibly not completely achieved in the graphical form- has been my own way of dealing with the density of actors, cultural artifacts, historical episodes, prolific textual productions, demands and actions related to precarity. While many other readings could be done of the conceptual unfolding of precarity, I have engaged in this narrative strategy and methodological approach as a way to respect the complexity of the concept.

⁹ The demands coming from each thematic bubbling are often shared by other bubbles, each one adding its singular take on it. Tracing clear relationships between bubbles and bricks is rather a pedagogical exercise in order to apprehend and communicate the multiple conceptual productions of these many struggles. The graphic tool of the bubble attempts to capture this permeability of concepts between struggles.

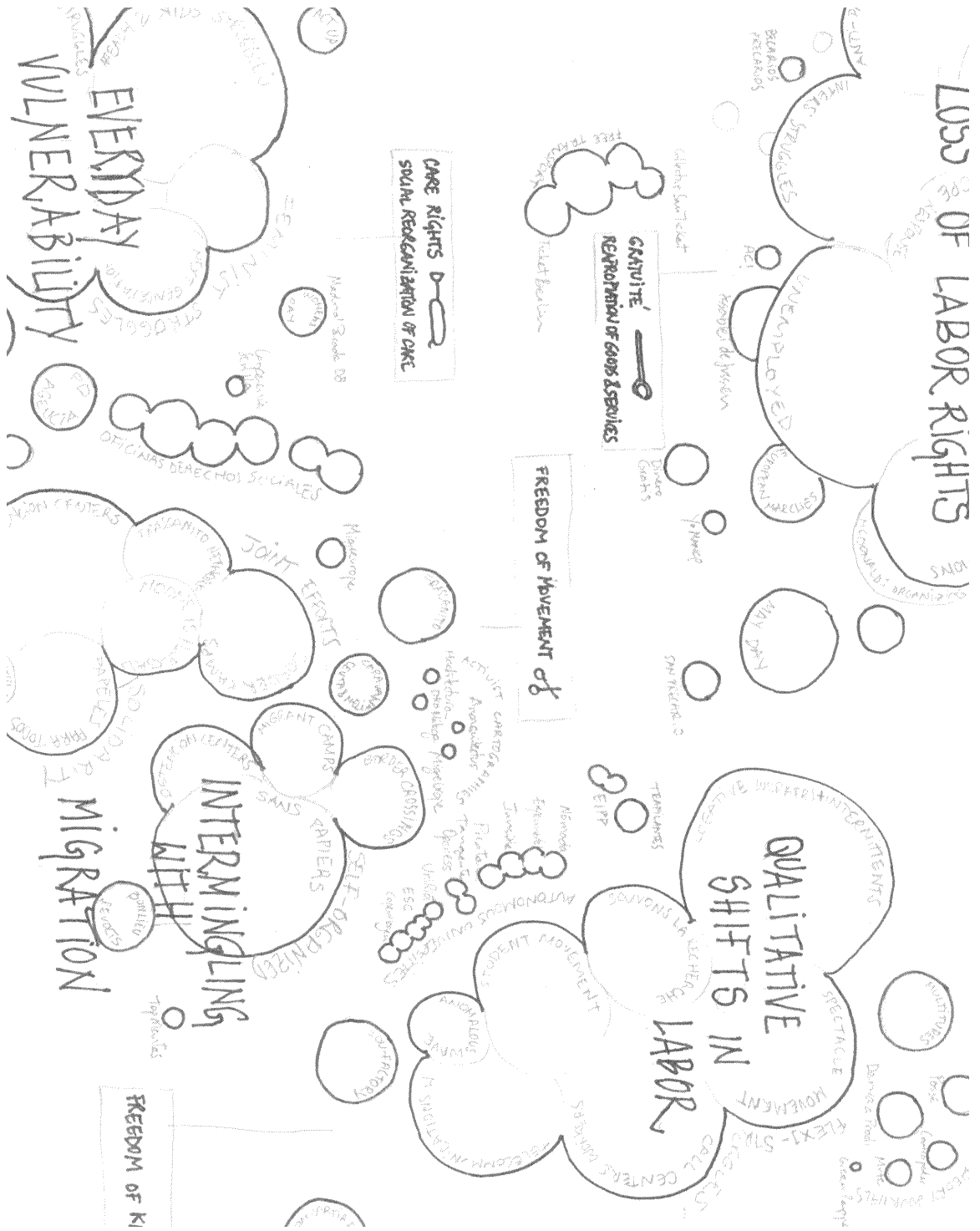


Figure 6.1: An Effervescent Cartography of Precarity (fragment of draft in progress)

The following is the explanation of the map legend. The flow of a series of concatenated bubbles is divided in four segments. Each of them is thought as a *bubbling process*, represented by a cluster of bubbles, and acting as one of the four thematic waves identified in the development of the concept of precarity. [Each one has a distinct color.¹⁰ The same color is used for the series of concrete struggles within it.] These concrete struggles attached to the broader articulating bubbling processes have diverse temporalities and geographies among them but share a similar understanding of precarity. Concrete struggles and actors are represented by *interconnected bubbles* and *independent bubbles*. Some are totally inserted into a particular bubbling process. Others are floating more independently, but in close distance to a particular wave. Some of these independent bubbles go beyond their respective wave to make interconnections between the different bubbling processes. These bubbles form a series of archipelagos interconnecting the different waves. As extensions of those major articulating processes, there are square captions with small *icons of tools* within. These square captions contain key words, representing the different political-conceptual assemblages (analyses, demands, strategies, concepts) advanced by each thematic zone or ‘bubbling up’. These captions refer to the production of theoretical, analytical and practice-based proposals, and they can become a potential source of new actors and struggles. In some cases, another set of resulting struggles gather under them, which are also represented by micro bubbles. The chapter reviews bubble by bubble. What follows is a guided tour along the path of the precarity struggles and

¹⁰ Each bubbling process will have a distinct color, although within a similar game of tones. The choice of a series of analogous colors is to stress that despite the differences and many disparities among them, they are all part of the general development process of the concept of precarity. Actually, there has been an effort to place together and find affinities among actors, texts, events that in many occasions would be rare to find together. It is important to note though, that the lack of contrasting colours should not imply the absence of frictions, tensions, attempts at domination, etc. among many of the discourses and actors. These will be addressed in the description of the different conceptual waves as well as in the conclusion.

discourses by the hand of *Precarias a la Deriva*. The presence of this prolific women's collective, discrete yet progressively *in crescendo*, is noticeable, signaling its main contributions to the development of the concept of precarity along the chapter.

6.2. Precarity as a Loss of Labor Rights¹¹

The first bubbling process focuses on the struggles that understand precarity as the increasing loss of labor rights historically won by historical workers' movements in certain European countries. Particularly, those rights associated with the changes in the type of contract brought about by the different reforms in labor legislation—from full-time to part-time, from permanent job to temp job, from full labor protections to less acquisitive power, less security measures, easier layoffs or less unemployment benefits. This loss includes other welfare protections such as health insurance. Two distinct conceptual proposals have been identified as products of this first moment that stresses the loss of those labor rights: one, the return of the welfare state; and the other one related to the struggles that go beyond the framework of waged work.

6.2.1. Origins of the uses of Precarity in Spain

It is difficult to exactly pin down the first use of the term precarity and its original meaning. Digging through different social movements' texts, many place its origins during the French unemployed movement of the late 1990's. Within Spain, the term precarity (in reference to current labor conditions) started to be used during the labor reforms of the 1980's referring specifically to the consequences brought about by the legalization of *temporal, part-time and*

¹¹ In regards to the disparity of length between the descriptions of the bubbling processes, is not based on a hierarchy of importance. Rather, the first two processes are represented as longer due to the amount and longer trajectory of their explicit engagement with precarity, in terms of actions as well as textual production, and thus the need for more historical background and exploration of movements' activities. Additionally, there is more information available about the first two babbings, which are much more open and public than the at times clandestine, hidden, or quasi-unrepresentable struggles of the protagonists of the last two zones of the map.

training contracts. These atypical types of contracts were associated with an unstable labor relationship, normally a lower salary and lessened protections against firing. The TV cartoon character of *Bruja Averia* was an early expression of this discontent through what eventually became a popular saying: *viva el mal, viva el capital, viva la precariedad laboral!*.

The shift in the labor regulation paradigm and in workers' organizing in Spain is quite drastic. In the midst of the international crisis of the 1970's a strong workers' movement nonetheless managed to continually raise salaries (above the inflation rate) and dictate the "Ley de Relaciones Laborales" –defending stable full employment- in 1976. By the 2000's, and in the midst of a historic economic boom, Spain became the country with the highest rates of temporary work in the EU and with very muted/limited labor unrest as compared to the previous phase. How to grasp such rapid transformations? While chapter six traces the historical development of labor reforms in Spain, this chapter focuses on the responses by social movements to this contentious process. The different episodes of civil unrest show the first uses and meanings of precarity as well as the progressive loss of protagonism of the traditional workers' movement.

The first labor reform passed in 1984 introduced a diverse modality of contracts in Spain. Being proposed by the Socialist government at the time and supported by one of the main union centrals, this juridical change was not object of major public debate. However, four years later, the Socialist government effort to generalize a similar flexible kind of employment through the *Youth Employment Contract*, was strongly contested. Popularly referred to as "garbage contracts", this kind of employment represented a striking contrast to the general understanding of full time, indefinite and permanent job that was rapidly generalized during the 1960's and 1970's. As a response, an effective general strike was called for December 14, 1988 by the two

main union centrals against “precarious contracts”: 95% of the active population stopped working paralyzing the country for 24 hours; even the Spanish TV signal was off.. This pressure obliged the government to sit and negotiate with the unions, the labor reform was aborted and the expenditures in welfare programs were incremented. Despite this temporary victory, the Felipe Gonzalez administration continued with his overall economic plan of “modernizing Spain”, including the flexibilization of labor markets. The response to the consecutive labor reforms would not be so massive though.

The decline of traditional union organizing

The juridical transformation of the labor regime implemented through the 1980s and 1990s would have profound consequences for labor structures and organizing in Spain. For instance, the waged working class would be divided in two main blocs: on the one hand, those workers that got their job prior to the reforms, with relatively stable employment and very beneficial collective agreements/bargains; on the other hand, the new cohorts of young people born during the 60s and 70s entering the labor market around the era of the development euphoria lead by President Gonzalez. They will increasingly have short-term contracts, mostly part-time, not well paid and easier to layoff. This second bloc would grow continuously, going from 4% to 30% during the two Socialist sessions. Socially speaking, a considerable part of the population would notice a major interruption in the progressive improvements in acquisitive power and labor conditions proper of the previous generation, thus drastically reducing professional life expectations.

In terms of worker organizing, these reforms supposed a definitive setback. Such labor fragmentation produced a significant weakening of traditional tools such as the strike, and also

made union affiliation difficult, given the disparity of labor conditions within the same workplace and the lack of identification of common interests. The generational break produced by the reforms avoided the transmission of the organizing culture of those veteran sectors of the workers movement to the new generations. According to some analysts, this legal ‘weapon’ (the labor reforms), inspired by the *flexible* model of labor relations already used in the Anglo-Saxon world, was used to weaken the collective capacity of a workers’ response (Miguel Sanz 2008). It should be noted though that this ‘weakening strategy’ started during the *Transition* (1976), more specifically with the *Pactos de Moncloa*, when an effort was made to install a highly bureaucratized union model based on union elections, professionals and representatives (similar to the union models of most of the “developed” world), abandoning the assembly and direct action based tradition of the workers movement of the 1960s and 1970s.¹² This weakening process was made present in the increasing number of bilateral agreements between unions and patronal. The workers’ movements progressively accepted the conditions of the flexible labor market and try to strategize within the parameters of this framework.¹³ Today, the most visible presence of the traditional unions takes place during May 1st, the international celebration of workers day. Highly ritualized marches following the same itineraries every year take place in different cities. Familiar chants and official union icons accompany a modest crowd of mostly bearded middle age men, slowly moving along to finish with the long speeches by unions’

¹² “Self-organization gave way to delegation and, later, to new state structures and the democratic unions [as in unions of the democratic period]. In the process, the level of rank and file participation sank until during the 1980’s, regular factory assemblies were practically a souvenir of the past.” *El sindicalismo en el Estado español*. Por Joel Sans. Marzo 2007. *En Lucha*

¹³ An exceptional moment was the SINTEL struggle during a dramatic process of a massive layout of workers from a long-term state-owned company, linking precarity to the privatization process of public companies. Although the main union centrals were part of the organizing, it was not the leadership of those unions but their grassroots bases the ones that put together a variety of innovative strategies to pressure the government. See the movie *Las Cataratas de Iguazu*.

leaders. The presence of the term precarity is visible in the union flyers and speeches, with the strict connotation of the “loss” of the good all times.

Due to this trajectory, contemporary movements working on and from precarity, do not consider most official unions as real allies. However, there is a growing number of minor unions through Europe that engage the question of precarity in more antagonistic and innovative ways. In contrast to the official unions, they try to support and form alliances with emerging political and economic actors, such as unemployed, migrants, or precarious population more broadly. The more dynamic union of this kind in Spain is the *Central General de Trabajadores* (CGT), supporting ‘atypical sectors’ –from temporary workers to unemployed.¹⁴ The CGT was one of the main interlocutors of the growing movement that linked the hard conditions of unemployment to precarity, in the sense of no protections against firing. The CGT was very attentive to the development of the unemployed movement in France, becoming one of the main organizers in Spain of the two-month *European Marches against Unemployment, Precarity and Social Exclusion*.¹⁵ These marginal unions were targeting not only national governments through the traditional union tool of striking, but also supra-national state entities such as the EU, through more inventive mechanisms such as these simultaneous cross-country marches.

Some of these more critical and marginal unions together with unemployed movements have advanced a series of political-conceptual proposals that in the cartography are represented

¹⁴ The actual CGT come from the more clandestine sectors of the workers movements in Spain, such as the historical CNT: “Even if our current name of CGT was adopted in 1989, our organization has a long trajectory under a different name, CNT, acting clandestinely since 1939” (CGT website).

¹⁵ These were numerous marches that departed from different points of the European Union. The participants walked towards Amsterdam visiting different cities on the way, and getting new additions in every stop. The goal was to arrive during the European Summit where the Reform to the Maastricht Treaty was to be signed. For more information see <http://www.euromarches.org/espanol/0528a.htm>

as two main “bricks” coming out of the red area. The following sections review some of the terms, actors, and events crucial for the development of these proposals that somehow escape the initial limited sense of precarity as loss of labor rights.

6.2.2. *Welfare as Social Wage*

This wave of struggles shares a common focus on the question of the labor contract, denouncing how the new labor reforms are proposing modalities of contract as the legal base to ease the path towards more flexible labor markets and increase loss of labor protections for workers: “precarious contracts are juridical foundation for *flexploitation*”. The demands posed by these struggles are similar to typical demands from the traditional union workers movement: stable contracts, defense against random layoffs, better labor and unemployment conditions. Despite the fact that most EU member countries have quite progressive national labor legislations, the current labor reforms have often provoked social explosions coordinated across whole industrial, communication and energy sectors or organized in particular factories defending their historical rights. Within this same corporative spirit, not only industrial workers, but also more atypical figures such as the growing population of “grantees or fellows” and “interns” have been asking for similar labor rights and benefits; demanding status of workers and its consequent political and economic recognition. Examples are “Becarios Precarios” in Spain and “Movement de Stagers” in France. In all these cases, by using Precarity, it was possible to point to the exploitation brought by flexible labor regimes: *flexploitation*.¹⁶ Some of the interlocutors of this series of struggles –especially large traditional unions- used a language of

¹⁶ (wikipedia) <http://www.kuda.org/?q=en/node/745>

victimization of the workers displaying a discourse of nostalgia for previous protection policies under the welfare-state.

There are other non-union based movements though that base their critique on a larger vision of labor rights, and are stretching the notion of precarity beyond the concrete sphere of labor contract and workplace. For example, based on a post-Marxist understanding of class, the remuneration of work should not be only made through individual wage but through mechanisms that allow for well being of the collectivity of workers. As such, they talk about a “social wage” being channeled through measures such as public services –free access to healthcare and education for example-. Thus, they denounce that the parallel process of privatization of public services is also a form of precarization. They reclaim the social services and public support gained under the European welfare state model: access to health care, education, transport and housing. These anti-privatization struggles will be formed by traditional union actors and new emergent political sectors, which are intersecting with other precarity struggles (e.g. movement for housing).

6.2.3. Utopias of no-work

Los Lunes al Sol (Mondays under the Sun) is a popular movie that spoke to many in Spain when it came out in 2002. It is about a group of friends, in their late forties, who used to work in shipyards, closed now due to the process of industrial restructuring in Spain. This movie, through a touch of nostalgia and despair but also a focus on loyal friendship and humor, addressed one of the main phantoms that Spain, and other European countries were going through: the problem of unemployment. Actually the movie’s title comes from a song used by the unemployed movement in France.

At the same time that the European Union was putting forward labor reforms that facilitate firing of employees, cutting unemployment subsidies, and making it harder to have access to stable job positions, a rising discontent grew among the inflated jobless population in EU member countries. Around the years 1997/8, the word precarity started to be popularized by the unemployed movement in France, and also in EU official reports on social welfare. Bourdieu with his two *Contre-Feux* intervention-books (1999; 2003) was one of the main supporters of the movement, denouncing globalization as the process spreading precarious labor. In the book section of "Job Insecurity is Everywhere Now" Bourdieu talks about a growing generalized condition of uncertainty:

The new framework of productive relations in the era of services introduces a change in work and life conditions, toppling the tradition of stable employment and protection by the Welfare State. Rather this gives way to the "establishing of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity that tends towards obligating workers into submissions and the acceptance of exploitation (1999: 82) .

This book section helped to spread a critical view of flexibilization at one point and is still commonly used by activists now. According to The Guardian's obituary: Bourdieu became "the intellectual reference" for movements opposed to neo-liberalism and globalization that developed in France and elsewhere during the 90s. "Ours is a Darwinian world of insecurity and stress," he wrote, "where the permanent threat of unemployment creates a permanent state of precariousness." (The Guardian, January 28, 2002). In regards to the unemployed movements, the unemployed collectives from France were quite decentralized developing different demands and approaches. Some asked for work, work under better and more stable conditions; but some provocatively rejected work as it is currently understood. This particular sector had a great impact on young activists that were trying to re-imagine a different labor regime and re-invent

non-capitalist ways of living. One of the main references within the French unemployed movement was AC! (*Agir contre la Precariete*) formed by collectives spread through different French cities; and the *Assemblée de Jussieu*, holding weekly meetings during 1998 in a temporary squat in Paris. Some of their conceptual contributions to the struggles against unemployment and labor precarity is the question of no-work and the issue of *gratuité* (gratuity, the ‘free’):

“As a response to the lack of imagination in order to think other production forms and a different way of relationship, beyond the strict current labor market, we propose to put into question the very notion of wage labor”.¹⁷

The critical unemployed discourse goes this way: the current labor contract is a ‘blackmail’ based on fear - either you accept the rules or you are nobody. The rules are dictated by markets’ requests such as –the company’s profit, inflation and interest rates, zero deficit, etc...- to which one owes total submission, putting down one’s own life priorities and needs. Against this fatalistic view of life, this sector of the unemployed suggested the idea of *gratuité*. You don’t necessarily need to work under such pressures because money should not be needed for basic needs. In order to carry out in practice such an understanding of economy, they start deploying direct actions: for example, they invented and used a transport ticket for train and metro for precarious and unemployed people. They also created fake stamps to send their material for free. In such spirit, they take actions in supermarkets where a few people go shopping food and at the time for paying, a large crowd invades the cashier area explaining they are taking the food for free: “The point of all these actions was to eliminate money from our lives” (Jussieu Assambley 1998). This kind of action in supermarkets and restaurants called

¹⁷ This one and following quotes from “Interview to some member of Jussieu Assambley by Oficina 2004”. Accessible at <http://www.sindominio.net/ofic2004/historias/jussieu/trabajo1.html>

requisiciones goes back to Italian *Auonomia*, and the practice of “auto-riduzione”, influencing some contemporary activist groups such as *YoMango*. Not only in the idea of taking merchandises for free but also the celebration of the action itself as a communicative and expressive moment itself:

Las acciones tienen el triple objetivo de poder hablar con la gente, divertirnos y hacernos nuestra propia publicidad, pues no nos dirigimos nunca a los medios ya que intentamos continuar siendo los únicos dueños de nuestra voz. Para decirlo brevemente; intentamos que nuestro movimiento coincida lo más posible con nuestra vida, es decir: que no haya separación entre nuestra vida y el movimiento. Porque no somos militantes....sino un movimiento que no se deja representar y haga lo que quiera (Jussieu Assambley 1998).

Reappropriation of services and goods

This interview to the unemployed of Jussieu was made by members of the *Oficina 2004*, a squat based-think tank experiment in Barcelona, clearly inspired by their conceptualizations of work and gratuite. After rendering homage to the official unions as the murderers and grave diggers of the working class¹⁸, they put together an art-based campaign called *Dinero Gratis*.



Figure 6. 2. Poster of the Free Money Campaign¹⁹

¹⁸ Homenaje a los sindicatos in <http://www.sindominio.net/ofic2004/historias/homenaje.html>

¹⁹ Free Money is a paradox subverting common sense and sabotaging the current order. It is available to all kinds of critical discourses that aim to attack the current labor regime, its logic and its fear. Because, by naming the cause of the current social unrest, free money is a discourse definitively owned by both everybody and nobody.// Because in becoming the name of social disquiet/unrest free money belongs definitively to everyone and no one (dinerogratias.com, author's translation)

Actually, this very philosophy of questioning the validity of money and reclaiming goods and services for free is a widespread practice –as an explicit political practice- among many groups linked to precarity struggles. For example, the emergence in different places of collectives focusing on free public transport (Colectif San Ticket/ Berlin for free/umsonst) as well as train ‘hijacking’ during moments of protest (trains to Prague and Nize). There are also individual and collective actions to obtain goods such as food, clothing, and leisure from supermarket chain and large companies, all for free. In order to understand the connections made between precarity and gratuity it is worthwhile to cut and paste the following text by and about one of the main actors of this practice –*Yomango*.²⁰

“Yomango is not a collective formed by individuals who dedicate their time to shoplifting from multi-national corporations. First, it is not a collective. Second, there are no Yomango Individuals. Yomango is everywhere, but it is hard to grasp. So how can the followers of Yomango get arrested? You don’t “follow” Yomango. Yomango happens. Nonetheless it is true that when Yomango occurs certain physical entities (such as security personnel) do what they can to avoid it. This just makes visible the person who is enjoying a Yomango moment. This person, at that very moment, may be perceived as a thief but nothing is further from the truth.

Yomango is a gesture which provides you with everything advertising promises– which the reality of capitalism prevents you from having: the prospect of adventure, self-fulfillment, creativity, sharing, community. Yomango is a transformative act of magic. It does not recognize the laws of physics nor does it acknowledge definitions such as legal or illegal. It does not recognize borders or security arcs. Yomango liberates objects and liberates your desires. It liberates your desire trapped in objects trapped inside large shopping malls. The same place where you yourself are trapped. Yomango is a pact between co-prisoners. These conceptual tools have in common the idea of gratuity. Taking money out of the picture is a potent way to surf precarity. And “surfing” it is. Living for free is practically illegal. These Yomango practices do not stabilize one’s life. These are precarious practices designed to cope with precarity. They don’t provide you with the assurance of food, housing, healthcare, leisure or transportation in the future.

²⁰ YOMANGO is a play on words, since Mango is the name of one of the main corporate clothing chains in Spain, but also means “I rob” in colloquial slang. See “10 STYLE TIPS FOR A MORE YOMANGO LIFE” accessible at <http://www.yomango.net/node/126> in INDEX of texts.

There are two things these practices do hope to stabilize. The first is human relations, these practices are a human safety net for precarity acrobats. The other is a conceptual safety net based on knowledge and skills. They create a commons for people who do strange, illegal, things”.²¹

Participants in creating Yomango range from the unemployed to those with careers in high-end design and other creative professions. The composition of this group speaks to a broader section of actors in the precarity struggles known as the ‘cognitariat’. These, together with all those “atypical workers” with flexible jobs, are the protagonists of the next bubbling up process. If this red bubble stemmed from a focus on the quantitative transformations in labor – such as less long-term contracts, less security, less salary, less protections-, and normally in a negative and pessimist outlook; the violet zone will signal how these transformations are rather qualitative ones, bringing along a different labor paradigm.

6.3. Precarity as a qualitative transformation of labor

The second articulating area draws from the previous understanding of precarity as defined by the proliferation of new types of contracts, although moving forward to a more comprehensive analysis of labor changes. Precarity is understood rather as a paradigmatic transformation in capitalist production bringing major transformations in labor organization. The conceptual move goes from the popular question “what are you, temporal and part-time worker *or* stable and full time worker?” to the affirmation that “flexibility characterizes our lives nowadays” or “we are all becoming flexible workers”. While the first bubbling focuses on precarity as the loss of labor rights, as a quantitative deviation that we should fight to correct back; this second round of responses look at precarious labor as qualitatively different, with

²¹ Precarity explained for kids. <http://precariousunderstanding.blogspot.com/2006/07/28/precariety-explained-to-kids/>

distinct characteristics, that will make it spread as a general tendency beyond workspaces. This conceptual wave advanced two new qualities of labor: 1) intermittency and 2) immateriality. The two following sections address the development of each of them as being articulated by different struggles. As a product of these struggles, two conceptual bricks are identified: 3) the free culture and copy left proposals, which will acquire its own independency as a movement itself; and finally 4) the development of concrete politico-philosophical proposals to engage with the new regime of intermittency and immaterial labor.

6.3.1. *Intermittency and New Tactics*

Flex-worker is the figure presented as the emergent protagonist of contemporary labor organization. The flexible worker will have distinctive characteristics, including the spreading condition of intermittency at work as well as the growing use of communicative, affective and intellectual skills during production, and thus will need different forms of labor organizing. Among the different struggles and collectives experimenting with this other understanding of precarity, two of the main reference points of this conceptual and organizational transition are the Milan-based group *Chainworkers* and the mobilization of the *Intermittents* in France.²²

From mall consumer to chain worker

Chainworkers and other media-activist groups declare the influence of US alter-globalization movements on their own work. More specifically the literature on corporate logic – such as *NO LOGO* by Naomi Klein and the intervention-publication of *Adbusters Magazine*; and concrete organizing experiences fighting multinational corporations- referencing the vibrant anti-

²² Additionally a plethora of texts are circulating in different academic and independent activist publications across Europe –*Multitudes*, *Derive Aprodidi*, *Posse*, *Contrapoder*, *Brumaria*, *Greenpepper*, *Mute Magazine*- as well as papers and books engaging this theme, both online and distributed by autonomous projects such as *Traficantes de Suenos* and *Akal Ediciones* (Madrid) or the *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics* (Vienna). Key to understanding some of the discursive inventions of this thematic wave is the widely distributed ‘Precarious Lexicon’ by “some Precarias a la Deriva”.

sweatshop movement, especially on university campuses, culture jamming or the national Taco Bell boycott. US activists in this vein emphasized and problematized how globalization is affecting their consumption patterns, through modes of selling products that are more than ‘objects’ but speak to one’s own identity and way of life; while they criticize the labor conditions of those who are producing those very same products, normally in far-away maquiladoras (eg. Nike). Some European activists brought these questions of current global production home, calling attention not just to the fact that they are consumers²³ but also they constitute part of the changing production process. What kinds of jobs are provided in our countries or cities by those same corporate chains that use maquiladoras elsewhere? What are the conditions of the workers in big malls or fast-food chains selling those same products produced at sweatshops? Departing from an analysis based on consumption patterns, European activists make a jump to their own working conditions: “Logos are colonizing the planet: they establish slavery work in the South and precarious labor in the North”²⁴. In order to address that emergent sector working for the big chains in the North, Chainworkers was born as a website in 1999 in Italy with the intention of becoming a tool for workers of fast-food and distribution chains, call-centers, cleaning services, and those having temporary contracts with all kind of companies (www.chainworkers.org).

From McDonalds’ Strikes to MayDay Parades

Inspired by sporadic rebellious moves by fast-food chain workers -- the emblematic precarious figure of the 90s, with less labor rights, no union representation, and no classical worker identity -- this Milan-based group started to imagine ways of struggle in the chain

²³ Here is where *Yomango* activism could be placed, if companies are selling you a way of life, through invasive advertising and still based on the exploitation of workers, a possible respond is to organize boycotts, but even more, to spread the practice of re-appropriating merchandises, not only for need but also as a self-defining practice and anti-corporate lifestyle.

²⁴ Chainworkers and Eurosocal Activism: Por una red europea de activismo contra la precarizacion social

companies, a commercial model spreading in Italy and Europe more broadly. According to Chainworkers website, “the new socio-productive context neutralizes the organizing forms of classical unionism as well as the analytical patterns of the left”. In contrast with the paradigm of many classical union struggles, articulated around sectors and articulating more corporative demands –eg. salary raises for a particular group or sector of workers-; the current situation required a less corporative approach but one dealing with the overall transformation in labor regimes. They actually depart from some of the dispositifs proper of the historical workers movement when it was still more internationalist and class-based instead of the contemporary sector-based unionism. For example, the celebration of Workers Day on May 1st as the commemoration of the Chicago martyrs in search of an 8 hour workday. In one of their communicative interventions, Chainworkers started to reclaim and re-signify that celebration in 2001 as the Precarious Workers’ Day. Actually, the May Day process has been object of anthropological analysis as a re-appropriation of an historical symbol to infuse it with “new ways of doing politics” in the context of semi-capitalism and a post-fordist Europe²⁵. The goal at subverting the current official character of mayday marches with a more subversive touch, is to visualize the emergence of a plethora of labor figures –all those atypical workers that did not feel identified with the official union calls and were usually invisibilized in mass media and policy circles. As one of the Chainworkers’ members stated: “some years before, talking about precarity was almost an act of terrorism according to our government. Mayday served as a communicative act to develop a new consciousness”.²⁶

²⁵ For an anthropological study of this resignification of MayDay by precarious struggles see Antón Fernandez de Rota 2008 “Un simbolo en disputa: Las politicas de reinencion y la reactualizacion precaria” in *Tiempo de espera en las fronteras del Mercado laboral*. Actas de XI Congreso de Antropología, San Sebastián: Ankulegui Ed.

²⁶ “De la precariedad laboral a la precariedad social.” Interview a Chainworkers by Maria Cecilia Fernandez. Dossier Jornadas en Sevilla.

Instead of the long, monotonous and legal marches organized by the principal official unions, the dispositive of MayDay parades, full of a carnival/rave spirit, music bands, floats, costumes, and often without the city's permission, started to spread from Italy to other European cities. Since 2005, the MayDay process has become a continental phenomenon with actions progressively spreading to Barcelona, Sevilla, Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Helsinki, Vienna, London, Paris, Limoges, Stocolm, Marseille, Leon, Terrassa ... and even Tokyo²⁷! (see Figure 6.3.) Though it should be noted that while in Italy, these MayDay parades can actively compete in numbers with the official 1st of May marches, in the other cities the numbers are much smaller than the official marches.



Fig.6.3. Call for Mayday 2008 in Tokyo

Precarias a la Deriva joined the efforts of the MayDay process. In their writing on *Precarious Lexicon*, the Mayday entry talks about the need to update this international workers celebration due to current transformations. Speaking in terms of a transition from industrial

²⁷ For Mayday Tokyo actions since 2004 to 2008 see <http://mayday2007.nobody.jp/>

capitalism to *post-fordism*, PD describes the emergence of distinctive figures of labor, and thus the end of previous forms and places of struggle:

Since 1886 the first of May has been the international day (except in the US) for the commemoration of the "Chicago Martyrs" (worker leaders condemned to the gallows in the context of the general strikes for the eight hour day in the US) an expression of the demands and struggles of that great historical and strongly identitarian subject, the proletariat, inexorably linked to a period of capitalism, -industrial capitalism-, to particular modes of organization, -the great strikes and the mass unions-, and to concrete places of mobilization, -the factories-. But to the degree that capitalism has been changing its forms of exploitation in order to dodge the workers conflicts and re-appropriate their demands, passing from industrial capitalism to fordism and, from this, to the present post-fordist mode of production, this date has been losing meaning until it became just a holiday (for some) and completely devoid of content for almost everyone (2005b).

The multiplying character of the subject-worker is described in poetic terms, going from those with temporary contracts in different locations to undocumented workers. PD though has always been quite skeptical about using the term 'precariat' as an identity-based tag that could integrate all those atypical workers. PD has insisted in the importance of recognizing disparate differences and radical singularities:

Because today that monolithic antagonistic subject has been replaced by a diffuse multiplicity of singularities, that some dare to call the precariat, in the year 2001, a Milanese collective of precarious of the large service sector chains, the Chainworkers (www.chainworkers.org), issued a call for May first baptized as the Mayday Parade. Its protagonists were atypical workers, remunerated and non-remunerated, with and without papers: these professionals of geographic and vital flights, fixers of temporality, experts in metamorphosis who, linked by multiplicity, sought, in the difficult times of existential precarization, to celebrate and visibilize our struggles and dreams. The initiative caught on and was repeated year after year with increasing numbers and increasing expressiveness. Three years later, it was put on in the city of Barcelona as well, and this year anticipates these Maydays in no less than 16 cities European cities (see www.euromayday.org).

Precaria a la Deriva outline some of the actors involved in precarity struggles,

describing some of their organizing strategies (the parade or media-activism) and some of their demands, presented in terms of *lost* and *new rights* (these will be elaborated upon later on):

The Mayday Parade constitutes a means of visibilization of the new forms of rebellion, a moment of encounter for the movements, and practices of forms of self-organized politicization (social centers, rank-and-file unions, immigrant collectives, feminists, ecologists, hackers), a space of expression of its forms of communication (the parade as an expression of pride inherited from the movements of sexual liberation, but also all the media-activist artillery developed around the global movement against the summits of the powerful of the world) and a collective cry for rights lost (housing, health, education) or new ones (free money, universal citizenship), which day to day and from each situated form we try to begin and to construct from below (PD 2005b).

According to the organizers, putting together these Mayday parades has been an instrument of visibilization of precarity struggles. Although having previously following the trajectory of Mayday from abroad via web, we had the opportunity to take part in some of the organizing and activities for the Madrid Mayday 2008. From that experience we realized that rather than focus on the *event* per se, the importance was placed on the *process* of building up through a variety of ways: open assemblies where people are invited to take part in the process; series of teach-ins and workshops on the question of precarity; high-design websites and colorful signs and flyers; videos and music for the occasion on internet. According to an organizer of the Mayday in Malaga:

“Mayday, understood as an advertising and communicative machine to agitate imaginations, is a tool to create new European precarious subjects” (Mayday Madrid workshops at Centro Social Patio Maravillas, April 2008)

The quality of the graphic material is explained due to that a significant portion of mayday participants are temporary workers of the design industry and because of the philosophy

that “politics exists in the form”²⁸ In order to make the movement attractive to youth -one of the main targets of these labor changes-, movements try to generate a pop culture around issues of precarity –including logos, marketing culture, rave scenes, cool music, etc.- reclaiming back those now dominant market-based aesthetics. Although in many occasions the numbers of the actual parades are not so significant (excepting Milan with 80000 and Barcelona with 20000); the quality and quantity of graphic material and discursive production is quite notable, especially compared to the big union marches (collecting flyers from the official May 1st march in 2008 down stairs from our home showed us the boredom of messages and aesthetics of the official unions). Exploring that graphic and textual production, from its inception in 2001 to nowadays, mayday organizers have traced the changes in their approach towards precarity: from the first call to “stop precarity” to the last calls based on the slogan “the social precariat is rebelling”. This transition is a source of tension among conventional unions and mayday followers as we were able to witness. The Madrid Mayday 2008 process entitled “*precarious person, ...dare yourself...to rebel*” tried to engage a variety of figures: from university adjuncts to tele-marketers to undocumented construction workers (see fig. 6.4.)

²⁸ Marcelo Exposito, public talk entitled “El desarrollo del proceso MayDay”, at Mayday Madrid workshops, April 30th 2008 Centro Social Patio Maravillas.



Figure 6.4. Call for MayDay Madrid 2008

The activities developed over several months and we were able to participate in some of the preparatory events taking place at *Centro Social Patio Maravillas*. This recently squatted old school was located in the downtown neighborhood of Malasana. Since the squat action, many have been helping out to clean up and adapt it for the numerous activities: from the Madrid Social Forum to kids-friendly political meetings to the Mayday series assemblies. The Mayday workshops prior to the street actions were taking place in the big room downstairs, half bar and half set up in teaching format, with speakers in a central table and the audience in semi concentric circles. The space was full of smoke, dark and quite full. The tension between union and precarity activists was palpable. Some of the guest speakers coming from a union background and a more sociological empirical approach, limited themselves to identify the

negative consequences of precarious labor. At the end of the session, many voices from the audience, talked about a different understanding of precarity. As one participant said, another understanding that would recognize “the ambivalent traits of precarity such as temporarility or mobility, allowing an identification with one’s own conditions as a source of politicization, assuming a new collective identity from which to fight, asking for demands and updated rights from within this context and not from an irreversible past”. Insisting in this propositive approach, and adding on to the tense atmosphere that was growing in the room of the squatted social center, another voice stated “Rejecting pessimist and defensive positions, the mayday process bets for a joyful offensive, which not only questions everything, but puts forward concrete proposals. Mayday could be a tool for communication and contagion among groups thinking in these terms” (Public interventions at Mayday workshops, Patio Maravillas, April 2008).



Figure 6.5. Patio Maravillas, Madrid (squatted social center), downtown Madrid.

The Mayday process, rather than being thought as a means to ‘get out there’ to some abstract public sphere (though maydays have been covered in the mass media)- is conceived as an “aggregation dispositif” in the following two ways: first, aggregating similar initiatives, as a participatory way of networking among groups and projects working on parallel questions but not necessary connected or knowledgeable of each other; and second, aggregating previously non-politicized individuals, that working under precarious conditions might feel attracted by the whole advertising combo of mayday paraphernalia (websites, videos, songs, t-shirts, macro-concerts, parties) that put atypical workers –themselves- in the center. This centering of the atypical is done not just to insist on a status as victims but emphasizing the possibilities of improving contemporary conditions, including those they themselves inhabit. This process of political re-subjectification is the potential of precarity. This is how the speech by a member of Mayday Sur, a process that coordinates actions across the cities of the southern region of Andalucia, talked about this question of re-subjectification:

By participating in mayday sur activities you get quite a tattoo, peircing your body with the joyfulness of encountering folks that share your own situation and finding out that from where you are you can do a lot. It has to be a before and after for those young folks working in the service industry, counter-cultural but not necessarily politicized. Mayday is then a mechanism to *interpelate* the isolated precarious worker (Toret interview, May 2009)

Also, by addressing globalization from the point of labor transformations, rather than focused on global trade or corporate consumption as US global justice movements, European precarity struggles have been able to politicize the very conditions of activists themselves. The very changes in production regimes and capital accumulation modalities are affecting your income, your ability to find accessible housing, your sociability at the workspace located in the metropolis, etc.

Many of the globalization movements, from which we come from, have focused on support and solidarity with others, and usually 'the other': going from whales to indigenous peoples to maquiladora workers. Through the politicization of precarity, we are now able to fight in first person. Precarity and Mayday opened up a field of intervention for us, bringing our own affected bodies, not just as activists fighting for abstract principles and far away figures. (Toret interview, May 2009)

This insistence on fighting in the first-person and moving towards a politics of aggregation will have consequences on the kind of research developed by these networks as well as on the specifics of organizing.

From San Precario to Bio-sindicalism

Another modality of intervention that also aims at creating a kind of collective identity among the nebulas of dispersed individuals working in the territories of precarity, has been the invention of *San Precario*. This is a communicative strategy initially developed by Chainworkers. Building from the Catholic character of their country, the idea was to generate a patron of the precariat to whom to pray for better conditions. Statues of San Precario have been participants of direct actions and activist meetings across Italy. The icon of San Precario points to the five crosses of precarity: lack of money, housing, affective relationships, free communication and transport.

There is a network of San Precarios spots through Italy, where people can go to get legal information, self-training, as well as a community of colleagues in the same situation. Again, the goal is to create ways to aggregate and generate social conflict beyond current unionism. There is an explicit concern about renovating union institutions: on the one hand, it is key for these collectives to tear down current hierarchical and rigid structures, allowing for a more decentralized organization through transversal networks that trespass not only nation-states but

also sector-based borders. There are a few initiatives that try (or have tried) to connect self-organized efforts fighting precarity at the European level (the *Prec_Cog network*; the *GAP: Great Precarious Alliance*; or the *Precarity Webring*) but they are usually pretty weak. Instead of re-inventing the wheel they looked for previous and historical models. In this search for organizing ways of transversal workers agitation, they found inspiration in the US Wobblies of the 1910s and 1920s (International Workers of the World or IWW) known for their commitment to decentralized and cross-sectors committees, their work with migrant workers, their mobility, and emphasis on direct action²⁹.

This kind of European chapter of the IWW would on the other hand differentiate from the historical one in its emphasis on *bio-unionism*: given that precarity is understood not just as a labor mechanism that is creating a new sub-proletariat –the precariat-; but is rather constituting a new and more complex relationship between life and labor, unions then will deal with questions of ‘life’ broadly understood:

“Biosindicalism departs from the following premise: if precarity is affecting the social and not just the labor sphere, invading all our life, it is obvious that union organizing should depart from each of the points where life is developed, both from outside and within workspaces”³⁰

This is how *Precarias a la Deriva* reflects on the recent experiments at organizing beyond workspaces:

Biosyndicalism is a contraction of bio (life) and syndicalism (unionism), where life crawls toward that tradition of struggle that has been sindicalism and deprives it of its most corporative and economic elements. But: what has life to do with this? 1) First of all, life is productive. We are not among those who say, "Life has been put into

²⁹ Andrea Fumagalli (2007) Precariedad, el espacio del conflicto in Conference Dossier “Jornadas de Precariedad y Crisis del Estado de Bienestar.” Sevilla, April 2007

³⁰ De la precariedad laboral a la precariedad social. Entrevista a Chainworkers por Maria Cecilia Fernandez. In Conference Dossier “Jornadas de Precariedad y Crisis del Estado de Bienestar.” Sevilla, April 2007

production." It always produced: cooperation, affective territories, worlds... but now it also produces profit. The capitalist axiomatic has subsumed it. 2) Second of all, precarity cannot be understood only from the labor context, from the concrete conditions of work of this or that individual. A much more rich and illuminating position results from understanding precarity as a generalized tendency toward the precarization of life affecting society as a whole. 3) Thirdly, labor has ceased to be a place that organizes (individual and collective) identity), a place of spontaneous encounter and aggregation and a place that nourishes the utopia of a better world. Why? Because of the failure of the workers' movement and the process of capitalist restructuration that accompanied it, as much as the push of the desire of singularity (of the feminist movement, the black movement, the anticolonial movements and other movements linked to the spirit of '68) that made the worker movement stall from the inside.

But, look, this does not mean that labor can no longer be a place (among others) of conflict, nor that the teachings of the workers' movement cannot be useful. It means only that the battle inside and against precarization cannot be restricted to the sphere of labor. It means that it is necessary to invent forms of alliance, of organization, and everyday struggle in the passage between labor and non-labor, which is the passage that we inhabit (2005b).

That increasing condition of being between periods of work and no-work was highly analyzed by another key reference group in this process of expanding the concept of precarity: the "Intermittents" from France.

Intermittent work as current labor paradigm

French labor protection law made an exception for spectacle workers (actors, acrobats, theatre crews, performance workers more generally, etc.) since the 1930s, recognizing the irregularity of this kind of work, and providing a special subsidy during the periods of non-contractual activity. During the restructuring process of the European welfare state, French politicians decided to cancel this labor subsidy in 2004. Workers of the French cultural industry complained through strikes but also more communicative strategies of visibilization, such as taking over TV shows while on the air, subverting official ceremonies or occupations of cultural institutions (like the Pompidou museum) that made first pages of national newspapers in France.

From this context, the *Coordination des Intermittents d'Ile de France* was born. They carry out original direct actions and non-confrontational civil disobedience, engaging in the production of reflexive theory, developing counter-proposals about labor organization and its relationship with income as well as more general reflections on changing economic policies such as retirement.

They developed a fine analysis with two major insights that will travel around many of the bubbles working on precarity, and especially those linked to cultural work. First, the fact that the question of intermittency at work, was not just an exception proper of sectors such as the industry of spectacle or seasonal agricultural work, but rather it was becoming a more generalized condition. Rather than exceptional, intermittency and discontinuity at work is becoming nowadays paradigmatic. A second insight coming from the very experience as intermittent workers was the question of how those activities done in between jobs, despite not being considered part of work itself were extremely productive and profitable for future employers or others. In the strict sense the following activities were considered outside of the labor sphere: self-training, research, non-waged modes of cooperation, productive networking, social relationships normally associated with reproduction, etc. However, contemporary capitalism tends to rely more on those activities, exploiting them without compensation. There is no formal no monetary recognition of its productive function, they are taken as activities outside of work time, and thus there are no responsibilities towards them (remunerating them, guaranteeing them, etc.). This set of broad reflections about the new character of labor, and the need for different modes of social distribution, -born out of the situated experience as intermittent cultural workers-, made of this struggle not a corporative one. Rather, it become a struggle open to alliances and with notable social impact, developing proposals that many felt

identified with. Proposals such as a kind of *income* that would remunerate that non-waged production that is becoming key for contemporary accumulation but is still not compensated. Production is more than ever based on communication, affect, sociability, information, collective knowledge. This premise is linked to the Italian post-Marxist insights (many of whose authors lived in exile in France). Negri, Virno, Lazzarato, and Corsani, among others, are pointing to the question of immaterial labor.

6.3.2. Immaterial Labor

The term ‘immaterial labor’ pops up continuously in a set of theoretical essays and sociological research pieces widely referenced by current European activist circles. I discuss briefly some of the nuances of the concept since it is an important reference for precarity struggles. Immaterial labor focus on redefining “the nature of labor in post-Fordism” and come from the Italian literature called *post-operaismo* or *Marxismo autonomo*. The main hypothesis argues for a new dominant quality of labor, which rather than based on repetition and bounded time units, is based on relational, communicative and cognitive faculties that go beyond conventional work time and workplace. This new quality should be understood as a tendency, not as an overall description of current empirical labor realities. This hypothesis comes from a situated reading of Marx’ *Grundrisse* fragment on Machines, interpreted in the light of and from within the experience of the Italian 68 movement –ten consecutive years of constant social unrest named as the “permanent 68”, “laboratory Italy” or the “Italian anomaly”– characterized by a massive exodus from factory work and a cry for non-waged production, creativity and affect. Negri and Lazzarato claim that it was the 68 movements that “developed an epistemological de-clogging” (2006: 50).

However, according to Virno's thesis on "counter-revolution" the demands of 68 have been incorporated by contemporary capitalist restructuring starting in the 80s, returning them to society in the form of "flexibility" and "information society". The so-called flexible and immaterial components have been introduced by capital in order to respond to both 1) the emerging necessities of the global market in terms of "just-in-time production" and "zero-stock" and 2) to the demands made by many anti-systemic movements of the 60s who rejected the routines of the factory or were able to place them under their control, looking to satisfy their desires in more creative and liberating activities. Capturing these movements' values such as creativity, cooperation and communication, current labor organization will go beyond the fordist assembly line model, introducing "immaterial labor" as one of the main tendencies of contemporary labor practices.

The centrality of immaterial labor comes from a situated reading of a heretical prediction of Marx, which in Virno's words:

"it is not a very Marxist thesis: abstract knowledge –specially scientific knowledge, but not limited to it- tends to become the main productive force, due precisely to its autonomy from production" (2003: 78 author's translation)

This reading will be based both on sociological research coming mostly from interviews of workers as well as from an interpretation of Grundrisse through the lens of Foucault and Deleuze:

"Labor becomes biopolitical, what is put to work are the communicative, relational and organizational faculties of labor, the biopolitical faculties. [...]
Capitalism has always consisted in a coexistence of diverse modes of production, dominated, organized and exploited by the more "deterritorialized"; in this case is the one tending towards autonomous labor where apparatus of captures –such as communicative and financial ones- converge" (Lazzarato 2006c: 37 author's translation).

In this redefinition of labor regimes, knowledge and collective exchange of ideas become preeminent, as is indicated by the peer-concept of "general intellect". While the assembly-line

industrial worker during fordism was not supposed to talk during his/her work time, conversations being considered almost a form of sabotage, the current modalities of capitalist expropriation demand from the workers as much talk and thinking as possible in order to respond to the demand of continuous innovation –from technical requirements but also from the diversified consumer demands. However, this mode of production escapes current practices of remuneration, based on the exchange unit of “time of work”:

“Contemporary capitalism increasingly uses and supports itself on the intellectual, cultural, affective and relational resources developed at the heart of processes of social cooperation. However, capitalism never pays the complete price of that immaterial production” (Sapienza Pirata 2006: 333).³¹

Work time, the central piece of the law of value, is not so important anymore. And thus waged-labor as we know it loses its centrality in the production of wealth (Virno 2003: 78). While both capital and the old left try to ignore such paradigmatic transitions, it is from that realization that two avenues are opened for novel antagonisms: On the one hand, this autonomy from the regime of waged-labor (there is now the possibility of thinking of waged-compensation as a temporary existential moment, and not like a forced situation that provides a long-term and stable identity), allows a process of “self-valorization”, understood as positive and autonomous *agencement* (related to agency and empowerment) of the subject in the conditions of immaterial labor. Following Deleuze and Foucault:

“the Marxist concept of the work force –under the level of general intellect- [...] develops a process of autonomous production of subjectivity. Subjectivity, as an element of absolute indetermination, becomes an element of absolute potentiality” (Lazzarato and Negri 2006: 51).

³¹ Laser Posse Sapienza Pirata (2006) “El cognitariado se alza en Neuropa” Brumaria 7, pp.333

On the other hand, the possibility of generating new powers relationships, a non-dialectic approach to capital and the state. Instead of confronting them to then take the power that they hold, the idea would be to create parallel and alternative powers –constituent powers- born out of independent subjects, working at the level of *potentia* and not just of *potere* (Negri and Lazzarato 2006: 51). It is neither possible nor pertinent to address all the concepts and nuances of this vast literature here, but at least briefly outline some of the major notions that are commonly used among precarity circles. We will now see how these concepts of immaterial labor are put to practice and further elaborated by concrete experiences of struggle, developing a series of novel and concrete demands.

Struggles of the Cognitariat

“Education, creativity, information and social relations become primary economic resources of post-industrial economies, the same way that oil was during the industrial boom of 20th century” (Sapienza Pirata 2006: 334)

Some of the struggles that respond to this statement are the already mentioned “intermittents” working in the cultural world and spectacle industry in France. However, what happens in other spheres explicitly dealing with immaterial labor, such as scientific research, education and communication? Are there any kinds of antagonisms there? The brief piece *The Cognitariat rises up in Europe*, by an Italian group called “Pirate Sapienza” (referring to the University of Rome) recollects a series of struggles taking place in those sectors of the economy. In particular, struggles happening at the heart of yet another cathedral of culture (besides those of spectacles), that is the university. This is the case of a growing number of researchers, both in Italy and France, contesting governmental policies that generalize temporal contracts in research institutions. They denounce the growing “precarization of research work”. *Sauvons la Recherche*,

Ricercatori Precari or *Red de Investigadores Temporales* are all examples of struggles that reject acting based solely on corporatist interests, or sector-related questions, without addressing the broader picture. Rather, they put forward demands linked to current understandings of immaterial labor: for example arguing that all knowledge is collectively produced, they stand against solo intellectual property rights and defend free access and circulation of knowledge.

The new status of knowledge in current modes of production has renewed the agenda of some student movements of different European universities. Together with the traditional demands of stopping fees hikes, as well as the current debates around the consequences of Bologna Treaty³², there are some student initiatives focus on rethinking and reclaiming the university as a space for the free movement of ideas (against the patenting of knowledge) and for a non-authoritarian education, one based on collective self-training. This is the case of the Rome-based initiative called *ESC* and its recently publication *Universita Globale*. Finally, more examples of ‘flexi-struggles’ of the cognitariat are the ones taking place at the telecommunication sector.³³

All of these distinctive precarity struggles point to how knowledge is actually a collective good produced by communities of workers, breaking down previous boundaries between research and education, producers and consumers, work and unemployment. All these struggles share the common demand of free access and circulation of knowledge. This has generated a

³² The Bologna Treaty: effort to homologate the different university systems that co-habit in Europe with the purpose of increasing efficiency in terms of student/researcher mobility as well as facilitating the link with labor markets. It has been target of students’ critique for adopting the anglo-saxon mode and increase privatization of education. Though many movement within precarity struggles do look at elements of the Bologna process as a way to break the endogamic hegemony of professorial dynasties in older universities, they also point out some of the negative consequences that could result. See Isidoro Sevilla (2008)

³³ These include struggles of workers of TV news companies, conducting actions on air, as well as the campaigns organized by the call centers workers where they invite clients to join them in the struggle.

whole movement with a diverse array of actors around the question of intellectual property rights, developing demands and practices of *copy left*. Yet again the concept of precarity keeps stretching to unexpected terrains.

6.3.3. Freedom of Knowledge: Free Culture and Copyleft

As a result of this awareness about the centrality of knowledge, precarity struggles are calling for and exercising practices for the free access and distribution of knowledge. “Freedom of knowledge” has become a *tool* widely extended beyond precarity struggles. Most of the magazines, books, or videos produced not only by precarity struggles but also other contemporary social movements are labeled under copy left licenses, usually one called *Creative Commons*. This one in particular allows for “free copy, distribution, exhibition and interpretation of the material”, with the possibility of asking for recognition of authorship and translation, reflecting the names of the authors and translators. Although it permits –if not encourages- copy and distribution, it does not allow it with commercial goals. It also could ban any kind of modification of the material if requested. *Creative Commons* was developed by a group of progressive lawyers in California as a response to the increasing invasion of big companies re-appropriating material that was not under any kind of license, and thus was unprotected in the copyright market. *Precarias a la Deriva* has all its publications, the ones produced by the collective as well as individual members, under Creative Commons Licence.³⁴ Their loyalty to this practice is explained by themselves in the “copyleft” entry of their *Precarious Lexicon*:

Copyleft is a movement with several departing points: a) the certainty that the goods encapsulated in the concept of "intellectual property" (a book, a computer program, a

³⁴ This was the reason that our own translation of the prologue of *Nociones Comunes* (the piece on genealogies of militant research), done thanks to a Research Assistantship from Cultural Studies at UNC was not finally published in the *Journal of Cultural Studies*, owned by Routledge, with strict property laws and unwilling to publish anything with those characteristics.

melody...) are the patrimony of all persons (since they are nourished from collective magmas) and b) that, unlike material goods, they neither deteriorate nor are exhausted with use, c) nor, lastly, are they subjected to the principle of scarcity (but rather that, to the contrary, they increase and are enriched when they are shared). It would be a matter of fomenting the diffusion of copyleft practices as basis for projects of cooperation without command over living labor and of promoting legal implementations to make it effective (creation of licenses that assure the free circulation of immaterial goods). (PD, 2005b)

Following the insights developed by the theory of immaterial labor explained above, they propose copyleft practices as a response to the current transformation of labor regimes and production forms:

Copyleft is, also, an axis of fundamental articulation for a politics from below adequate for our time. Our époque is marked by crossroads such as 1) the overcoming of the society of labor based on forms prescribed by a social system founded on waged labor; 2) knowledge is converted into the principle productive force at the same time that labor time is maintained as a unity of measure; or 3) 18th century property laws applied now to immaterial goods (pillars of our global economy) whose qualities are completely distinct from those of tangible products (2005b)

Fighting for the Commons of Knowledge

Copyleft practices are seen as a potential way of turning precarity into something productive from which to generate and share ideas, codes, information, artistic creations, etc. Also, copyleft is seen by precarity struggles as a possible way to respond to the contemporary process of enclosure, one not centered on land such as the historical enclosure movement of the 17th century prior to the Industrial Revolution. Rather, this time is about fighting against the enclosure of a new commons, the territories of knowledge. Precarity and the commons of knowledge are linked in this way:

But, what relation does all this have with precarity? Well, among the possible avenues of de-precariatization is that of assuring that the fruits of collective intelligence (from the development of free software to audiovisual production, passing through all types of

literary and musical creations) are ultimately for the use and enjoyment of all. Because they are born from the common and nourished by the common, because it would be the cultivating stock from which future immaterial creations will grow. If the land was once a common good for the few who managed to appropriate it, the moment has come for stopping the communal lands of knowledge from being also enclosed, the time of the freedom to access, distribute, modify, and enrich what belongs to everyone. (2005b)

With this process of enclosure of knowledge, different positions have emerged. While there is a general reinforcement of intellectual property laws via institutions, legal reforms, trade agreements and the media's criminalization of information sharing (pirated software, P2P, etc.), this has been accompanied by an increase of underground practices that challenge those very same laws. In Spain this double process is reflected on the one hand, by the growing role of the institution that defends authors' intellectual property rights - *Sociedad General de Autores Espanoles*- trying to develop a discourse of criminalization towards the extended practice of copying for free; on the other hand, by the emergence of a plethora of heterodox ways to relate to intellectual property rights:

“from *Top mantas* to retired folks to teenagers, they are all breaking those very same laws in an everyday basis by selling copies in the street or downloading videos, music and texts for free on their PCs. Hackers are not marginal anymore, we could talk about a proliferation of hacking practices and a generalized hacker culture” (interview to users of free software, hardware and licenses OTA architects, December 2007).

This hacking pragmatics could be the basis of a potential process of politicization, developing a critical understanding of consumption, or even questioning notions such as property or capitalist logic more broadly, which are some of the main pillars of precarity struggles. At the same time, it is a source of cooperative practices and parallel communities outside of the regular market. The main argument being used, on top of possible ethical and political ones, is ultimately pragmatic: the free movement and open sharing of information is the basis for a more fruitful,

efficient, and creative processes of intellectual production, acknowledging that the tendency towards privatization of knowledges notably diminishes those possibilities and denies better outcomes.³⁵

The Politicization of Sharing

The Spanish activist network *Compartir es bueno* (Sharing is Good) is one of those actors that works for “sharing knowledge, culture, technology and power [...] As a response to the ongoing menace to the free movement of information and open processes of communication; [such as the] mercantilization of culture and criminalization of free and creative exchange”. In their website they develop a bullet point manifesto which departing from the questioning of property laws in the terrain of intellectual production, develops a coherent argument that finalizes with a call for sharing not just particular productions but the very defense of the intellectual commons: *La propiedad intelectual es una contradicción...La creatividad se defiende compartiéndola...Compartir cultura es un derecho.*³⁶

The link with precarity is evocatively made in their self-definition paragraph: “we carry out copyleft practices, design campaigns against intellectual property laws, create community, and also, by doing those things, *we reconfigure precarity*”. The copyleft philosophy has been

³⁵ Among these “free culture” practices, there are two main modalities: 1) on the one hand, there is a great variety of copy left licenses (not only Creative Commons but ColorIURIS, GNU General Public License or LML to mention a few) that promote free copying and distribution as well as collaborative production of written texts, music, photos, radio programs, software programs (Linux/Open source), hardware material; and 2) on the other hand and complementary to the first one, it is the development of technical support in order to share archives between PCs via on-line through Peer-to-Peer programs (P2P) such as *E-Mule*, *Soulseek* or *Direct Connect*. The use of these kinds of licenses or P2P programs has produced popular projects such as *Wikipedia*, the collaborative encyclopedia online made up by entries coming from an open multiplicity of participants. It is important to notice that the use of these modalities of free exchange and collaboration is not always an ‘explicit’ political statement. However, there are many social movements’ initiatives trying to think through the possibilities of this copyleft culture from a clear political engagement:³⁷ collectives that focus explicitly on theorizing about the defense of the commons, put forward concrete campaigns, carrying out direct actions or developing technical tools as well as legal resources to deal with current property law regimes.

³⁶ See <http://compartiresbueno.net/index.php/manifiesto/>

intimately connected to precarity struggles and also to global justice movements more broadly. Most of the participants in these movements use email servers and webs based on open source programs, and their textual-graphic-musical production is under free licenses. Not only their own practices, but also some of their campaigns have focused on this issue: movements have organized world-wide campaigns against intellectual property laws such as the anti-TRIPS global campaign. Thanks to this campaign a quite secret treaty jumped into public light, its perverse consequences put under scrutiny such as the possible prohibition of generic medicines, thus limiting access to key drugs for AIDS or other epidemics and illnesses to small segments of the affected population. Another campaign focused on fighting Monsanto's patenting of seeds which would force many campesinos to increasingly depend on paying for their seeds (to the patent holder).

The very cyber-activists working on the development of technical infrastructures to share as much and as free information as possible, are reflecting on how the very exchange on those conditions, is producing notable effects on the formations of networks. They talk about a rhizomatic effect of the free circulation of knowledge, intensifying and multiplying the density and longitude of networks. This has effects on the nature of social mobilizations themselves. The free exchange of information in real time, via blogs or cell phones, are changing the very nature of moments of social unrest: exemplary cases are the Manila mobilization called via text messages; swarming counter-summits of the global justice movement; *Banlieu revolts* in France articulating a fast urban guerrilla via cellphones during the day and blogs at night; the March 13

mobilization against war and the conservative party in Spain via text messages; or even the apparently spontaneous Eastern European revolts (De Ugarte 2007).³⁷

6.3.4. Tools in the Making: Flexicurity, Basic Income and Commonfare

As we have mentioned, many activist collectives have taken up the autonomous Marxist analyses of the current nature of labor in order to develop concrete social and political practices updated to the current conjuncture. The demands linked to these analyses are not a return to previous fordist modes of employment or to welfare state policies. They argue that the value of cognitive/creative/affective labor can not be calculated in the same ways as previous factory labor. Also, they emphasize that the return to full and stable employment is not an achievable –or even desirable- goal. Given those presuppositions, it is important to start thinking about policy solutions adequate for a flexible but not exploitative labor market: some of the demands will be condensed in three interrelated concepts: *flexicurity*, *commonfare* and *basic income*. In the spirit of generating a common vocabulary among disperse yet similar initiatives dealing with precarity, this is how Precarias a la Deriva defines flexicurity in the *Precarious Lexicon*, compiling a set of demands that are currently circulating among precarity struggles:

It is the case that flexibility is increasingly benefiting capital and not those who try to balance themselves on the tightrope. From here arises the need to turn this situation around, in the sense of demanding securities and rights in the bosom of flexibility. It would be a matter of demanding and constructing flexicurity, as a contribution to a sort of new welfare state for intermitency. The dispositifs and demands are multiple: 1) *assuring the access to* knowledge generated by all, to housing, to real mobility (through free transportation and the abolition of migration regulations), to health and care; 2) generating a *universal basic income* that ends with the economic overturning of the bipolarity of temporary workers, a regularity in their incomes that would give them

³⁷ This very book –a referential reading in Spanish about networks- is actually a product of this free culture logic: from its inception, and through the elaboration process, the book material was freely accessed via blog, generating a rich debate that actually influenced in the final result of the book. The numerous editions, both electronic and in paper, are offered by the author to the *public domain*, meaning allowing free copying and distribution of the material.

negotiating power when they accede to a remunerated job and when they refuse to accept determined labor conditions and that permits the organization of strong networks of resistance in the times of non-work; and 3) studying the *creation of new labor rights* that respond to the new realities of temporary workers and would be aimed at avoiding the new forms of abuse as well as recognizing the wisdom and dexterity acquired across the length and width of these labor and vital trajectories enriched by mobility (changes of activity, of country, continuous education). (2005b, with author's corrections)



Figure 6.6. Poster for Euro-wide campaign around flexible labor markets

Flexicurity

Flexicurity then arises as a possible way to think of a new type of labor regime that without going back to the factory model or the 9 to 5 type of work, it is not based on low salary or absence of social protections. The possible advantages brought by recent labor transformations –such as increased mobility or less rigidity- are being reclaimed by choosing the term *flexicurity*. This term has been in the mouth of movements for some years now, since the Mayday mobilization of 2002 in Italy. Recently, the EU has begun to use as a possible framework to

discuss labor policies. The first public usage by the EU appears to have been in 2006 during an informal meeting by European Ministers. Since then a wide array of documents and events sponsored by the EU are dealing with the question of flexicurity.³⁸ While it is not possible to trace a cause-effect relationship, it is yet interesting to point to how the EU is now using a term, that while whose origins are not so clear, have been in broad use by discontented voices in Europe. Among those, some become increasingly central in media and public debate –such as the CPE in France, the Euromaydays in Italy or even the official unions increasing unwillingness to accept flexible measures without any kind of compensation to workers. This context of discontent might have provoked some rethinking among EU policy makers. Flexicurity, -as in the Danish Socialist government’s version-, appeared as a timely way to reframe the labor question in Europe.³⁹ While for central union federations flexibility meant nothing positive and the demand was to return to stable employment, new actors in the precarity struggles will point to how flexibility is not necessarily perverse if it is thought out of the exclusive logic of capital accumulation. What is needed is a solid demand for security mechanisms updated to flexible labor markets:

Precarity and flexibility are not synonyms, this allows to the Italian chainworkers and the French intermittents of spectacle to ask for *flexicurity*. This means secure access to resources while at the same time, maintaining labor flexibility and intermittency, and the possibilities that these open to develop different activities outside the labor regime. [...]

³⁸ It is important to note that the European Union is now using the very same term, especially the documents following the revised Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs, such as the Commission’s piece on “Towards Common Principles of Flexicurity: More and better jobs through flexibility and security” released in June 2007 (see Text #4 in Appendix for a definition of flexicurity) The EU has also established the Flexicurity Expert group, with several reports and a Flexibility publication, as well as organizing related events such as the Stakeholder Conference on Flexicurity 2007. To track the use of flexicurity by EU see http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/flex_steps_en.htm

³⁹ Although there is not enough evidence to further develop any claim, this interesting double use of flexicurity could be initially read as a response, cooptation, or conceit to citizens’ demands by the part of the EU, signaling the impact of movements in elite discourse.

Having a job then, is not anymore the central axis for the organization of transformative conflict. (Malo, from Precarias a la Deriva, 2005).

Commonfare

Given the initial character of these demands they are not always crystal clear and at times terms like *flexicurity* and *commonfare* are used distinctively and other times interchangeably.

However, there is always an explicit effort to evoke a new kind of welfare regime:

Flexicurity is a system of labor rights able to guarantee new security and protection forms for a kind of labor flexibility whose control and profit would be in the hands of the very same workers, and not under capital's interests. *Commonfare* implies a transformation of the welfare state, not through neoliberal policies, but towards an infrastructure able to guarantee the universal and public enjoyment of common goods -both material and immaterial ones. (Marcelo Exposito, translator's notes for Neuropa 2006).

We ask for the construction of *a new grassroots welfare* (desde abajo), able to guarantee direct income (in monetary terms) and indirect income (in the form of access to basic services: from housing to mobility, from knowledge to sociability to eco-sustainability). This set of proposals is called *flexicurity* in Italy, and calls for the prominence of the right to income (both direct and indirect) over the right to work (Fumagalli 2005)

The idea is to produce a set of condensed enunciations of the new rights and forms of struggle adequate for the workers of the 21st century. Inspired in the British Chartist movement that presented a charter with new rights in the 19th century to the UK's Parliament, it is time to review those postulates of the old social contract currently in crisis and invent new ones:

“three main enunciations could make up the index of the new charter of living labor: 1) right to mobility and status of universal citizenship; 2) right to access to information and free production of knowledges; 3) right to a minimum universal income as remuneration of unpaid cooperative work as well as open possibility for self-organization of living labor. This would allow for the material basis of a new regime of production and society called commonfare” (Rodriguez 2003)

Universal Basic Income

This demand is actually one of the most developed in terms of arguments and networks.⁴⁰ The fight for basic income has a long history beyond Spain, with diverse manifestations according to the place and specific time of the struggle. The best known version among some European countries consists of a state-based monetary remuneration, this being universal, individual and unconditional. Since everybody –not only those in salaried positions– participates in one way or another in the process of capital formation, everybody should get at least a piece of the pie: the sum would be estimated according to the minimum wage at the time. However, the version that is now more popular among precarious struggles goes beyond money. Based on certain analyses of the current state of capitalism, especially those coming from neo-Marxist and Feminist readings, we are passing through a transitional époque. According to authors such as Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato, the relationship has gone from capital/labor to capital/life. The tendency towards a kind of labor that include many characteristics traditionally associated with women’s work –such as flexibilization, vulnerability, availability, adaptability, improvisation, or multiple tasks– is blurring the clear lines between work and non-work. Spaces of reproduction as well as relational and cognitive activities –spheres of life in general– became sites of economic production strictly speaking. Given this context, the demand for a “basic income” can not be exclusively made in monetary terms, rather it would include a series of infrastructures, services and resources such as: housing, transport, access to knowledge, etc.

Basic income or renta básica in Spanish is understood as a mechanism for valorizing those activities that despite being constantly producing are nevertheless invisibilized, unrecognized and difficult to measure: affect, knowledge, relations, care, etc. The struggle for

⁴⁰ There is actually a long trajectory of different social movements with different definitions or approaches to basic income. However, I will not enter in to details here. For more information see: Iglesias (2004); Pinilla (2006) y Raventós (2007).

renta básica in these terms, would be the equivalent to the historical struggle for a salary by the mass-worker/factory worker. Given the new stage of capitalism, we need new rights. If the production of capital is distributed among more actors and various spheres, if economic activity has become more collectivized and more diffuse, then resources should be distributed further as well, and not based on individual property or an individual's amount of 'work'. *Renta básica* then becomes a tool for the recognition and remuneration of those cooperative and relational activities that are currently off the radar. This remuneration should be unconditional, and not based on quantifiable merit, because we are constantly productive, within and without our workspace. This version of *renta básica* would be an income not directly connected to productivity.

According to a referential text entitled *Le Revenu Garanti comme processus constituant*⁴¹, widely circulating among activists circles today, which we also encountered at the Sevilla Conference through Antonella Corsani's presentation, "ten years of labor policies have put two fundamental disconnections into evidence: first, employment is no guarantee for a satisfactory income; and second, economic growth is no longer a generator of employment". The first one speaks to how flexible labor policies brought about a multiplication of employment opportunities but in terms of temporary contracts, intermittent work, part-time work, young employment, etc. That allowed an extension of waged labor, but at the price of precarious conditions. This is the how unemployment is integrated into flexible production, with the consequent emergence of the 'working poor', a term coined in the US but increasingly in use in Europe. This shows how waged labor today is not necessarily enough to live; there is a strong

⁴¹Antonella Corsani and Mauricio Lazzarato. *Multitudes* n. 10, 2002

disconnection between work and income. The second one speaks about the failed relationship between economic growth and generation of employment. Given the current nature of markets, directly linked to just-in-time demand and depending on the fluctuating financial markets, production is more uncertain: “Those market and production uncertainties are passed as risks into the workers, who should assume them through flexible and precarious conditions and moderate salaries. For example, even in moments of growth, when benefits are picking up, the risk of massive layoffs does not disappear”.

According to Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato, those two disconnections have an important consequence: the direct influence of capital over life. Life itself becomes productive in all of its times (not only those happening at the company workspace); these labor modalities demand a subjective engagement that presupposes an overarching personal investment in constantly improving workers’ creative and relational skills; the clear-cut separation between production and non-production spaces becomes blurry, particularly those activities normally associated with the sphere of re-production become part of current capitalist production. Following that diagnosis, Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato as part of that growing trend that problematizes the idea of precarity as strictly focused on labor, they propose what they see as a necessary displacement of the central relationship capital-labor towards capital-life. Contemporary capitalist accumulation is not only founded on labor exploitation, but on the exploitation of knowledge, culture, free-time, relational resources of individuals (such as communication, sex, socialization), living material, imaginaries, etc... This transitory phase has been called “the passage from welfare to workfare”. Economic growth exceeds the limits of the company today, capital not only draws profit from waged labor, but also from all that collective

production that arises from social relations (intellectual, communicative, creative resources). Capital makes profit through dispositifs that go beyond the factory and waged labor, such as financial global markets appropriating social cooperation and individualized property laws over collective knowledge. However, capital is not recognizing –especially in monetary terms- that source of wealth.

Given that life itself has been put to work in this conjuncture, what strategies would be able to respond to this double disconnection? What kind of demands can be put forward by people affected by those changes? One of the proposals has been a universal and unconditional income, not as a final solution but as way to opening up a “constituent process”, a path towards new economic and social institutions that recognize the new character of social cooperation, the current production models based on collective goods and the subjects of this production. A universal and unconditional income could be a tool of self-valorization and material recognition of the activity of cooperation as a source of welfare. This formula would entail a monetary component as well as compensation “in species”: free access to health, education, information, water, energy, transport, and housing. Although similar, there is an important difference with the welfare state framework: “*Guaranteed Income* is not a dispositif of a social-democratic management of misery, but a fundamental tool to weakening the waged model and its coactions [...] moving forward to the abolition of the salariat”. According to the Italian participants at the gathering, the proposal of a *universal basic income* becomes a measure to deal with the question of increasing precarious living conditions brought about by “cognitive capitalism”.

Nonetheless, this reformulation of capital/life is not completely satisfactory for many other participants in the precarity struggles.⁴² According to these movements,, the current capitalist transformations in Europe are not limited to the process of becoming “the most competitive knowledge economy of the world,” following the Lisbon Strategy. It is not just the arrival of “cognitive capitalism” in the words of Italian movements but also the concomitant process of the EU becoming a *securitarian block*. This phenomenon is what movements have baptized as *Fortress Europe*. For these movements, the debates on immaterial labor are insightful but quite limited. Even if they try to go beyond the limits of labor, they remained quite capital oriented. By bringing the question of migration, the next bubbling process develops a forceful critique of the two previous processes as *capitalocentric* analyses. Migration and the border regime will try to tear at, yet again and even more forcefully, the concept of precarity. Let’s see how this conceptual stretching unfolds through the following bubbling.

6.4. The Intermingling of Precarity & Migration

Precarias a la Deriva is part of this current attempt at re-signifying precarity, bringing not only feminist debates on reproduction but also, theories of power that tackle racial, gender, colonial, and physical hierarchies. PD develops a fierce critique to the neo-marxist debates on ‘immaterial labor’ pointing to the limitation of being an extremely homogenizing analysis that does not take into account the layers of social value and consequent discrimination practices attached to each kind of ‘immaterial labor’. For example they say: while both are considered immaterial workers, it’s not the same to work as a sex worker than as a web designer. Also the multiple relations of power that individualize subjects according to different forms of domination

⁴² For a review of internal criticisms among movements within precarity struggles see final part of this chapter.

are ignored. Immaterial labor is blind to race, colonial history, and geographical asymmetries as well as to issues of legal status in terms of migration/citizenship as well as issues of disability, sexuality and other differentiated traits in each individual and in each population. *Precarias* pays special attention to the emergence of invisible hierarchies in organizing efforts as the product of embedded racism or prejudice.

The following is the call by *Precarias* for a picnic in the Park of *Casino de la Reina* in *Lavapiés* on May 1st 2008. This activity was a last minute idea to complement and also serve as an alternative to the main Madrid Mayday activity. The latter was a colorful and musical march in downtown without city permission, where undocumented migrants could not safely participate. The call captures the feeling of how precarity is currently understood by many collectives: as an unfixed and mobile concept, avoiding a fixed ideal of the “precarariat.” Precarity is used as a way of understanding a sort of trend occurring in many places with many populations stretching beyond the workplace and beyond national borders, into questions of social services, public spaces, housework *and* issues of citizenship.

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”. (Email communication in Precarias a la Deriva list-serve).

Within that wild amalgamate of precarious struggles, there is a quite significant portion linking the spheres of migration and precarity. These are the main used arguments to support this connection: 1) while the specificity and intensity of the migrant experience is well acknowledged, it is possible to find some points in common worthy of exploring; 2) not only is there a question of similarity, but the conditions normally associated with migrant workers, especially those without documents, are being slowly generalized, becoming somewhat paradigmatic traits of precarious labor; 3) the question of the border is not a problem dealing only with migration but concerns question of production, evidenced by exploring the specificities of the border-factory.⁴³ Each point is developed as follows:

⁴³ Some of the arguments about the growing intersection between precarity and migration have been elaborated by Spanish anthropologists such as Ubaldo Martínez Veira, developing ethnographic studies in some of the most conflictual areas of migrant labor, e.g. El Ejido. See *Trabajadores invisibles. Precariedad, rotación y pobreza de la inmigración en España* (2000) where one of his main hypothesis is that precarity is not just a phenomenon restricted to migrant labor, but it is a growing tendency among both autochthonous and migrant workers in Spain. See also “Organización del trabajo y racismo. El Ejido (España) en el año 2000” (2001) for a relevant case-study.

6.4.1. Migrant and Autochthonous Precarious: Unite!

There have been some efforts at finding parallel conditions and looking for alliances among precarious workers from abroad and those from the receiving countries. Some of these organizing initiatives are the following: in Spain, the process leading to the *Fadaiat* event; the cartographic-research project *Otra Malaga*, or the organizing by PD; in Italy, the discourse put forward initially by *Chainworkers* about *prec-cog-mig*, as the three types of precariat, has spread quite broadly; or at the European level, the *Frassanito* network has been very active in making that link between precarity and migration. This work has also begun to filter the language of other social movement actors. Several alternative unions, such as the CGT and SOC, openly connect precarity and migration; some migrant collectives, such as one of the *Sans Papiers* collectives of Paris also begin to speak of the ‘undocumented’ struggle as one against precarity.

This work of coordinating struggles has started to become visible during the mayday parades where from the calls-to action to the actual street marches, the question of migration is quite present. For example, in the following call for the 2004 EuroMayDay parade in Barcelona, this is how the two kinds of populations are linked:

There is a common sustained on tangible elements, rather than ideological ones, such as the way of inhabiting the city, the incoherent relationship between salary and work, the lack of guarantees for basic rights, cuts on freedom and militarization of the territory, as well as the ability to build spaces for living and producing outside official state-sponsored spheres or exclusively private spaces. It is obvious that migrants are situated in this context in a singular and differentiated way due to the status of non-citizenship and a general trait of lack of security and invisibility. *Migrantes y precarios. Señales de un devenir común.*⁴⁴

Some precarious movements make the connection between precarity and migration too quickly and quite flat. This is the case of the triad *prec-cog-mig*, a kind of tipology of the

⁴⁴ <http://estrecho.indymedia.org/newswire/display/7778/index.php>

different faces of precarity. When chainworker, cognitive worker and migrant worker are differentiated as three distinctive categories, the multiple overlapping between those three can easily be ignored, falling into homogenous figures, and reinforcing previous stereotypes. This is the critique made by PD in the Precarious lexicon. However, there have also been efforts at finding transversalities –common traits shared by different figures or workspaces, regardless of being of migrant or ‘national’ origin (such as the affective component of labor or a particular tactic of resistance). In that search for the common, there has always been though a special emphasis on the specificity and intensity of each experience, especially the migrant experience: “Queda claro que los inmigrantes se sitúan en este contexto de forma singular y diferenciada debido a su no-ciudadanía y mayor indefensión e invisibilidad”. In fact, different voices have been critical specifically of the analysis focused on “immaterial labor” because of its homogenizing tendencies.

6.4.2. *The Becoming-Migrant of Labor*

Migrant work is not just similar to some of the current forms of precarious labor. Some defend that is actually becoming *the paradigm* to define contemporary practices of production:

When we talk about the paradigmatic character of migrant labour, rather we want stress the fact that migrants are experiencing in advance the general conditions of contemporary labour, all the forms of depreciation and precarization. At the same time we want to point out that migrants` practices of mobility express a radical challenge to these processes of deprivation. (Statement by Frassanito Network in “Euromayday and Freedom of Movement” 2005)⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See <http://precariousunderstanding.blogspot.com/2007/01/05/euromayday-and-freedom-of-movement/#more-45>)

Thus, it is important to pay attention to and research those characteristics proper to contemporary migrant labor to see how it is shaping the current process of labor transformation. The analysis will not produce closed and eternal categories, but conjunctural and open conceptualizations using notions such as ‘becoming’:

“The current state of things is not the product of an inexorable destiny, rather it is the result of set of forces, including ingenious initiatives and conflicts lead by the different social actors. This condition of continuous making and remaking of the world is what we denominate *becoming*” (Fadaiat editorial team 2006: 84).

Thus, the analysis of the paradigmatic character of migrant labor is understood as a process denominated “the becoming-migrant of labor” which means:

“the centrality that mobility (both in a geographical or functional sense) has in labor today. Working conditions suffered by migrants today (such as informality in the contract, vulnerability, intense links between territory and employment, low salaries, lack of union rights, temporality, total availability, etc) are spreading today to the rest of workers” (Toret and Sglidia 2006:108).

However, it is important to note that claiming the centrality of migrant work does not imply to privilege the figure of migrant as the new political or revolutionary subject. Rather, it is claimed as a point of view that changes the perspective not only when looking at migration but at other topics; it would be something like migration as a “place of enunciation” in terms of the *Modernity/Coloniality* paradigm:

What we do claim is a point of view, a perspective that enables us to think and act differently – in a much more productive way about the issues at stake in the discussion, actions and crisis of the left in Europe. To assume migration as a point of view means to take distance from any political discourse on migration informed by paternalism and pietism. Migration, as we see it, needs to be considered as a social movement and we need to take into account the social protagonism of migration. We need to look at the manifold ways in which migration movements and struggles confront and challenge the reality of domination and exploitation. We must look not only at exclusion from citizenship, but also at practices of citizenship that take place even under the condition of illegality. We must look at behaviours, desires, imagination and the individual and collective projects that criss-cross the movements of migration. Instead of pointing at a

glorious new protagonist or a migrants' world of misery we need to understand one simple fact. The materiality of struggles and of social and political inventions does exist. Since these struggles and interventions do take place every day they call for our political and strategic articulation. These struggles and the potential they carry should not be simply considered in terms of a »special issue« on migration since what they show us exceeds the boundaries of any such narrow classification. (Frassanito Network, "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us. Movements and Struggles of Migration in and around Europe").⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Text distributed in European Social Forum in Athens, 2006.

The experience of migration then becomes a productive situated knowledge able to offer insightful analyses of contemporary transformations as well as imaginative and realistic proposals for other social mobilizations. But in order for migration to gain such an explanatory and propository role, it should be understood, at least in these two ways: on the one hand as internally multiple, impossible to capture by a homogenous category⁴⁷; and on the other hand, not just as the entrance of ‘the other’ at home coming from far away, but as a much closer phenomenon, *a social movement itself*, product of conflicts battled at home and abroad in the last decades:

In recent years, the transformations of citizenship and precarization of labour constituted two strategic fields around which the left and the social movements in Europe organized their struggle against ‘neoliberalism’. In both of these fields, the movements and struggles of migration provide a crucial input in disentangling the radical political imagination from the impossible dream of a return to an alleged ‘golden age’ of social state citizenship and of the ‘fordist’ compromise between labour and capital. At a first glance, migrants’ condition (social and political stratification, frontiers within citizenship and precarization of labour) reveal the brutality of the transformations that have reshaped citizenship and labour relations in the last two decades. These transformations are partly a result of a successful capitalistic response to the struggles that in the 1960’s and 1970’s criticized the social state and fordism, racism and sexism. They revealed and attacked the nightmare of factory discipline and social domination hidden beneath the rhetorical dream of the ‘integration’ of the other. But above all these transformations are the answer to the anti-colonial struggles and migratory movements of millions of women and men who globalized the world against the attempts of capital and empires to enclose global populations in nation-states (Frassanito Network).

Social and political stratification, frontiers within citizenship and precarization of labour as migrants’ conditions reflect what Etienne Balibar called the rise of a new apartheid in Europe. You can trace it in every European city; you can see it in the conditions of territorial, social and

⁴⁷ For a study on migration that share this same understanding of migration see Laura Maria Agustin (2007) *Sex at the Margins. Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry*. London: Zed Books

economic segregation most migrants live in. Yet, migrants have experienced the violence of these transformations not just in this predictable but also in a very peculiar manner. If we view the current transformation from the point of view of movements and struggles of migration, we can see something different: migrants' everyday practices are attempts to open up the borders of citizenship, win new spaces of freedom and equality, establish new transnational social spaces that link Europe to the whole world, and claim and affirm the right to mobility against the reality of labour and existential precarity. Let us repeat it: the struggles of migration are manifold and heterogeneous and as such they need to be examined at the level of everyday life where they do not necessarily take the shape of open political and social struggles (*Ibid*).

Such an eloquent notion of migration expressed by the pro-migration *Frassanito Network*—and informed by authors such as Etienne Balibar or Sandro Mezzadra— shows how these movements are envisioning the strategic interconnection between migration and precarity. While there are groups and campaigns that are focusing more exclusively on the question of migration as such, (e.g. sans papiers struggles, freedom of movement, papers for all, no one is illegal, no border camps), there are quite a lot of resonances among migration-networks and precarity organizations developing a kind of common political agenda. Specifically around the question of citizenship and rights, they both share the necessity of re-signification of such forms of legal definitions and consequent protections:

We would like to highlight that the status of citizenship (as is the case with “worker”) tied to certain guarantees of inalienable rights, is going through a terminal crisis. What use is there or me to have documents that names me a citizen if I inhabit Europe but cannot have access to housing, if I produce Europe and I have to do a balancing act just to subsist? An erosion of social, labor and civic rights associated with the status of Citizenship exists, such that the demand for recognition as citizen on the part of the immigrant population passes automatically through a battler to redefine that status that has today been emaciated. Citizenship, from now on, should be linked to obtaining a new

charter of rights of living labor. *It will be an other citizenship or it will not be.* (Entransito 2004, emphasis mine)⁴⁸

This call for a *citizenship-otherwise* would be the basis to re-think a new set of rights, participating in the debate about *social rights* from the very experience of extreme mobility and vulnerability. In this way, pro-migration movements are indeed expanding the notion of precarity and its demands.

6.4.3. Speaking from the Border: the Biopolitics of Precarity

The analysis of migration is also linked to the specificity of the border's place and culture. While a crossing-point and a line of division, the border is understood as a productive region with its own political economy. In the case of the Straits of Gibraltar, this laboratory of globalization, is filled with export-zones for Spanish and European companies in northern Morocco or the development of agricultural sectors depending on seasonal and 'low qualification' workforce in Southern Spain (Fadaiat editorial team 2006: 84). The EU border is also quite an idiosyncratic space because of its high levels of militarization. Militarization oriented towards policing who is able to cross and who is not. This selected surveillance allows and legitimates the use of violence towards specific populations. This speaks, in some cases more explicitly than others, to the Foucaultian notion of biopolitics.⁴⁹ In some of the texts by

⁴⁸ Entransito (space for research and action around precarious issues), "Migrantes y precarios. *Señales de un devenir común*, 2004 (<http://estrecho.indymedia.org/newswire/display/7778/index.php>). "Queremos destacar el hecho de que el estatuto de ciudadano (así como el de trabajador), vinculado a cierta garantía de unos derechos básicos inalienables, atraviesa una crisis terminal. ¿De qué me sirve tener un papel que me nombra ciudadano si habito Europa y no puedo acceder a una vivienda, si produzco Europa y tengo que hacer equilibrista para poder subsistir? Existe una erosión de los derechos sociales, laborales y civiles que se asociaban con el estatuto de la ciudadanía, por lo que la reivindicación del reconocimiento de ciudadanos de la población inmigrante pasa automáticamente por una batalla por redefinir este estatuto hoy vaciado. La ciudadanía a partir de ahora deberá ir ligada a la consecución de una nueva carta de derechos del trabajo vivo. *Será una ciudadanía otra o no será.*"

⁴⁹ This notion of power as a way of managing people as a group appeared first in *The Will To Knowledge*, defined as "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (History of Sexuality, Vol.I, p.140). Foucault further elaborates this concept during his courses at the *Collège de France*, translated into English in *Society Must Be Defended* (2003)

different activist groups, the notion of precarity brings in the meaning of ‘control over’, as being part of a system of domination over and classification of different populations:

“This strategy of governing [governabilidad], named by Foucault as biopower (the capacity to maintain life and to channel it towards certain forms and practices of living) appears with the development of capitalist accumulation, complementing, modifying and overlapping with the power to kill which was until that moment, the fundamental characteristic of sovereignty. Those disciplinary techniques for work (e.g. disciplining man and woman as working bodies through disciplinary institutions such as factory, family, jail or mental hospital) are combined with techniques of control, management and administrator of populations as human collections (e.g. thinking both men and women as part of the species)”. (Companera de Trabajo Zero, 2001:77, author’s translation)

By bringing in the question of populations, race becomes an important marker not to be ignored. Debates about precarity have usually been quite blind to racial considerations, however those networks working on precarity from the perspective of migration were much more aware to this other axis of hierarchy. Still, the Foucaultian notion of biopower would be a reference to gain insights about how racism is helpful to understand capitalist transformations. According to Lazzarato, following Foucault, the emergence of biopower has allowed the inscription of racism at the heart of the state mechanisms in order to support the “society of work”. He quotes Foucault’s lectures from *Society Must Be Defended* in order to bring in the question of racism and migration in his analysis of capitalist developments:

“race, racism, are the condition to accept the act of killing in a society of normalization. Of course, when I talk about killing I don’t mean just direct murder: the fact of exposing to death, multiplying the risk of death for some, or simply, the political death, meaning expulsion, rejection, etc.” (Foucault in Lazzarato 2006: 78).

According to Lazzarato, one should not think that racism was just a sin of Nazism, when biopower, as the acceptance of the right to kill, was generalized and shared by German society. During the postwar period and nowadays, biopower is intimately subordinated to the

reproduction of a society of work, in order to do so, the state does not stop at producing and nourishing racist mechanisms:

“This is the case of Europe, that wanting to reproduce a society of employment, develops a state besieged by migrants (foreigners) from within and from with out”
(Lazzarato 2006: 78)

Instead of that constructed division between the other and the local, movements are trying to find parallel elements among those defined in the mainstream as two populations: one of the shared elements would be the experience of *fear*. From traditional unions to media-activists they all talk about the strong connection between precarity and the generation of fear. Given the lack of rights and the fragmentation of the workforce, the worker becomes more vulnerable than ever. The menace of fear is extremely effective to create submissive workers: fear of being fired, fear of the company moving overseas, fear of not finding a job, etc. In the case of migrants, this fear multiplies exponentially: the extreme vulnerability of a person without papers come from the fear of deportation, fear of random detention and police brutality, etc. These series of existential menaces help maintain the levels of precarity at work. Through those systems of control, workers are forced to accept conditions otherwise rejected, resolving in this way some of the ‘needs’ of the market.⁵⁰

It is important to note that one of the most active and relevant movements’ sectors engaging the question of the border is the growing community of critical mappers engaging in a prolific production of militant cartographic projects.⁵¹ Some of the most sophisticated and

⁵⁰ A member of Precarias a la Deriva has been working on investigating the dilemmas of migration in Madrid, as part of the research project conducted by Observatorio Metropolitano. Some of the conclusions look at the emergence of ‘governmentalites’ to deal with migrant populations and racism See: “Diferencias gobernadas, nuevos racimos” <http://diagonalperiodico.net/spip.php?article6455>

⁵¹ For a deep engagement with this cartographic proliferation, and specifically around the question of the border see Sebastian Cobarrubias’ dissertation “Mapping Machines”

expressive maps dealing with the current migration regime in Europe are: the *Straits of Gibraltar* by Hackitectura (Spain); *Architectures of Migration* by An Architektur (Germany); *Death by the Thousands at the Doors of Europe* by Le Monde Diplomatique (France); *Foreign's Camps in Europe* by MigrEurop (France); and the *MigMap* by Labor K3000 Collective (Germany).⁵² These cartographic projects are part of a broader set of struggles demanding the free circulation of people.

6.4.4. Freedom of Movement

There is an explosion of groups and campaigns that are focusing more exclusively on the question of migration as such, (e.g. sans papiers struggles, freedom of movement, papers for all, no one is illegal, no border camps). I cluster them here according to who are the actual actors of the struggle: if they are people born in the countries of arrival, those are struggles under the tag of *solidarity*; in the case of being the immigrants themselves who are the main active participants, it is about *self-organizing*; and finally, when it is a combination of both, the tag would be *joint efforts*. These three modes of organizing introduce a series of terms able to reframe the debates and perception of the 'problem of migration' among the general population. Together –solidarity, self-organization, and joint efforts- put forward a series of demands calling for free movement of people. The development of this contribution -or conceptual tool- is traced here via the engagement with particular groups, campaigns and terminology.

⁵² For a review of these concrete cartographic projects as part of a broader trend in militant mapping see Casas and Cobarrubias (2007) "Drawing Escape Tunnels through Borders" in *An Atlas of Radical Cartography. Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* (pp. 51-69)

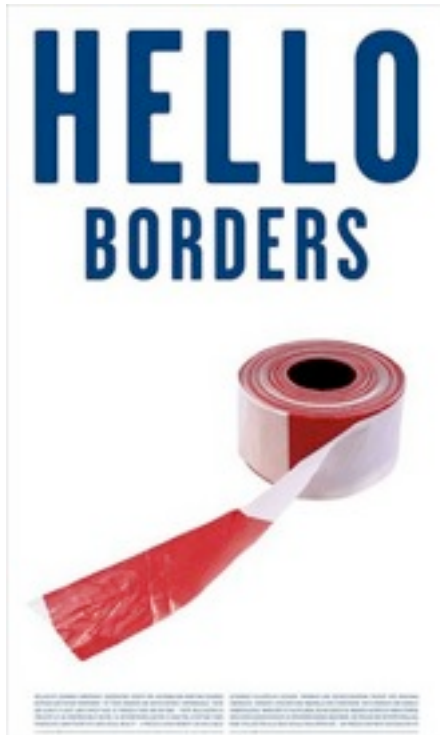


Figure 6.7. Poster of Euro-wide campaign against EU border policies

Solidarity

Composed by non-immigrant members, these solidarity movements call attention and denounce the consequences of an increasingly repressive migrant legislation and border situation. Reframing the European Union as *Fortress Europe*, they convey the image of a continent armoring itself from some outside threat. Beyond the myriad of anti-racist, human rights and pro-refugee associations spread throughout the EU there have been some notable moments and strategies that have served to catapult the migration issues into the public sphere. This is the case of the multi-country strategy of the *No Border camp*, setting up campsites and protest centers at EU border areas, by EU summits or at important points in the EU migration policing system. The mass presence of activists and actions were conceived as mechanisms for

visibilizing the border issue as constitutive of the new Europe under construction.⁵³ Other solidarity efforts include the campaign “*Kein Mensch ist Illegal*” (No One is Illegal). Initiated by artist-activist groups in Germany, this campaign has refocused the discussion around migration by destabilizing the insistence on ‘legality’. The emphasis is rather on how human beings in and of themselves cannot be “illegal” (they may commit illegal acts which is different from being illegal). The goal is to defuse the vocabulary of ‘illegal’ or ‘illegal alien’. This simple slogan accompanied by a series of public art projects have traveled around Europe and even to the US. Other early solidarity efforts include the performances-interventions in airplanes called “*deportation class*” actions. The passengers on commercial flights were trained to denounce the use of commercial flights for deportations often causing the captain of a flight to request the deportee and police off the flight.

Self-organization

The processes of overt self-organization by immigrant groups imply that immigrants themselves led the organizing and actual politization of their own situation.⁵⁴ This organizing takes different forms, including mutual aid networks, nationality based organizations, or more informal local arrangements. For the purpose of this chapter, the focus is on those cases that work on the advancement of certain demands and rights, often revolving around the rights of mobility, opportunities for survival, and a redefinition of citizenship or at least asylum. This is

⁵³ The first *No Border camp* took place interestingly at the EU summit in Tampere, Finland in 1998, only one year after the important ‘Sans-Papiers’ movements in France. That EU summit is considered key both by EU legislators as well as by migrants’ rights activists. The figure of the “extra-communitarian” was to a large degree coined and defined, becoming the official term used in EU policies regarding migration.

⁵⁴ The term immigrant self-organization is problematic, especially in countries where there is a direct colonial relationship involved. For instance, are the Banlieue riots an explosion of an immigrant community or a post colonial revolt? As early as the 70’s there were demands being made by North African migrant workers in France. less than ten years before that, these demands would be construed as anti-colonial demands and probably repressed as such.

the case of the mobilizations by the *Sans-Papiers* in France. This refers to the uprising of undocumented migrants (*san papiers* = without papers) especially during the 1996-1997, using “occupations” of friendly Catholic parishes as one of its principal strategies in reclaiming access to documents, creating visibility and denouncing repression. The series of church-occupations, hunger strikes, and marches by the *Sans-Papiers* in France made national and international news for months, constituting a critical inflection point at defining the immigrant rights debate. The visible explosion of migrants’ voices signified the entrance into the French vocabulary of ‘sans-papiers’. The more common terms thus far to refer to the migrant population -*alien*, *outsider*, *foreign*- used to foster hierarchical relationships between the ‘native population’ and those “ex-communitarian” ones. The possible relations imaginable were either racism or pity. By naming themselves *undocumented*, the intended effect was to de-centering questions of distinct ethnic background or country of origin, and rather, framing difference as a minor and arbitrary questions of having or not having the appropriate documents. This moment acted as a reference point for many immigrant communities and movements throughout the EU.⁵⁵

Other examples of migrants’ self-organization include those efforts not only in the country of arrival, but also in the country of origin. This is the case of the large infrastructural camps of migrants at the other side of the border. For instance, in Morocco, migrants waiting to cross into Spain (over the border fences or via some limited boat routes) have developed campgrounds with complex logistical organization and regular meetings and assemblies to decide on attempts or points to cross. These camps also include mobile phone hacking devices in order to maintain contact between camp members, people in Spain (other migrant, migrant rights

⁵⁵ In Spain itself, 2000 and 2001 were filled with a similar set of actions, all of which put the migration issue into the public sphere focusing on the new figure of “sin papeles” and the question of ‘migrant rights’ (Interview with Ferrocarril Clandestino, May 2007 and ATRAIE February 2007).

activists, press), and other migrants at other points in Morocco or along the transit route towards the border.⁵⁶ Finally, briefly mention the migrants' rebellions at other kind of *camp*s, this time in Europe. These are the refugee and immigrant detention centers dispersed all over the European continent used to house people pending their asylum cases, or while processing their expulsion.⁵⁷

Joint Efforts

The last modality of fighting the consequences of the EU current migration system is based on cooperative relationships between self-organizations of migrants and European based activists. One of the main targets of these emerging coalitions are actually the migrant detention camps, re-baptized as “our own European Guatánamos”. The most emblematic example of this kind of cooperative organizing in Spain is *El Ferrocarril Clandestino* (the Underground Railroad), making reference to the historic group in the US that organized to help enslaved Africans escape from bondage to freedom. Its specific goal is to co-organize projects, campaigns and actions to win concrete goals, like the release or normalization of some migrants. The Ferrocarril grew out of the *Caravana a la Valla* (the Caravan to the Fence) of 2005, a Spanish and European effort that traveled across the Spanish territory and toward the border fences of Ceuta and Melilla just after the mass attempt to cross the fences in the Fall of 2005. The experience of the Caravana lead to many discussions about how to understand the border as both an internal and external phenomenon and how to best support or strengthen migrant struggles and link them with autochthonous struggles, including that one of precarity.⁵⁸ It is important to

⁵⁶ Police raids from Moroccan security forces have lead to mass attempts to cross the border based out of these camps, especially in the summers of 2005 and 2006. See “Relatos de Migrantes de una Guerra en la Frontera” (2006).

⁵⁷ See Europe of Camps map accessible at www.migreurop.org/IMG/pdf/carte-en.pdf

⁵⁸ See *Fronteras Interiores y Exteriores* (2006).

note that many members of PD have been extremely involved in the Ferrocarril process since its inception:

Some of us participated in the ‘Caravan’ back in 2005. We heard the testimonies of some of those who trespassed the fence.⁵⁹ What we saw at the border got hammered into our retinas. What we witnessed though was not so far away, its other side was right by us, in our own neighborhood: Lavapiés. We had to do something about the situation. This something though needed and wanted to be in line with emergent notions of solidarity we were working on within our precarity struggles: not one based on *assistentialism* (welfare or service based), but rather on processes of mutual support that go back and forth, today I can give you a hand, tomorrow you will help me out...this is where we start linking and thinking through our own precarity with immigrant’s acute precarity for the absence of legal papers... (Interview with PD/Agencia member, October 2007)

The growth into the *Ferrocarril Clandestino* has led to the politicization of particular cases of irregular detentions, and to make common events of survival -such as weddings for legalization- into micro instances of struggle. There has been also a concern for the legal question, including initiatives such as workshops focused on understanding the EU formularies for asylum seekers, and the publication of a resources guide for migrants.⁶⁰

The common denominator among these three interrelated modalities of struggle is the demand for freedom of movement, pushing for a re-conceptualization of notions of legality, difference and citizenship more broadly speaking in a globalized context. They make the explicit connection between precarity and the migration question through their texts and actions, pointing how the experience of illegality exponentially multiplies the intensity of two main traits of precarity: uncertainty and vulnerability. Every activity, every space becomes unsafe and

⁵⁹ Those testimonies are accessible via indymedia estrecho, or publications such as *Guerre aux Migrants. Le livre noir de Ceuta et Melille* (2007) and *Fronteras Interiores y Exteriores* (2006) also prefaced by a PD member.

⁶⁰ This “*Guía por la Libertad de Movimiento*” can be picked up for free at different locations and includes information on everything from registering with the municipality, renting, legal rights of the undocumented, unions that are friendly to migrants and provide support, where to go for Spanish classes, etc. All this collected material under the banner of: “Precari@s en Movimiento (Precarious People on the Move): Precarias and Migrants united for a world without clases and no borders” (Guía Spanish versión, 2006).

potentially risky: from the initial travel, to finding a job, to the everyday at the workplace or at the new home, to the very communication with family abroad. This proliferation of uncertainty transforms precarity into something that concerns the overall existence. It is this overarching notion of precarity that will also be the basis of the following set of struggles cluster under the fourth bubbling process.

6.5. Precarity as Everyday Vulnerability

The development of the concept of precarity thus far has been expanding beyond the realm of labor through notions such as precarity as bio-political or 'social precarity'. Nonetheless, the production centered discourse of immaterial labor still frames most of the debates around precarity in Europe. In parallel to this development, feminist inspired activist groups have been working on a different understanding of precarity. They call attention to the spaces of reproduction and insist on how life itself is being transformed. This is not just about life being made productive, as the Italian neo-Marxists argue, but rather it refers to the overall transformation of the conditions of living. In line with this feminist understanding of precarity, *Precarias a la Deriva* explains the relationship between labor and life in the following way:

But: what has life to do with this [precarity]? 1) First of all, life is productive. We are not among those who say, "Life has been put into production." It has always produced: cooperation, affective territories, worlds... but now it also produces profit. It has been subsumed by the capitalist axiomatic. 2) Second of all, precarity cannot be understood only from the labor context, from the concrete conditions of work of this or that individual. A much richer and illuminating position results from understanding precarity as a generalized tendency towards the precarization of life, affecting society as a whole. 3) Thirdly, labor has ceased to be the site that determines individual and collective identity, a place of spontaneous encounter and aggregation and a place that nourishes the utopia of a better world. Why? Because of the failure of the worker movement and the process of capitalist restructuring that accompanied it, as much as the push of the desire towards singularity (by feminist movements, black movements, anti-colonial movements

and other movements linked to the spirit of '68) that made the worker movement stalls from the inside. (PD, 2005b, fragment of entry on biosindicalism).

6.5.1. Feminist Contributions & PD's Theorization of Precarity

These are some of the strongest feminist critiques to the Italian post-Marxist hypothesis on immaterial labor: voices from feminist political efforts have decried how the Italian post-Marxist hypothesis is largely Northern and male biased (Federici 2008; Mitropoulos 2005; Precarias 2004). In this interpretation, the discussion on immaterial labor as articulated by Italian thinkers and movements are invisibilizing other forms of precarious labor. Specifically, those jobs that despite holding similar traits with certain aspects of immaterial labor –mainly in reference to the communicative and affective components- may have existed for a longer time but without receiving the same theoretical attention or political importance. This refers to work such as domestic work and reproductive labor, work carried out by migrants or even newer jobs such as call center. This work is often held by minorities in the Global North, and is more embodied than the portrait knowledge-worker. Often these are precisely the kinds of jobs historically ascribed to women, and increasingly performed by the growing migrant population in Europe.

In fact these critiques have highlighted how the framing of many debates around precarity as a “new” sociological phenomenon (as opposed to simply a new politicization) fail to see the Fordist compromise achieved in some countries as both exceptional and predicated on the extreme exploitation of ‘others’:

The experience of regular, full-time, long-term employment which characterised the most visible, mediated aspects of Fordism is an exception in capitalist history. That presupposed vast amounts of unpaid domestic labour by women and hyper-exploited labour in the colonies. This labour also underpinned the smooth

distinction between work and leisure for the Fordist factory worker. The enclosures and looting of what was once contained as the Third World and the affective, unpaid labour of women allowed for the consumerist, affective 'humanisation' and protectionism of what was always a small part of the Fordist working class (Mitropoulos 2005: 4)

Furthermore, these feminist analyses that have tried to complexify the critique of precarity resulting from the debates on cognitive capitalism pose an additional and complex question: if one mobilizes as a subject that emerges from a position inherent to a stratified capitalist relationship how can one supersede the hierarchies and exploitative relations that this particular subjectivity presupposes? In other words:

To put the question in classical Marxist terms: to what extent can an identity which is immanent to capitalism [...] be expected to abolish capitalism, and therefore its very existence and identity? Does a politics which takes subjectivity as its question and answer reproduce a politics as the idealised image of such? A recourse to an Enlightenment Subject replete with the stratifications which presuppose it, and ledgered according to its current values (or valuations), not least among these being the distinction between paid and unpaid labour.

[...] Transformed into organisational questions: how feasible is it to use precarity as a means for alliances or coalition-building without effacing the differences between Mimi and the Philosopher, or indeed reproducing the hierarchy between them? Is it in the best interests for the maquiladora worker to ally herself with the fashion designer? Such questions cannot be answered abstractly. But there are two, perhaps difficult and irresolvable questions that might still be posed.

[...] How does the fast food 'chainworker', who is compelled to be affective, compliant, and routinised not assume such a role in relation to a software programming 'brainworker', whose habitual forms of exploitation oblige opinion, innovation and self-management? How is it possible for the latter to avoid assuming for themselves the specialised role of mediator let alone preening themselves in the cognitariat's mirror as the subject, actor or 'activist' of politics in this relationship? To what extent do the performative imperatives of artistic-cultural exploitation (visibility, recognition, authorship) foreclose the option of clandestinity which remains an imperative for the survival of many undocumented migrants and workers in the informal economy? (Mitropoulos 2005: 6)

These critiques could seem to nullify much of the force of precarity as a concept. In this view precarity seems ‘self-centered’ in the best of cases and doomed to failure in the worst. Yet these feminist critiques have also opened the possibility to politicize other terrains of struggle neglected or unanalyzed in other interpretations of precarity via a cautious and un-heroic encounter with the concept. The work of *Precarias a la Deriva* has been central in this regard suggesting provocative alliances and unexpected theorizations of labor beyond the workspace (2004).

Even if Italian post-Marxists insist on the idea that “life has been put to work”, feminist approaches would defend that the spheres of production and reproduction have both been sources of work for a long time. However, each sphere holds distinctive traits, including the fact that reproductive tasks have been historically invisibilized, unremunerated and usually lacking social and cultural recognition. The change nowadays consists on that some of the characteristics of the reproduction sphere are becoming important sources of capital valorization. While sharing a few analytical points with post-marxist theories of labor transformation, the specificity of this understanding of precarity comes from a distinct conceptual framework, that of feminist economics. While the first one, draws from the Marxist notion of ‘general intellect’ in order to arrive to the concept of “immaterial labor”; the second one is based on putting attention on the reproductive world getting to the notion of “the becoming-woman of labor”.

Feminization of Labor

This kind of feminist analyses are mostly available at different numbers of the French magazine *Multitudes* under the term “devenir-femme du travail” (the becoming-woman of labor). In a similar line, *Precarias a la Deriva* acknowledges these changes in labor including an

increase of relational and cognitive aspects in the productive machine. They develop their analysis starting from the transformations and expansion of the realm of reproduction historically assigned to women, referring to this process as the “feminization of labor”:

It is the process through which traits that usually characterized women’s work and lives such as flexibility, vulnerability, total availability, high degrees of adaptation, talent for improvisation, and [the] ability to simultaneous[ly assume] roles and tasks (as housewives, wives, mothers, grandmothers, daughters, nurses, teachers, midwives) are nowadays spreading through a growing spectrum of types of employment, for both men and women (TrabajoZero 2001: 75, authors translation).

The feminization of labor refers to this growing presence of characteristics (and their servile dimensions) proper to the kinds of jobs/tasks historically assigned to women (at least in those western societies or the way their history has been narrated), into different contemporary sectors going from web designers to tomato-pickers. In a broader sense, the feminization of labor implies that the affective-relational component of those historically women’s tasks is becoming a general tendency of labor as such. It becomes a common quality of different kinds of labor as well as a source of value.⁶¹ This explanation that starts from ‘woman’s work’ as the analytical matrix is presented as less cerebral and more embodied than the discourse of immaterial labor, in the sense that acknowledges the very material aspects of affective labor (Trabajo Zero 2001: 78). Both feminist and post-marxist trends shared ideas such as the importance of life stressing the notion of “biopolitical production”. While developing similar arguments, they stem from distinctive points of departure and references. For example, feminists are in agreement with Virno’s counter-revolution argument about how capital was able to re-appropriate the desire of creativity and cooperation from the movements of the 60s putting production out of the factory.

⁶¹ This meaning of “feminization of labor” is quite different from other uses of the same term proliferating in sociological texts as the increasing number of women in manual industries in the ‘Third World’ (i.e. the ‘dexterity’ of women in textile maquiladoras) or the entrance of women in the waged labor market.

Nonetheless, while PD agrees that capital has not invented anything new, they contend that actually what capital has discovered and appropriated are the subversive desires of visibilization by feminist movements and women in general, in order to extract profit from their characteristics (Trabajo Zero 2001: 78).

From a feminist perspective then, *Precarias a la Deriva* see immaterial labor debates as too production centered; instead, they opt for an understanding of precarity that takes the blurring of the realms of production and reproduction into account. This emphasis on reproduction spaces is captured by the term “feminine precarity”.⁶² PD engaged in a research project in which, through a close engagement with their own experiences they refined the notion of precarity to articulate a more situated version of it. Their research coalesced around the notion of ‘*precariedad femenina*’ as a particular form of flexible labor (gendered but not sexed). This concept offers an understanding that is able to capture the effects of current transformations on the continuum of production-reproduction-and in-betweens. One of this project’s contributions to the notion of precariedad consists in breaking the distinction between ‘labor’ and ‘life’ usually maintained by traditional political economists. PD’s own definition of precarity emphasizes this necessary blurring of spheres speaking of a general tendency towards uncertainty:

“In order to overcome the dichotomies of public/private and production/reproduction, and to recognize and give visibility to the interconnections between the social and the economic that make it impossible to think precarity from an exclusively labor and salary based point of view, we define precarity as *the set of material and symbolic conditions that determine a existential uncertainty with respect to the sustained access to the essential resources for the full development of the life of a subject*” (PD 2005, my italics).

⁶² Other feminist initiatives in Europe inspired by PD’s notion of precarity are *Precas* (Italy) and *NextGeneration* (Brussels)

Production and reproduction are so interwoven that it is no longer possible to speak about just precarious labor, but rather, precarious life. This is where they introduce the notion of “precarization of existence”. This different approach emphasizes how precarity is a *process*, not a particular state of affairs, neither a sociological category nor a fixed identity:

Notwithstanding, in the present context it is not possible to speak of precarity as a differentiated state (and, as such, to distinguish neatly between a precarious population and another guaranteed one), but rather that it is more fitting to detect a *tendency to the precarization* of life that affects society as a whole as a threat (PD 2004: 27).

Precarization of Life

Within this framework of precarity as unfolding processes towards increasing levels of uncertainty vulnerability, *Precarias a la Deriva* arrives to the notion of *precarization of existence*:

In the day to day, precarity is a synonym for some labor and existential realities that are increasingly destructured: fragmented spaces, hyper intensified and saturated times, the impossibility of undertaking middle- to long-term project, inconsistency of commitments of any kind of indolence and vulnerability of some bodies submitted to the stressful rhythm of the precarious clock. Some bodies debilitated by the inversion of the relation of forces (now on the side of capital), by the difficulties of building bonds of solidarity and mutual aid, by the current obstacles for organizing conflicts in the new geographies of mobilities and the constant mutations where the only constant is change (2004: 35).

As part of their research project, in order to address the complexity of precarity understood as an overarching process, PD identified several axes of study, some of the initial ones being: *mobility, border territories, bodies, knowledges and relationships, entrepreneurial logic, income, and conflict* (PD 2004). Besides pointing out the specificities of precarious situations, they never claim this phenomenon is completely new, relating it to historical processes where similar conditions were brought about by distinct capitalist developments.

However, they argue that one cannot just ‘cut and paste’ analyses that may have been valid a hundred or more years ago, one needs to develop conjunctural and geo-historically specific research (Malo 2004). From that research experiment one of the main findings that needed further engagement was the question of care. They identified a common component among precarious jobs performed by women: from a domestic worker to a tele-marketer⁶³, each one in its own way, had to deal with care activities (being in charge of children or elderly people or showing understanding and affective behavior on the phone). Based on their research sections “globalized care” (2004: 217-248) and “the communicative continuum of sex-attention-care” (2004: 64), the question of care will become one of the central themes for next PD’s political steps. Care will be also present for other feminist movements, influencing the overall realm of precarity struggles (Puig de la Bellacasa 2008).

Precarity & Care

These new and metamorphic forms of life can get caught by the discourses and technologies of fear and insecurity that power unfolds as dispositifs of control and submission, or, and this is what we are betting on, they can conceive new individual and collective bodies, willing to edify organizational structures of a new logic of care that, faced with the priorities of profit, place in the center the needs and desires of persons, the recuperation of life time and of all its creative potentialities (PD 2005b).

What some of these feminist social movements mean by *care* are those material and immaterial tasks that provide security and comfort both to others and to oneself –such as cleaning, cooking, nursing, rearing, smiling, reassuring, etc. – activities necessary to sustain life itself (Women’s Day Madrid manifesto 2007).⁶⁴ So, what does care have to do with precarity?

⁶³ For a transcription of a drift-expedition with a tele-marketer see «Sin el mute. Relato de una deriva con teleoperadoras rebeldes», en Precarias a la deriva, *A la deriva (por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina)*, Traficantes de sueños, Madrid, 2004, p. 111-117.

⁶⁴ For a developed definition of care as cooperation, interdependency, social ecology and transversal everyday activity see Precarias a la Deriva (2003) *Una huelga de mucho cuidado*. Contrapoder #7

Certain feminist groups, such as PD, have been working on the multiple intersections between these two realms. First of all, recent socio-economic transformations such as women's access to labor markets, migratory movements, welfare state and labor reforms, have supposed a profound challenge to the organization of care work. The dismantling of the welfare state system has been especially key, through the reduction in social programs- such as publicly supported elderly care, childcare, after school programs, healthcare for handicapped family members. These programs served as a cushion to the massive entrance of women in the labor market. With the lower levels of public funding for those activities related to care, there is an intensification of what many feminist movements have called "the care crisis".⁶⁵

Second of all, those indispensable but unfulfilled care tasks -unfulfilled by the 'traditional' woman's role and by the welfare state model-, are increasingly entering into the regular market and underground economy. These remunerated care-based sectors -such as domestic work- usually held by women, are one of the most precarious forms of employment: in terms of contract, labor rights and conditions, employee-employer relationship, etc. On top of the low labor protections and often being off of the radar of the public sphere, domestic work is increasingly being done by immigrant women, with different ethnic backgrounds, usually recently arrived from their countries of origin in search of regulating their migration status. This question has sparked quite a lot of debate about issues such as: the global economy of care, where care becomes the primary 'export' of many 'poor' countries; or *GCC's* or *Global Care Chains*, with "global women" acting as mums or family care givers in multiple countries with

⁶⁵ See C. Borrego, A. Pérez Orozco and S. del Río, "Precariedad y cuidados", in *Materiales de reflexión*, nº 7, *Rojo y Negro*, September 2003; Precarias a la Deriva, "Cuidados globalizados", *A la deriva por los circuitos de la precariedad femenina*, Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid, 2004; Cristina Vega, "Interrogar al feminismo. Acción, violencia y gubernamentalidad", in *Multitudes*, nº 12, 2003; A. Pérez Orozco, *Perspectivas feministas en torno a la economía: el caso de los cuidados*, Consejo Económico y Social, Madrid, 2006.

households stretching thousands of miles⁶⁶. Thus, precarity in these domestic work sectors needs specific analyses and particular ways of intervention to be carefully thought and discussed especially by those affected. The next section will review how this line of work has been pursued by PD during its current phase working with a domestic workers organization based in Madrid.

The third connection between precarity and care is being made by emphasizing how the ecological logic of care –as mutual interdependency- is under threat because of the increasing precarization of existence, and its concomitant logic of fear. The high level of uncertainty and continuous insecurity is due to those everyday concerns of moving constantly (to find work, housing, etc.), to renew CVs, contracts, migration papers, etc. The intensity and stress of contingent labor brings along a lack of time and resources to engage in non-remunerated care activities, with the consequent care deficit for one’s family, for others and for oneself. The micro-politics of fear are also exacerbated by the intensification of the macro-politics of security. The increasing presence of the securitarian discourse is justified by the potential of ‘terrorist attacks’ or ‘domestic robbers’ bringing along regressive migratory policies or self-imposed ghetto-based urbanism through enclosed communities. The connection of precarity with fear is made by PD in the following way:

Precarity works as a blackmail introducing fear in different spheres of life: we are susceptible to be fired tomorrow because of our kind of contract, we could be evicted or vacated tomorrow because rent and mortgage prices are rising but our salaries don’t; we are susceptible to be with no child-care or no care for ourselves in the future because of a lack of public support, expensive prices of care tasks and the deterioration of our community relationships. [...] The politics of fear transform those subjects that need care or demand rights, into poor victims or into dangerous subjects in contrast with the rest of ‘normalized’ society. (PD 2003)

⁶⁶ Many of these analyses follow the book by Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2002) *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. London: Granta Publications.

Against this predominant logic of fear and increasing securitization, feminist movements are working to recuperate and to politicize the logic and practice of care. From this process of politicization of care, a series of conceptual and tactical proposals have arisen. These are reviewed in chapter 8 on Care.

6.5.2. Precarity and Health

Precarity, through the lens of care and life itself, is intimately linked to the vulnerability of our own bodies. The corporeal fragility is emphasized in analyses of current transformations by putting the body in the center when speaking about capitalism, securitarian logic or precarization of existence more broadly. The basic question of health comes up when enumerating the many consequences of precarity: from labor casualties –such as the sky rising number of deaths among construction workers in Spain- to more subtly connected bodily episodes such as chronic illness. This is the case of the ACT UP campaign explicitly connecting AIDS and precarity.

ACT UP, born out of New York and then expanding to Paris and other places, was 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 health services become more democratic and less pharmaceutical-driven. ACT-UP Paris has since then developed its own trajectory, trying to participate in other ongoing social mobilizations, bringing in the AIDS question to contemporary political debates. This is how the ex-president of ACT-UP-Paris defined the current campaign to us:

“Act Up Paris is not as a single issue organization, this is what defined ACT-UP NY and now they are declining quite a lot. Our goal has been to cross our struggles with other problematics. Now we are linking the question of AIDS with that of precarity through the campaign: “SIDA: La Précarité Tue” (AIDS: Precarity Kills). We put shocking information out such as that today in France, 50% of people who tested positive for HIV are living under the poverty level, and 22% do not have personal housing. This leads us to alliances and team work with a variety of sectors, including those engaged in precarity struggles” (Interview to ex-president of Act Up Paris, April 2007)

The population of people with disabilities is also starting to think about precarity in order to fight for dignity and social recognition of the value of their own bodies. The incipient efforts to bring these two issues together are being made through organizations working outside of service structures marked by *asistencialismo* (disempowering sort of service provisions) that predominate handicapped organizations. Rather, they consider themselves to be part of a “movement for independent life” reclaiming that those people with any kind of mental or physical impediment, should have the same civil rights, options and control over their lives as other people without those handicaps⁶⁷. These groups are redefining the notion of handicap as “functional diversity”, defending that what is actually handicapped is the very system, unable to recognize and integrate different human bodies and diverse capacities. This anti-systemic critique is not only empowering a sector that has been usually positioned as victims but also opening doors to work together –hand by hand- with other anti-systemic movements.⁶⁸ Finally, sexuality is also being linked to precarity through the critique towards the prominence of the heterosexual contract and patriarchy as the basis of the whole capitalist system. Despite some entrepreneurial initiatives to make profit of certain sexualities, sexual diversity is rarely

⁶⁷ See “Breve historia del movimiento de vida independiente” at <http://www.minusval2000.com/relaciones/vidaIndependiente/historia.html>. Accessed on November 20th 2008.

⁶⁸ Actually, one of the current alliances of PD is with one of these groups, the national network *Foro de Vida Independiente*.

promoted by the system. According to the lesbian and gay voices within precarity struggles, sexual diversity is put under the radar to be normalized and integrated to the whole production-reproduction machine, today characterized by the increasing precarization of life.

These different understandings of precarity that emphasize the questions of reproduction, life and care, are working on the conceptual-political tool of reorganizing care work.



Figure 6.8. Poster of Euro-wide Campaign for Care Rights

6.5.3. Reorganization and valorization of Care Work

The centrality of life implies that the demands arising from these feminist-inspired movements would center around the question of care. Particularly, there have been some initial conversations and initiatives talking about the “social reorganization of care”: a call to every member of society to engage in care tasks, and a call to institutions for a social and economic revalorization of those, providing visibility to the hidden sphere of care and giving it the

importance that actually has for society itself to function. Given the inception phase where this demand is at now, there are not clear formulas yet about how this would translate in concrete policies. However, this proposal is process of elaboration stemming from the premise that care tasks today, following a historical pattern, are not well distributed. Care tasks are performed mainly by women, without questioning the sexual division of labor and pervasive gender roles. But also, among women, there are levels of care work and hierarchies of socio-economic remuneration depending on ethnic background, place of origin and citizenship as well as education, language abilities, physical appearance, etc. A basic step for a new organization of care would imply to question the well assigned roles of who is normally taking care of who, trying to go beyond taken for granted privileges. For instance, men should then take more active responsibility in the sharing of care tasks. Also, women of color from the South should be given more opportunities than the exclusive venue of becoming “domestic workers”, as it is becoming the case in Spain. Calling for a re-organization of care though imply a further level of change. So far the successes of the feminist movement have been mainly within the framework of the capitalist market, for instance women gaining access to public spheres and the paid workforce. By putting care in the center though, it is not about adapting the rest of activities and idiosyncrasies to the demands of the profit-oriented market. Rather, it is the society at large, including institutions, companies and the state, who should re-organize taking into account the necessities of care, which is in ultimate terms, the resort of life itself. The goal is to articulate what it would mean to foster a new society based on care and interdependency, rather than on the logic of profit and fear. This implies the rethinking of new rights, roles, laws and infrastructures for the society of care. Many feminist collectives are working in this direction. This is the case of

the Madrid network of feminist collectives that, deeply inspired by PD, developed a year long series of workshops on the question of the re-organization of care, culminating with the March 8th International Women's day march of 2007. The main demand of this march was precisely for the "social reorganization of care" as suggested by PD, and most of the slogans, chants, songs and conversations showed the richness of those debates. This theme will be further developed in the care section. Before that, it is important to briefly review a series of initiatives within precarity struggles that although linked to one or more particular zones of the map, go beyond the limits of each of them engaging in a process of conceptual and organizational cross-pollination.

6.6. Archipelagos of Criss-Crossing Bubbles: Redefining Social Rights

This cartography shows how the concept of precarity and the struggles around it are many and multiple. Along the path traced by precarity struggles, there has been an ongoing production of conceptual proposals and new terminology. Besides the four main bubbling processes identified thus far, with its respective conceptual productions, a series of groups, events, texts, actions are not so easily identifiable as part of a given bubble. Rather, this series of actors have an explicit intention at traversing the many struggles and demands, trying to elaborate a kind of political-agenda-in-progress. The different conceptualizations and claims around the question of precarity become a platform to rethink new rights and relationships, accommodated to contemporary conditions, as the call for the 2008 MayDay in Malaga pointed out: "un nuevo protagonismo social defendiendo y conquistando derechos. Hacia una nueva carta de derechos contra la precarización de la vida".



Figure 6.9. Poster for MayDay 2008, Malaga

6.6.1. Re-articulating a Political Tool-Box

Some of the “practical and theoretical tools” reviewed so far, developed by each of the four thematic clusters, are the following: 1) The red cluster, initially articulating precarity strictly as loss of labor rights, did not offer any creative proposal but the return to a mythical golden era. Stemming from that pessimistic outlook embodied by the main unions, two conceptual proposals emerge: first, by the hand of secondary yet dynamic grassroots unionism the reclaim of *welfare services as social wage*, as an approach adapted to the new production regime. Second, the more radical sectors of the unemployed movement went beyond social services provisions (políticas asistenciales) and the demand for full time jobs, to engage in the cry for *gratuite* including health and transport services for free, without having to justify levels of misery to state agencies; 2) The violet cluster pointed to a paradigmatic transformation of labor, emphasizing

intermittency and immateriality as the emerging and generalizable traits of the contemporary labor regime. The realization about the expanding intermittent condition gave rise to demands still very much in the making but pointing to certain directions: the reformulation of a regime of *flexicurity* implies accepting the state of intermittency but under protection measures such as a *basic and universal income* or what has been named as *commonfare* more broadly speaking. The process of pointing to the increasing presence of immaterial labor and brain work gave rise to a powerful politico-theoretical brick, the *freedom of knowledge*. The demands for free culture and copyleft surpassed the original cognitariat's struggles to become an independent movement by itself that would agglomerate specific articulations under it. 3) The purple cluster represented by those speaking from migration as a point of view articulates the broad and challenging claim of *freedom of people's movement* (via papers for all or abolition of borders), as well as the necessary protection measures to assure a safe mobility for workers in general. In this way they ask not only for open/fair access into a country and its labor markets, but for a redefinition of citizenship itself. 4) Finally, the blue cluster, bringing in the question of reproduction and expanding precarity to the interstices of existential survival, reinvigorate the question of care, asking for recognition and redistribution of care tasks, and more broadly speaking for a *social re-organization of the care sphere*. Besides those more defined areas or 'bubbling processes', there is still another set of struggles, especially situated among the last three clusters, generating a common agenda tinkering all these demands. This is what they name as "new social rights".

6.6.2. Towards new social rights and alternative institutions

The necessity to reformulate the current set of rights is a constant *leit motive* in many precarity circles. The international conference in Seville 2007 *Crisis del Estado de Bienestar*,

Precariedad y Nuevos Derechos Sociales centered three days of workshops, panels and discussions on the necessity of new social rights:

We have started a phase in the terrain of conquering *new social rights* that focuses on everybody, because everybody works, everybody participates today, directly and/or indirectly, in the production of wealth and the reproduction of the conditions to generate and maintain this society. It is about time to take the baton of the theoretical models of basic income in order to collectively discuss the modes of inscription of utopian formulations of an income for all, in the flesh and in the imagination of both small and big battles, in the dreams and values of the generation pierced by precarity, migration and invisibility. It is time to start writing a collective opus as a chart with the social rights proper of the 21st century, able to validate conquests and updated to the current realities (Sevilla April 2007).

Like the organizers and participants at this conference, a series of emerging actors are working from precarity as a political proposal that traverses different demands, working more explicitly than other groups, at the cross-roads of care, migration, urban development, privatization of social services, labor reforms and intellectual property regimes. This is why in my reading of the struggles of precarity made of four main ‘processes of bubbling up’, there is the need to add a fifth cluster: this time, in the form of archipelagos to evoke the series of small initiatives, that despite their size, have a broader scale of intervention due to their innovative and influential work. The groups and initiatives making up this cluster have assumed this multi-tiered and de-centered terrain as theirs: and attempts to develop ways of struggling/intervening in this multi-issue land of precarity.

The engagement and actual development of more structured proposals of these new rights are being worked by a variety of emerging social movements’ institutions. This is the case of alternative ‘higher education centers’ such as *Universidad Nomada*, *Universidad Pirata* or *Universidad Libre Experimental*; research institutes such as the *European Institute for*

Progressive Cultural Politics; alternative publishing houses such as *Traficantes de Sueños*; movements' regular publications such as *Contrapoder*, *Multitudes*, or *Posse*; migrants & autochthonous networks such as *Red Frassanito* or *Ferrocarril*; also cartographic projects such as *Otra Malaga* or *Hackitectura*; housing rights initiatives such as *VdeVivienda* and especially the emerging phenomenon of a novel way of organizing, a quasi-unionism, or rather, building towards forms of bio-syndicalism.

*Social Rights Offices and Agencies for Precarious Affairs*⁶⁹

These office spaces are located at street-level in several medium to large cities, normally associated with and using the facilities offered by previously established *Social Centers*.⁷⁰ These social centers might be either product of a squatting operations or the result of a process of negotiation with the municipality to use that space as *Oficina de Derechos Sociales (ODS)*. During our time in Spain, we were able to visit and participate in the activities of three ODS in

⁶⁹ For a further engagement with social rights offices see the following documents by active participants: Silvia López, Xavier Martínez, Javier Toret. 2008. *Oficinas de Derechos Sociales: Experiences of Political Enunciation and Organisation in Times of Precarity*. In *Transform #5*, accessible at http://eipcp.net/transversal/0508/lopezetal/en/#_ftn6; and

Pablo Carmona, Tomás Herreros, Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, Nicolás Sguiglia. 2008. *Social centres: monsters and political machines for a new generation of movement institutions*. In *Transform #5*, accessible at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0508/carmonaetal/>

⁷⁰ Centro Social Ocupado Auto-gestionado (CSOA) es el nombre que reciben en varios lugares de Europa los edificios ocupados por movimientos sociales con la finalidad de que sirvan total o parcialmente para la realización de sus actividades. Es más frecuente entre participantes la denominación "movimiento de centros sociales" que "movimiento okupa", esta última popularizada por la prensa. Autogestionado con estos rasgos: organización decisoria horizontal a través de asambleas. Autofinanciación a través de lo obtenido con la venta de material editorial o producido dentro de las actividades programadas, entradas a actividades lúdicas, comidas, bar, si lo hay, etc. Es frecuente que se trate de evitar la financiación mediante subvenciones, y en general toda deuda moral hacia las instituciones oficiales, aunque puede haber excepciones coyunturales (wikipedia entry, accessed 09/13/2008). Some older squats threatened with eviction in Madrid have continued taking space while paying a symbolic rent to the municipality after long process of negotiation with local politicians about the social and cultural capital of those spaces (this is the case of Eskalera Karakola-Centro Social de Mujeres).

Madrid, one in Sevilla and one in Tarragona.⁷¹ These offices are conceived as spaces of potential encounter and cooperation among diverse precarious people, a place to go and share problems, doubts and organizing proposals from the very personal experiences of precarious situations: from housing to care issues, from papers to labor problems. According to the self-definition articulated by the Sevilla-based office:

This is about self-organized spaces to provide information and consultancy by and for precarious folks. The Offices for Social Rights try to combine different strategies in order to make the particular problems suffered by isolated persons into processes of social self-organization, generating networks of mutual support as well as effective organizing for concrete victories against abuses by homeowners or bosses, and against situations of rights violations because of the deficiencies within the systems of social protection. The founding idea of this project is the collective need to put our everyday problems in common, and especially, the urgency for responses and collective solutions to the problems of housing, labor or papers that affect all of us” (Ladinamo 2007)

According to the participants, an office space –open on a regular basis to the whole public- provides a point of encounter for diverse people going through precarious situations, otherwise quite isolated and dispersed. These offices are conceived as a tool to push the limitations of old union forms and explore the possibilities of bio-syndicalism, organizing in all the spheres of life affected by the growing loss of social rights. As a slogan read at the Office of Social Rights (OSR) located in *Centro Social Seco*, Madrid: “Precarity= Uncertainty generated by the disarticulation of social rights”. According to their website, this kind of offices are:

⁷¹ This is an incomplete list of current OSR (ODS in Spanish) currently working in Spain: **ODS del Centro Social Patio Maravillas**, Madrid (http://blog.sindominio.net/blog/patio_maravillas/general/2007/12/09/presentaci_n_y_programaci_n_oficina_de_derechos_sociales), **ODS del Centro Social Seco**, Madrid (<http://ods.cs-seco.org>), **ODS del Centro Vecinal El Pumarejo**, Sevilla (<http://estrecho.indymedia.org/newswire/display/10855/index.php>), y **ODS del Ateneu Candela**, Terrassa (<http://www.communia.org/candela/?q=node/541>), *ODS en casa ocupada por somalies en Carabanchel y mas*. One of them is actually not under the name of office, but agency. This is **Agencia Precaria** or *Agencia de Asuntos Precarios*, hosted in the feminist social center *la Eskalera Karakola*, Madrid (http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias/todasacien/todasacien_invit.htm) This is the current project in which Precarias a la Deriva is embarked now. This new phase will be reviewed in the next chapter.

“Laboratories to make those social rights that are denied to us effective, and simultaneously, to imagine and explore new rights yet to be conquered.”

The very name of the offices comes from this demand for rights, not just labor rights – but broader demands such as “income, housing and papers for all” according to the OSR located in *Centro Social Patio Maravillas*. Actually, the very claim asking for “the right to have rights” is the slogan more commonly used among the Offices. So far these offices, which are spread throughout the Spanish territory, are coordinated through periodic communication and seasonal meetings. They are also aware of parallel experiences at the European level (and to a lesser extent about similar experiments in the US such as the experiences of some workers’ centers). Although each has its own characteristics due to their different territories and diverse participant populations, they all share a series of common programmatic activities: assistance around issues of housing; general information about government aid; labor consultancy; mechanisms of direct pressure to fight specific rights abuses; Spanish classes; and legal advice for obtaining residency or citizenship. Each of these activities present its own challenges. In particular, the activity of individual consultancy for specific cases about housing, labor or papers presented a dilemma for some of the organizers:

“the activity should not become too service oriented and create processes of disempowerment, through the creation of hierarchies of helpers and helped, experts in law and passive receivers. The goal is rather a process of back and forth (*proceso de toma y da*), today I help you, tomorrow you help me, etc” (Interview with member of Agencia Precaria, temporary postal worker and translator, October 12th 2007).

In the case of language classes to improve the Spanish level of recently arrived migrants is conceived as a great opportunity to generate encounters among people otherwise quite isolated. The pedagogical approach is to learn through concrete lived episodes and resolve

possible everyday problems. So far, all the ODS that have engaged in this activity are quite satisfied, although it is a challenge to find and maintain the teaching labor force, since normally they are volunteers, who are themselves going through precarious situations as well.

The goal is that these different activities create more horizontal and effective cooperative relationships among distinct experiences of precariousness. In order to achieve this goal it was imperative to generate networks of actual exchange and access to concrete resources. This is often referred to as developing a “precarious instinct”.⁷² The proliferation of spaces, resources, educational activities, etc. –such as offices, list-serves or shops, self-training workshops, etc. –, speaks to an increasing tendency of institution-building within autonomous movements. The scalar shift evidenced by the jump from initial list-serves to forming alternative universities show the growing centrality of grassroots institution-building among movements facing the challenges of precarity.⁷³ The goal then envisioned by the ODS is to generate processes of aggregation in a sector that is characterized by dispersion and isolation. This is why they insist in the creation of “alianzas precarias”, alliances among precarious folks at the individual level, but also alliances among precarious struggles, putting collectives and organizations in to contact with one another. In the process of knitting alliances, an important component, shared by all the offices, is the tool

⁷² A successful initiative is the list-serve called “precarious instinct”, a space to circulate all kinds of offers and demands in order to start the process of “de-precarization”: rent and job announcements, old furniture, interesting courses and conferences, dentists, etc. Sister list-serves have spread focusing on each city or even each neighborhood. In order to become a participant in one of those list-serves a self-introduction is required, briefly explaining why you are interested in the project and assumes some degree of political identification (not with a group or demand, but more as one critical of the status quo and with a general sort of anti-authoritarian ethic- i.e. no overt sexism or racism are allowed to continue). This conveys a more personal touch to the list-serve, a mechanism which otherwise remains very anonymous. As participants of the Madrid-based list, the first one of this kind, we could pose questions about many of the immediate problems upon our arrival in the country as well as to offer baby items and the like. There are other similar but face-to face initiatives such as the *Tienda Gratis* (the Free Shop) where you can take or leave clothes for free, similar to the US-based experience of the *Really Really Free Market*.

⁷³ There is currently a rampant discourse among precarity struggles in Europe about the need for movements’ institutions. See the online journal *Transform*, issue #5, 2008 accessible at <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0508>

of research. Designing and conducting research projects as well as organizing self-training workshops are activities shared by all the offices. The idea is to know your own territory better and share your knowledges in order to act more collective and efficiently. For these groups, it is important to engage in the research activity yourself, not outsource it to expert groups, because the process itself is conceived as an opportunity for generating distinct analyses and unique concepts as well as solid and affective alliances.⁷⁴

6.7. Conclusion: Recapitulations and shortcomings of the concept

The different processes of activist research among struggles fighting the current configurations of the European Union have led to the invention of the concept of precarity. According to the genealogy presented in this chapter, I contend that from its inception, it is a concept that has been mutating in order to speak to the different concerns arising during the process of formulation. By tracing the genealogy of precarity through a cartographic visualization of a series of bubbling processes, the intention was to convey how this is a concept in constant mutation with high adaptability in order “to work”, meaning intended to have effects in changing and producing worlds. This is why the Deleuzian notions of both *nomad thinking* and *concept as toolkit* were insightful to frame this genealogical account of the development of precarity. This framing helps to envision what kind of knowledge is produced by social movements pointing out how their conceptual production is based on epistemologies of unfixity, as well as relational ontologies that apprehend and relate to the real in a non-categorical and more open-ended (meshwork-like) fashion. Nonetheless, it is not my intention to claim that the

⁷⁴ For more specific engagement with the practice of research as a transversal tool among many of the precarity struggles, including the Offices of Social Rights, i am working on the paper “Knowledges, Methods and the European Movements Against Precarity” to present in a 2009 AAA panel.

invention of precarity constitutes an example par excellence of nomad thinking, an epistemology of uncertainty or relational ontology. Rather, these notions are used to understand the development of a slippery concept, that despite insightful contributions, also displays important shortcomings.

Some of these shortcomings and limitations are actually brought up by the different actors themselves leading to the further (although I would argue still incomplete) stretching of the concept. Here I recapitulate some of those internal criticisms made among the different bubblings, but I add my own critique asking what does precarity leave out, what does it make invisible, what does it naturalize? Also, I mention the analytical and political limitations of such an all-encompassing concept.

With regards to internal criticisms, the approach articulated by the red cluster was seen as limited by other movements because of its narrow focus on the quantitative changes in the realm of labor. The pink cluster would respond with more refined analyses about the qualitative transformations of the labor regime. The intermittent and cognitariat's struggles would also bring a more optimistic outlook about the potentialities of the current transformations. The discovery of *the happy precariat* further contrasts with the negative approach of the main unions that yearned for the return of a 'better past'. However, both of those conceptual waves, including the pink one, despite their discourse of expanding the notion of labor in complex and novel ways, remained constrained to a quite economic/traditional understanding of labor.⁷⁵ The two following clusters of bubbles signal two specific absences that need to be considered in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of labor today: where is the migrant and its

⁷⁵ It is true that some of the conceptual bricks associated with those bubbling processes are more creative and going beyond the boundaries articulated by the analytical origins from which they originally stem from. For example, the proposals around utopias of non-work or the movement for the free movement of knowledge.

counter-part, the border regime? And related to that, where is the domestic sphere, as it goes through an intense process of reconfiguration?

The migrant question points to the limitations of the excessive analytical weight given to class when addressing labor. Instead of the color blindness and the post-colonial amnesia common of class-based analyses –including those considered by some cutting edge neo-marxists- they point to the centrality of racism and current configurations of *coloniality* in order to rethink labor. By expanding precarity to the migration and border regime, this conceptual wave brings along a broader understanding of power, not strictly economicist, but structured around issues of control and classification of populations. Drawing from the Foucaultian concept of *biopower*, new axes of hierarchies are introduced reformulating previous understandings of labor. This sensibility towards questions of race, coloniality and the re-articulated North-South relationship of control makes the concept of precarity a less Euro-centric understanding of labor than previous ones.

The other forceful critique to the red and pink bubble would come by the hand of the feminist inspired movements. Again, those two conceptual waves are seen as too production centered. Sharing the critique articulated by the migration movements, feminists would also add the question of reproduction. Even the introduction of “life” by some voices within the immaterial labor wave– in particular, by Corsani and Lazzaratto -, would not challenge the centrality of capital. Feminists argue for going beyond capitalo-centric analyses, breaking the pervasive binarism of production and reproduction, even reformulated as capital and life, to see things differently and come up with alternative analytics and proposals. The different spaces of reproduction are actually the basis for understanding current transformations in labor: “the

becoming woman of labor” or “feminization of work”. Going further, according to this wave, it is *life* itself—understood in broader philosophical, existential and phenomenological terms—, the one that is being paradigmatically transformed. In order to assess the nature of these changes and effectively intervene in them, feminists –including *Precarias a la Deriva*- would focus around the question of *care* and its different re-articulations.

I contend that this series of internal criticisms has led to a notable expansion of the original meaning of precarity, addressing one of its main shortcomings, mainly the *capitalocentric* foundation -as defined by Gibson-Graham- of the two initial conceptual waves. Still, despite the many instances and efforts at expanding to other spheres and analytical axes, there are nonetheless main absences that the concept of precarity tends to have, invisibilizing certain sectors and struggles. This is the case of peasants and the question of the rural in general. Precarity discourses throughout the four main bubble clusters take for granted the urban figure, mainly speaking about the inhabitants of “European metropolis”.⁷⁶ This latent urbano-centrism tends to ignore the current transformations in the rural areas and the particularities of the farmwork sector. Will the peasant movements have a spot in the cartography of precarious struggles? This absence also speaks about the place of food, ecology and nature in the conceptualization of precarity. Will the introduction of “life itself” be able to broaden the concept to include the sphere of non-humans? If so, would socially pressing issues such as viral pandemics or food crisis be related to precarity as well? So far the concept remains quite anthropocentric, nonetheless, current alliances between ecological, food politics and animal rights movements, and precarity struggles might speak to this possible inclusion of nature into

⁷⁶ Metropolis is one of the key words among precarious movements in Europe. See Conference “Metropolis en Movimiento. Movimiento en la metropolis.” In Terrassa, December 2007. Also the term “city-factory” is very common.

the concept. However, one might question how much further precarity might go: Has precarity through this manifold process of re-signification and conceptual stretching become a toolbox, strategically effective and theoretically sounding? Or rather, has it been transformed into an all encompassing '*cajon desastre*' (catch-all phrase) where everything fits and whose theoretical and political validity is diminished by the lack of focus? Is it fair demanding from a concept that attempts to understand current labor transformations to include all possible axes and potentially related spheres?

Another danger is the risk of becoming an universalizing concept. The concept and politicization of precarity has been mainly situated in a specific geo-historical context, in this case particularly southern-western Europe. If flexibilization is happening elsewhere, would precarity fall into the temptation of exporting the analysis elsewhere as general recipe? What consequences would it have, maybe repeating previous errors of the universalistic left? Additionally, is there a universalizing risk in bringing all 'subjects' together under the same label, as in *precarious of the world, unite*? However, is precarity a European specific phenomenon or something translatable to other contexts? If the latter, how would precarity manifest itself in the South? If we think in these global terms, these analyses seem very North-centered. Instead of departing from analyses coming only from looking at European processes, can we think the expressions of precarity in the North in relation to the 'informal economy' of the South? Is precarity just a highly regulated 'informalizing' of the economy? And if so, does it resemble an old and well established experience for many in the South?

Despite these queries, the virtue of precarity thus far consists in its capacity to take internal criticisms into account, expanding its original meaning to unexpected terrains and

leading towards a kind of *cultural economics of labor*. In this way, the development of precarity shows its potentiality to become a less capitalo-centric as well as less Euro-centric concept than previous economic categories. Precarity, based on this genealogical cartography, has the capacity to offer a complex reading of current transformations in the sphere of labor and beyond, being open to possible lines of flight and advance creative proposals to deal with the upcoming realities of living and organizing in the globalized 21st century. The next chapter reveals how the value of the concept of precarity does not rely solely on the accuracy of its analysis, but rather on its potential to regenerate imaginations and lifestyles.

Chapter 7

*Hacia una Teoría del Cuidado*¹

Ethnographic Accounts of Changing Political Subjects and Strategies

Introduction

Shortly upon our arrival to the *Lavapiés* neighborhood, and after attending a couple of meetings organized by *Precarias*, I received a mysterious email in my inbox:

Precarias a la Deriva ha Muerto, Viva Precarias a la Deriva!
Precarias a la Deriva is dead, long live to Precarias a la Deriva!
(email on PD list-serve, March 15th 2007)

The “death notice”, as they called it, explained the transition period that *Precarias* was at the time going through. Since 2006, this feminist project engaged in a new experiment under the name of “*Agencia de Asuntos Precarios*”. Under this institutional sounding name –*Agency of Precarious Affairs*–, they made an attempt to formalize many of the relationships, resources and knowledges gained during the previous research phase. The Agency has currently an office space available every Saturday afternoon at *Embajadores* Street, a few blocks down from the previous squatted building that had to be evicted by order from the Madrid municipality. The new locale of *Eskalera Karakola*, the mythical women’s social center, is now located right across the street from *Traficantes de Sueños*, the alternative bookshop and publishing house, close to the local fresh food market, the muslim mosque and one of the libraries of the *Universidad Nacional a*

¹ English translation: Towards a Theory of Care

Distancia, itself located in an old monastery destroyed during the Spanish Civil war.² The new *Eskalera Karakola*, in contrast to the previous old building, is rented at an affordable price from the municipality and after a process of re-construction, now has a contemporary look, with a large meeting room, a radio studio, telephone line and a series of archives and basic technological support.³ Having this space available regularly and open to the public, makes this phase more prompted to act locally. This is in contrast with the previous phase, in that even if that phase had been a place-based research project, their material and effects ended up being more internationally oriented than expected. In this sense, *La Agencia* might be thought of as part of “the current process of territorialization of global justice movements” – meaning a tendency towards local concerns and organizing at the level of the lived territory, shared by many global justice initiatives at least in Europe (interview with MayDay Sur organizer, April 2008).

La Agencia was conceived from the beginning to operate more concretely in the *Lavapiés* neighborhood and the city of Madrid. Furthermore, this email signaled a thematic shift. While the first phase focused mainly on the concept of *precarity*; during this second phase, *Precarias* intersects the concept of *precarity* with the question of *care*. This chapter then propose care as another conceptual contribution by this activist research project and the broader networks where it is inserted. Alleviating my temporary shock over my “object of inquiry” suddenly disappearing, the email went on to insist that this was in fact not the end of *Precarias*, but rather a process of metamorphosis where *Precarias* was still alive and well, yet in a new and different

² I point to this specific urban landscape in order to convey a sense of the social and architectonic density surrounding the main organizing space of *Precarias*.

³ This kind of office space was conceived in line with the parallel projects of *Oficinas de Derechos Sociales*. For more on this kind of *Offices for Social Rights* see last section of previous chapter. The political economy of these independent spaces is based on the financial contributions of their members. They also might accept donations and scholarships from universities, municipalities and other local institutions.

format. The authors claimed that part of *Precarias*' spirit –not understood as a collective, but as an open trajectory- remained not only in the new phase, but also in all of those that have engaged with the PD project in one way or another, for instance: by attending their workshops, by circulating and translating their texts or by gathering inspiration to put other parallel initiatives together.

The name change from *Precarias a la Deriva* to *Agencia de Asuntos Precarios* was accompanied by a series of broader transformations that I was able to gather during my participation in this second phase. In particular, there seems to be two sides to the transition: one theoretical: from theorizing *Precarity* to theorizing *Care*; and a second one, in terms of practice: from an overt research team to the development of “alliances” as a political-research strategy. In this chapter, I argue that the transition experienced by this collective speaks to the transformative potential of practicing research. This transition is not merely chronological; it implies a profound process of transformation at the level of subjectivity and political imaginary.

The research conducted by *la Agencia* during this second phase is leading to further conceptual refinements of the notion of precarity by pairing it up with that of care, this way providing more insightful analyses of the current conjuncture. Yet, this research not only is able to explore the flexible metropolis in innovative ways. Rather, the activist research conducted by *Precarias* fueled a process of knowledge production able to nurture relationships and sustain alternative sociabilities: not only intensifying relations among the group members, but creating “unnatural” alliances and unexpected encounters between populations socially articulated as distinct and well-separated entities. In this case, *Precarias* –whose main participants are

sociologically relatively similar⁴-, engage in processes of articulation with two particular groups coming from different sides of the sociological spectrum: one consisting of immigrant domestic female workers, and the other one composed of men and women in wheelchairs, due to accidents or life-long illnesses. In other words,

“Departing from the question of *care* as one of the main conclusions from our first research project, we entered in a new phase of building *alliances* with different sectors: first, domestic workers, at the intersection of precarity and migration, and also as a not desired effect of feminism...we felt obliged to understand and work this question; and second, the ‘handicapped’ population, because of their discourse on the fragility of life and the right to be diverse, speaking from such a radical reality”. (Interview Agencia member, may 4, 2008)

The first alliance works on the re-invention of political strategies for the fractured sector of domestic migrant workers. The second one centers on the process of the politicization of disability, starting from the very renaming of the terms handicapped or disability with “functional diversity”. The development of these two alliances would not be free of frictions.⁵ Tensions would arise out of the misunderstandings among such distinct particular realities. In terms of everyday needs and expectations, issues such as the disparity of work schedules, spatial restrictions or family responsibilities, made the relationship challenging at times. At the level of political goals, a series of clashes between political imaginaries were made evident during the process of alliance building as the chapter reveals. Despite those difficulties, both parties seemed to accept the challenges involved, as if being moved by a mutual attraction able to generate a

⁴ If looking at the most active members of the loose network that participate in PD research project, Precarias was more diverse than usual activist groups, but also holding a lot of similarities. Roughly it was comprised by young women, with international background although most of them from Spanish origin, working intermittently at a variety of flexible jobs, many related to the “manipulation of codes” -as they put it-, to refer to types of jobs related to call centers, translation, teaching, writing, and service industries.

⁵ While the researcher was able to further participate and ethnographically investigate both alliances, for purposes of this dissertation only one of them –the alliance with immigrant domestic workers- is object of attention in this chapter. The extensive material as well as the unique nature of the second alliance made with the ‘handicapped activist group’ is currently a work in progress towards other publishing outlets.

shared point of departure from which to speak a common language and re-articulate political action. The development of these processes of relationality suggests the potential of research for transforming subjectivities and facilitating processes of collective agency. This is the basis of the third contention of this dissertation, speaking to the question of knowledge production as opening possibilities at the ontological level by enabling the creation of different subjects, relationalities and ultimately, constructing other worlds.

This claim was developed through ethnographic engagement with the second phase of *Precarias*. While other chapters heavily relied on social movements' own archives and brief auto-ethnographic encounters with other activist research initiatives, this chapter exhibits the most extensive ethnographic treatment of the Madrid-based group itself. The writing style makes an attempt to reflect the lived realities and lived relationships constituting the ongoing projects embarked upon by *La Agencia*. This is in part possible due to my full engagement with the group's activities, participating in monthly meetings, workshops, drifts, actions as well as the regular practice of participating in the email list and writing exercises. I hope to evoke the diversity of activities and multiple material practices via *staged conversations*. Making use of my fieldnotes and collection of documents, I focus on the series of workshops that gave flesh to the process of alliance building, hoping these narrative strategy, coming from the genre of drama, lend some agility to the ethnographic narrative.

The chapter begins by describing the different levels of the transformation experienced by *Precarias*. ***From Precarity to Care: A Multi-layered Transition*** offers brief but necessary background information to the reader in order to understand the current new phase of *Precarias* and its implications. This section also addresses how the politics of research, even if not so

overtly articulated, continue to be present and guide many of the practices and developments of this new phase. This embedded research acts as a tool to foster processes of subject transformation and renovation of political imaginaries.

The second part of the chapter directly addresses the dissertation research question about the conceptual productions by movements with *Towards a Theory of Care: The Beginning of a Common Glossary*. The previous research phase by *Precarias* provided the first steps of a theorizing process around the subject of care in search of a common political lexicon. I present it here as a series of novel terms that help to crystallize the conceptualizations around care and precarity. These five concepts will be further elaborated through the coming together of different parties during the alliance building phase. The encounters among *Agencia* and domestic workers, whether in the form of workshops, co-organizing street actions or co-writing, besides being filled with challenging tensions, develop a more refined understanding of care struggles, as seen in the next section.

The third part, *A Theory of Care in the Making: The Silent Revolt of Care Takers*, centers on the practice of building inter-subjective relationships and political articulations among different populations, in particular focusing on the alliance with domestic migrant workers. The ethnographic account depicts several instances of coming together to investigate the intricacies of care work and articulate possible strategies against the current state of fracture and for a socio-economic revalorization of their work. The fourth part, *The Cultural Politics of Care*, addresses the different implications of embracing the concept of care. Both in terms of political organizing and research modus operandi, the centrality of care will bring along a series of challenges and transformations that are briefly outlined in this last section. The conclusion emphasizes the main

arguments of this chapter, especially the transformative potential of research practices in social movements.

7.1. From Precarity to Care: A Multi-Layered Transition

The email with the “death notice” alerts the reader to the ending of *Precarias a la Deriva* as a mainly textual and explicitly research operation. It is the formal closure of a project and the announcement of morphing into a different political machine. In their own words, it is a transition “from the production of linguistic and visual codes (e.g. *The Precarious Lexicon* or the multilingual *Precarity DVD*), to the production of an everyday” (interview May 4 2008). This shift in the form and goals of research was due to the perceived limitations of a project that despite having great potential for generating a collective imaginary around the notion of precarity, was unable to produce further processes of aggregation and political action:

“Drifts were a powerful mechanism to promote instances of valuable communication among disperse and isolated actors. However, the drifts, by themselves, were not able to generate conflict” (Interview PD member, august 15 2005).

7.1.1 Towards the Production of the Everyday

The transition from a first phase as an action-research initiative to a second phase focused on concrete organizing through a formal “agency” was perceived as a necessary step, somehow, as a way to test the political hypotheses being previously advanced. If precarity emerged as an analytical catalyst able to provide insights about current conditions, what was critical now was to enact those realizations:

“The first phase has evolved into the construction of this Agency as an experimental space to create a practice, still to be invented, against the precarization of existente” (PD 2007).

In order to create this everyday practice *within and against* precarity, they opted for an organizing venue situated outside unions, NGOs, and other established institutions to implement strategies accommodated to local contexts and singular demands, deeply informed by the conclusions reached by the research project. *The Agencia* will work upon the alignment between precarity and care, shifting the theoretical attention significantly towards the question of care and its political derivatives. Care, one of the findings of their initial research project, was also emerging as a topic of concern among other activist circles, especially feminist ones. This is the case of the pan-European network *Nextgeneration* which was quite influential in bringing in the question of care into the broader precarity struggles upon criticizing their neglect towards certain precarious populations and their over-optimistic prospects of precarity:

“Insisting on the importance of care was a way for us to give a feminist radical edge to actions of the EuroMayDay, which was quick in proclaiming the disruptive possibilities of “precarity life style”. For us, they overlooked the very unequal situations of precariousness in Europe by insisting on their liberating possibilities (e.g. the end of full time jobs). While our group also partially thought that the break of frameworks of rigid labor setting could be liberating, putting the accent on the work of care was a way to recall that the burden of care makes the biggest part of precarious “flexible” jobs and is assumed mostly by migrant women and women of color – who were not actually included in the EuroMayday actions. In addition, inspired by *Preacarias a la Deriva* we also thought we needed to build collective care in activist networks, because precariousness pushes too many of us into burn-out. In trying to combine political activities and working for a living, caring becomes extremely important for us, challenging us constantly: without caring we will lose the battle anyway – *care is the sinew of precarious struggles* (Nextgeneration 2006).⁶

Despite the fluidity of the concept of precarity itself, as evoked in the genealogical cartography, the actual precarity struggles –as many other social movements- run the risk of enclosing themselves into ghettoized frameworks based on fixed identities, such as the precariat, the cognitariat, etc. Explicit concern about this matter was expressed several times publicly in

⁶ <http://www.nextgeneration.net/belgium/soul/care/html>

conferences, articles or in personal conversations. The figure of the long-term and visually coded activist, with few family or work responsibilities, was becoming the main actor of these struggles. This was seen with much internal criticism. An imperative to work with all those sectors in different precarious situations, but outside of coded circles of activism, brought *Precarias* to engage in a phase of alliance building. Rejecting the traditional logic of the “squat,” based on a defined group of people with clear boundaries between those in and those out, the production of alliances seemed the most appropriate mechanism. According to PD, the professionalization and ghettoization of activism was an elitist and inefficient approach to collective action, in many ways limiting both activists and broad social change. Instead, it was important to engage in practices to promote openness and knowledge of each other, “getting to interact and jointly organize with of all those people that despite of living and passing by so close to us, still remain so unknown for many of us” (interview march 2007).

This imperative towards breaking the myth and reality of ‘isolated islands of radicals’ was present since the inception of *Precarias*. In fact the very act of research is conceived as:

“The promotion of knowledge about ourselves and about others (...) We discovered in the practice of research a way to get out of the ghetto of activism” (Interview January 2008).

Despite being seemingly counter-intuitive, the epistemological foundation of “taking the self as a point of departure” was -- rather than an enclosing mechanism -- an intentional device to be able to speak in first person about processes affecting many and in that way being able to connect with others at the same level: “*partir de sí para salir de sí*” (*taking the self as a point of departure to be able to get out of oneself*). The second phase will go a step further engaging in the actual process of *alliance building*, developing personal bonding and common political

projects with sectors of the population previously conceived as quite ‘other’. This shifted mode of engagement will be an object of controversy and dilemma for the members of *La Agencia*, whose own positionalities get displaced to further engage in processes of *acompañamiento*.⁷ This new phase directly confronted the challenge of generating affinities and common struggles among distinct figures of the amorphous precarious sector, going from isolated bodies to agglomerations of affect, building alternative socialibilities and political practices in the process. The new phase also seemed different from the previous one in the apparent absence of the research component. Was the research practice totally over or does it continue to be present in different ways? I was totally intrigued about this issue upon my arrival, posing the following question: *Precarias* as a research project has morphed into *La Agencia*. Does this mean that research is over with, in order to start with action? Where is the research now?

“For me it’s another phase of the research process. They are not separated. Eg. if they are separated you end up with products such as this dead book (PD member shows a book on *Feminist Economics* that she wanted to share with us). It looks very interesting, but it just that- a project destined to be a book and nothing else. On the contrary, *Precarias*’ book was alive and generated resonances because it was born out of processes of antagonism and social struggle. But now, we want to move beyond the “propedeutico-comunicativo” (something like producing communicative resonance) function, in order to engage in actual organizing experiments of those people that have been attracted by that analysis and the language it generated” (Interview PD member, March 5, 2007)

This speaks to the broader question of the role and the form of research in processes of social struggle. What I gathered through my participation in the new organizing phase as *La Agencia*, is that besides coming back to some of the concrete procedures used in the previous

⁷ While for PD the enterprise of building alliances was a whole new adventure, this political practice has been part of left imaginaries and organizing for decades, also, the concept of ‘*acompañamiento*’ is well known in LA. For the purposes of this dissertation, what is at stake is not to identify what seemingly new activist practices they introduce, but to signal how processes of collective research led to transform political practices and strategies.

phase such as drifts and workshops, one of the main research continuities of this new phase is the practice of carefully recording and documenting everything.

7.1.2. *The Philosophy of Recording*

From the first moment of encountering the work by *Precarias a la Deriva*, I was impressed by the careful attention put into capturing the nitty-gritty of their own activities, including meetings, street actions, or research episodes. Documenting seemed to be a very conscious practice, as they explicitly refer to it in their first publication:

“Nuestra metodología es una practica minuciosa del registrar. Our methodology is based on a meticulous practice of registering” (PD, 2004: 4).

Personally, I really identified myself with this desire to capture what movements were saying, doing and imagining. It was something *we* –as the research team behind this dissertation– really missed in the movements in the US. Discussions among many contemporary US autonomous movements are often guided by a careful attention to *process*.⁸ Despite the important role given to note-taking, the product is usually a bullet-point document limited to the practical goal of informing those unable to attend or just to keep some sort of record of the consensus taken. However the practice of carefully documenting one’s own collective practices as a political tool had seduced us since we first met *Precarias a la Deriva* back in 2004, during one of our initial research trips. Recording seemed to serve as the nourishment for building a collective memory, as a way of resonating and connecting with many other people’s situations, as well as a possible generator of conflicts in places usually codified as apolitical. Through participation in meetings and especially via the list-serve, it became clearer what the reasons behind this practice were. This *philosophy of registering* was based on the awareness that what

⁸ See my own ethnographic description of process-based meetings in *Blurring Boundaries*” (2008: XX)

they were *collectively* doing,—whether as an independent group or whether in alliance with others— had some sort of value, and was worthy of recording: “First, we record as much as possible, and then we will see what we can do, there is always time to reuse those tapes,” joked one of the precarias just before one of the most popular workshops of the year. In other statement, during the yearly evaluation of *La Agencia*, registering come up again:

“Registering is a way to facilitate collective thinking, tracking what we are learning in the processes of struggle” (July 15, 2007)

During the evaluation, many expressed how they missed the practice of *writing together* and their desire to put more care into “documenting the things we are doing” through texts, drifts, *puestas en común* (putting things in common). The reasons for engaging further in the task of documenting, (reasons carefully taken down by myself as one of the two official note-takers of the meeting), were several:⁹

“to produce common thinking and collective analysis *sin pudor* (without reverence); to communicate *hacia afuera* (beyond the group itself), through research texts and videos as well as radio programs; to build common and rebellious imaginaries (*construcción de imaginario*); to boost the learning curve, through writing and street actions, fomenting the communicative and creative part of our work” (July 15, 2007)

Actually “getting out to the street” was conceived not as a mode of demanding something to someone, but rather as “a space for collective creativity, a process of joy and knowledge production”. The proposal was to carefully work at all the stages of the *continuum* between: research>production of outreach materials>generation of imaginary>action>research.

The possible uses of documented and archived material varied from internal purposes to connecting with society at large. In order to get things documented, these are some of the tools

⁹ All of the following are *verbatim* transcriptions of the meeting. Words in italics show the terms that are part of the common vocabulary developed by PD and that, when translated directly into English, lose some of its evocative power.

being used, what they refer as *dispositivos de registro* (recording dispositifs): 1) video cameras, 2) tape-recorders, 3) photo cameras, 4) notebooks, and 5) *el relato*. The first three are done with high-quality machines that all belong to the *Eskalera Karakola* which is in general, technologically well-equipped. The note-book is actually the most popular *artifact* among *Precarias*. Small, accessible, journalist-like, these are indispensable elements in meetings and other activities. Note-taking dates, ideas, or just contacts seem to be a crucial part of the culture. They are used in many of the activities, although the ones that would be transcribed and posted on the list-serve are usually the notes from the monthly meetings. Finally, *el relato* is kind of expressionist narrative of a recent event or itinerary, usually made immediately afterwards, what they called *en caliente* or “freshly made”. Normally it is not very thorough, but rather intentionally spontaneous and light. Emphasizing certain things and ignoring others, this kind of story-telling is detailed as well as strongly subjective. This is how one of the *Precarias* invited us to write about the drift-exploration to the CAMPF (one of the biggest residencies of people with disabilities in Madrid):

“escribamos ahora con el cuerpo, con todo lo que nos ha dado escalofríos, carcajadas, tristeza, emoción, ...que ya seremos mas racionales después, en la evaluación” “let’s write now with our bodies, with everything that gave us chills, laughs, sadness and emotion,...we’ll have time to be rational later, in the evaluation” (December 4th, 2007, metro ride back from the residency of people with disabilities).

Relatos are usually short texts (one to two pages) filled with shared terms and direct calls to a close reader. Sometimes the *relato* is signed by one member, and in many occasions is written by several voices, what they term as: *relato a tres voces*, *relato a seis voces*, etc. Each contributor produces a part of the piece, and then they are all put together. Normally, *relatos* are posted on the list-serve narrating what happened during certain events, especially those where

other members were not able to be present. Also, *relatos* are used to communicate what the group is doing to similar groups, narrating episodes of a collective past to be shared via email or via convergence. As research material, *relatos* are key components of both drifts and workshops. A drift is a source of multiple *relatos*, each participant will generate a very distinct narrative. The plan is to produce a short text right after the itinerary, normally back at home, ideally in the very same day, still filled with all the impressions and possible lines of flight suggested during that intense exposure to a reality. The following is a fragment of a *relato*:

Relato de una deriva por Paulina
4 Dec 2007

La visita al Campf.

La espesa niebla de la mañana en las afueras de Madrid, y los grados exagerados de la calefacción de la residencia, resumen un poco la sensación que me provocó el Campf.

No se puede resumir en pocas palabras ni con una valoración positiva o negativa. Para comenzar, verlas tempranito, ojeras pero dispuestas, me dio muchísima alegría. Me recordaba la fuerza que da el caminar preguntando juntas. ¡Era una deriva!

El encierro, se huele, se ve, se palpa. Le deja a una ansiosa. Para matizar le decía a Ramón, a ver, cómo te explico, esa residencia en Ecuador, sería de lujo. Habitaciones individuales, amplios pasillos, limpieza. Pero igual deprime. Es el formato lo que oprime. La diferenciación tan fuerte entre quien tiene ruedas por piernas y piernas con uniforme.

Also, right after a productive workshop, where many ideas have come up but have not been totally developed, the plan is that the participants have to finish their thoughts suggested during the discussion at their homes through these short writings. After this description of “the philosophy of documenting” –a seemingly mundane and trivial practice-, one might see how this constant attentiveness to tracking down the different episodes of a collective struggle, becomes

itself a knowledge production practice.¹⁰ This practice is based on different *dispositivos de registro* (recording techniques) that result in a series of “archives” (in the old-fashion and Foucauldian sense, that is, as a set of statements, enunciative modalities, concepts, etc. interrelated among themselves to constitute a system of sorts, an archive). Archives, in this sense, are also an important component among certain social movements.¹¹

Therefore, running through this manifold transition made out of several changes, a continuum line is traceable, that is, the foundation on the practice and spirit of research. Through ethnographic notes and staging conversations, the section narrating the story of the alliance with domestic workers tries to evoke the presence, albeit discrete, of the practices of activist research. Yet, it is not only at the level of research practices. There is also continuity in terms of the conceptual findings starting to be developed in the previous research phase. Mainly, the question of care and its derivatives which are now put under trial and error, re-conceptualized and further elaborated through the exceptional *laboratory* constituted by the alliance building with some of the main sectors of care work: immigrant domestic labor. The following section introduces some of the main findings developed by *Precarias* based on their initial drifts, readings and group

¹⁰ Sometimes I felt that this mode of writing was quite similar to ethnographic note-taking. They did not refer to the term *etnografía*, even if some of them have had an anthropological background. However, that eagerness of taking notes of everything, those detailed descriptions of events, that individual writing of collective happenings, ...it sounded like generating field-notes of a mythical ‘field’: their own meeting place, their own city, their own trajectory,....producing a kind of *auto-ethnography of a collective struggle*. There are definitely some parallelisms although many differences as well. The first time I encountered their publication it felt very ethnographic to me, as a first year student of a PhD in Anthropology. Actually I put together a paper about it called “other ethnographies are already possible”. I engaged the material more carefully suggesting similarities and disparities in a paper for a LASA conference (2004). Finally I decided that it was not worthwhile to call it ethnographic work, just describing it would be enough for the reader to take his/er own conclusions. However, it was to my surprise when presenting the dissertation material to a group of American students in Madrid, visiting Professor Cameron spoke up, explicitly calling it in the following terms: “this is the return of ethnography”. Some dilemmas and jokes for the ethnographer engaging with such ‘writing machines’ are described in “16 ironies of conducting research”, my paper presented at the SMWG symposium (eg. the supposed objects of study ask you to be the official note-taker; they gave you a note-book as a gift; they write great ‘relatos’ for you, juicier than your own ethnographic notes...)

¹¹ To see more on the practice of archiving by social movements and the new possibilities this offers for ethnographic research see chapter 2 on methods.

discussions during the previous phase. It might be seen as the beginning of a theory of care, or better, as the foundation of a conceptual lexicon useful to understand and intervene in the circuits of precarity intersecting with care.

7.2. Towards a Theory of Care: Building a Glossary of Concepts¹²

The concept of care is simultaneously emerging in different disciplinary fields and spheres of knowledge: from ecology, to feminist economics, and even liberation theology. The contribution by *Precarias* is situated within this emerging attention to care as a political, economic and philosophical concept. What is distinct about *Precarias*' contribution, is not only the connection made between care and the question of precarity, but especially the site and format of enunciation. Coming from a location of struggle, their theory of care is presented as something in the making, more in search of a common lexicon of conflict than a coherent and fixed series of answers. In this following section I present the *five* concepts related to the question of care that have been most developed by *Precarias* and that come out as the most explicit during the process of building the alliance with domestic workers. These five concepts are: *care*, *care crisis*, *global care chains*, *caretizenship*, and *careful strike*. These are some of the provisional understandings of each term:

CARE¹³

We're talking about the sustainability of life, that is to say, the daily activities of affective engineering that we propose to visibilize and revalorize as the prime material of the political, because we don't want to think social justice without taking into account how it is built in day to day situations. (PD, Huelga de mucho cuidado 2003)

¹² This information has been collected by the researcher from the writings and discussions by *Precarias* on the question of care after having finished their initial research project on the feminine precarity in Madrid.

¹³ This provisional definition of care is based on *Precarias*' material and other contemporary feminist collectives from Spain.

While this is one of Precarias statements about the centrality of care, they are inserted within a broader feminist wave towards the re-politicization, of care practices. What many contemporary feminist social movements mean by *care* is “those material and immaterial tasks that provide security and comfort to third ones –such as cleaning, cooking, nursing, rearing, smiling, reassuring, etc. –those activities necessary to sustain life itself”.¹⁴ Following their argument, despite its centrality in producing and maintaining life, contributing greatly to economic growth and socio-political development, all that *production*¹⁵ generated within the sphere of care has been for the most part undervalued and made invisible. Historically this invisible, non-recognized and unpaid position has been assigned to women, and it is still the case nowadays where 85% of those who ‘take care of care’ are women (Sevilla Conference, April 2007). However, some of the recent socio-economic transformations (e.g. women’s access to labor markets, migratory movements, flexibilization, etc.) not only strengthen the fragility and exploitation of that sector of the population traditionally ascribed to care issues (women), rather, these transformations are also generalizing the problems of care to the rest of the population, exponentially multiplying the question of who is in charge of caring. Care tasks end up, more clearly than ever, affecting everybody everywhere: since we all take care of somebody or we are being taken care of, we all have to deal with the emerging challenges of an increasing *void* of care-givers that have to be filled with different roles and actors (this phenomenon affecting

¹⁴ For a broader definition of care as cooperation, interdependency, social ecology and transversal everyday activity see Precarias a la Deriva (2003) *Una huelga de mucho cuidado*. Contrapoder #7

¹⁵ Care then is part of production and not just reproduction. According to the member of the *Lilith* feminist collective, such a division is based on Marxist economics that puts production as the main activity, and reproduction as the supporting device for the first one. This understanding is based on the patriarchal division of public/private. Feminist versions emphasize the centrality of the reproductive realm, which is understood as the one that is producing life itself, and economically speaking generates 2/3 of total social production (Sevilla Conference, April 2007). One might query that while putting “care” as part of “production” as well (and not just reproduction) is a sensible corrective to the Marxist/feminist use of reproduction, yet does this formulation extend the code of production to life itself? Some might see this move as an economization of ‘care’.

mainly industrialized countries). The situation is exploding because of many deficiencies: such as the lack of an explicit policy about care-givers, of infrastructures and services, as well as of the cultural recognition and the monetary remuneration of that critical activity.

CARE CRISIS¹⁶

The deepening and expansion of the ‘care-giver’ as an increasingly necessary figure, is opening contradictions and challenges referred to by Precarias and other feminists as the “care-crisis”. This crisis forces a necessary redefinition of the roles of care-givers *and* care-takers, opening questions such as: who is going to take care of those that need more care –children, elders, people with functional diversity, etc.? What kind of infrastructures, services, recognition and new family structures would resolve the current situation of a care-crisis? This crisis brings along both challenges and promising opportunities. If this crisis is understood as something not limited to the domestic sphere but rather, is seen as a social question, then it is possible to see its transformative potential. The logic of care, as basis for a more sustainable society, is counterposed to the dominant logic of profit-making and securitization. Also, care, as the set of activities oriented to sustain life, would generate a certain sense of commonality among diverse situations and different populations, helping to amplify mobilization processes.

GLOBAL CARE CHAINS ¹⁷

¹⁶ This explanation of the notion of care crisis is based on the presentation by La Agencia at the Sevilla Conference on Precarity as well as on the Manifiesto for the Women’s Day parade in Madrid in 2007. The manifesto document was discussed, consented upon and distributed by different collectives of the Madrid feminist movement during the march on March 8th. It is important to mention that this definition of care crisis is my own reading of those contents.

¹⁷ One of the inspirations to develop the concept of care crisis linked to the question of globalization was the book by Barbara Ehrenrich and Alrie Russel Hochschild. This is a compilation of case-studies dealing with the global economy of care, the phenomenon of a “care-deficit” in countries of the Global North and the solution of care as a central export product for some countries of the South.

The process of globalization has entered into our homes through the question of domestic labor. The internationalization of care and intimacy is made out of what has been called “world chains of affect” (Russel 2001 in PD 2004). These chains are mainly formed by women, transferring care tasks from one woman to another one. This transfer of tasks might be with or without remuneration. These women are dispersed through homes, working simultaneously at local and international scales. Normally, these chains start in ‘poor’ countries and end up in ‘rich’ ones. For example, a sister or grandmother replaces the mother who migrated to northern countries to take care of the children or parents of another woman, who herself works outside of the home. This migrant woman will engage in both homes, multiplying her presence and transcending borders. This is the kind of affective work in chain, or in sequence, formed by women placed in different parts of the world but closely connected. This chain will be marked by relations of power and hierarchy among the women involved, depending on the social value of care work, racism and situation of legality of each link in the chain.

*CARETIZENSHIP*¹⁸

According to some contemporary feminists, the notion of care helps to redefine the political understanding of citizenship and rights, which as concepts of Modernity are both considered limited and biased. They recognize that even if citizenship was historically necessary to acquire certain improvements, according to a feminist analysis, citizenship is placed on the first side of

¹⁸ The first time I heard this term was at the Sevilla Conference on Precarity, which addressed the two hottest questions being linked to the question of precarity at the moment: 1) basic income and 2) care. The workshop on “Practices and Rights of *Caretizenship*” took place also at that typical Andalusian patio of a downtown occupied building described in the previous chapter. The four participants at the table also spoke about the changing relationship between life/work being discussed by their colleagues speaking on the question of basic income in the morning. However, this afternoon workshop began from a care-centered vision, rather than a labor-centered approach of the same phenomenon. This definition of the increasingly popular notion of “caretizenship” is based on the presentation made by a member of the *Agencia de Asuntos Precarios* and by a representative of the Sevilla-based feminist collective *Lilith*.

the gender division made around public/private spaces and autonomous individual/interdependent community. Besides emphasizing those ingrained divisions, the notion of citizenship is based on a state-centered notion of the political “always asking for something from a public institution”. Recognizing care would go beyond a monetary or legalist acknowledgement in the part of the state. Rights under the premise of care would be redefined as the necessary redistribution of care-tasks, redefining given roles and developing new infrastructures. This is what they refer to as *cuidadania*. In Spanish, the term *cuidadania* was born out of a typo (interchanging a couple of letters, *cui-* instead of *ciu-*), that by mistake was written in the inaugural sign that is still present at the doors of the El Pumarejo Center. This very building hosted several years later an international conference on Precarity where this term was object of public discussion.¹⁹ Some Sevilla-based feminist groups started to appropriate this grammatical episode in order to rethink the connections between care and rights.

A CAREFUL STRIKE

In order to call attention to the importance of care work among both precarious circles as well as society in general, *Precarias* came up with an imaginative proposal. Rather than a foreseeable political strategy, it was conceived as a consciousness raising mechanism. This discursive proposal was a strike of care work: calling to stop and thus make visible the necessary, continuous, and invisible activities of care. Based on that paradoxical call for stopping the unstoppable, the goal was to bring attention to care’s centrality and to start a process towards the

¹⁹ This point generated a large debate among all the participants at the Conference on Precarity, Social Rights and the Crisis of the Welfare State (Sevilla April 2007). The discourse of *renta básica* was criticized as being immersed in a conventional understanding of rights and citizenship. The debate was quite productive trying to reconcile both proposals, which until then seemed quite distant from one another, each one mutually ignoring the other. Despite that apparent distance, there were things in common between the roundtable on *renta básica* and *cuidados*, although starting from different premises and a rather gendered embodiment of the presentations: the first workshop given mainly by men and the second by women.

politicization of care. Posing the following kind of proposal constitutes a creative and communicative tool for the generation of a different imagination:

“In this way the strike appears first as a question: “what is your care strike?” In second place, the strike appears as a multiple and daily practice, because care is not a domestic question but a public affair and a generator of conflict.” (PD 2003)

To recapitulate, the conceptualization of care via these five terms is not understood as finished or completely articulated. Rather, it is the beginning of something to be proven useful, sharable, and able to appeal subjectively and intervene politically. For instance, through the alliance with domestic workers these concepts are put to work, discussed, imagined and re-made, articulating a common lexicon in order to think through innovative ways to reconsider one’s own conditions and act politically. The following ethnographic section attempts to convey a sense of a theory of care “in the making”. The terms of the glossary will appear as point of departure for broader discussions.

The next section provides several responses to the initial research questions guiding this dissertation project by introducing the context of emergence, describing the research practices that go into making a political-affective alliance as well as the further development of concepts in the process. The material mostly comes from ethnographic field notes taken at meetings, workshops and drifts, as well as performance-actions in public space. The process of alliance building among *La Agencia* and a group of active domestic workers speaks to the three contentions advanced in this dissertation, though emphasizing the third one: that is, the hypothesis of the transformative potential of research, in terms of subject formation, fostering agency and re-inventing political imaginaries. Through the story of the relationship, I hope to show how each party originally came with distinct notions of the political, including a certain

sense of the political subject and concrete ideas for political strategies. Through the alliance, an emerging process of mutual contagion of political logics was fostered, articulating a renovated political imaginary and collective lexicon of struggle.

7.3. Alliance with Migrant Domestic Workers: The Silent Revolt of Care Takers

Migrant domestic work was one of the main themes for the initial research project by Precarias. Conducting a drift with a domestic worker from Ecuador allowed many of Precarias' members to walk through the different spatial corners of her everyday itinerary and engage in dialogue about issues not usually spoken about. The uniform became one of the main topic of discussion and confession by the part of this woman, who openly spoke of the uniform as a “check point”, a marker of hierarchical difference as if the border and all its racial profiling mechanisms were embedded in that piece of cloth. While I was there, this drift and its implications were mentioned several times:

“After having conducted drifts through the intense lives of some domestic workers, I would not give up to the potential of a foreseeable common struggle” (Retiro Park, long day evaluation meeting, July 15, 2007).

This speaks to how this experience deeply touched many of the participants, making a profound impact on the findings, which significantly geared from the question of precarity itself towards issues related to the “globalization of care”. This shift also invigorated a political energy towards the desire to articulate and work with a sector –migrant domestic women- that despite its growth had not thus far been politically visible.

7.3.1. Shifts in the Geographies of Domestic Labor

Since the fifties, the growing incorporation of women into the job market has increased the problem of how and who is to address domestic labor and care work towards children, sick

and elderly people, in other words, towards all those people more acutely dependent on others. This worldwide process has taken different rhythms and articulations depending on each historical context. In this case of Spain, as in other countries of the Southern rim of Europe, this process overlapped with the period of increasing economic de-regulation and the regression of young welfare states:

Con estas premisas, cabe decir que el trabajo domestico y de cuidado se esta reorganizando. Las nuevas necesidades de cuidado (acentuadas por el envejecimiento de la población) y las dificultades de un contexto laboral (que prima la temporalidad y recorta los derechos), agravan las condiciones en que se reproduce la reproducción, por no hablar del tiempo para sí, para la sociabilidad y la acción social y política. Así pues, la función del “ama de casa” no desaparece sino que se reconfigura (Hogares, Cuidados y Fronteras 2004: 12).²⁰

This arrival of women into the job market then did not change the enduring division between the professional and the family spheres. The feminist critique calling attention to the power relations embedded in that dichotomy of public/private spaces was still valid. Reproduction work did not gain any re-valorization, despite constituting the basis of any functioning society. Rather than being considered as critical common responsibilities of society at large, domestic work, attention towards children and care work in broad terms, are conceived as something to be managed individually, under the sole responsibility of the nuclear family. In this context where care is undermined and market-oriented activities are socially and economically praised, women are not willing anymore to accept the role of “mere house-wife”. Still, some of them have to go through the well-known “double workday”. The other partial solution has been to rely on a “third woman”. This third woman is increasingly a migrant woman, subordinated to the controls and constraints of an increasingly restrictive border and

²⁰ *Homes, Care and Borders* is a multi-country research project funded by the European Union where some Precarias contributed.

migration regime. This woman experiences severe restrictions in terms of family life herself as a result of the migratory policies that limit any kind of family re-aggregation. This growing product of a “new global division of labor” is particularly a novelty for the case of Spain, which for a long time had not been a country of in-migration. Also, the growing equation between the “care giver” and migrant woman brings along new articulations of class, ‘race’ and gender, in a country that was internally quite homogenous in ethnic terms. According to one study, the historical infra-valorization of care and domestic work increasingly mediated by the ethnic difference becomes the neo-colonial foundation not only for Spain, but for the new Europe (Hogares, Cuidados y Fronteras 2004: 13). This explanation points to the complex political economy of care.²¹ Care, also for *Precarias*, is shaped by class, race, gender and nationality. This could actually be related to coloniality, care becoming a space of tension where modern/colonial power relations are reproduced.

In this context, the Socialist government announced a series of legal changes which would consider domestic work under the general regime of labor. Until then, domestic work was legislated under a special labor regime, established well before the achievements of workers’ movements, and as such, with notably fewer rights than a regular worker. The integration of this special regime to the general labor regime was one of the measures to limit the increasing number of abuses and illegal conditions in the domestic sector. According to the Ministry of Labor, the majority of domestic workers in Spain are currently situated in the informal or unregulated sectors of the national economy.²²

²¹ Maria Mies writes a pioneering book that gets at some of this political economy. See *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a world scale* (1986) London: Zed Books

²² For more information see <http://www.amecopress.net/spip.php?article849>

This legal opening provoked certain timid responses by unions in support of the legal change. Yet, these statements were not so loud and eloquent as usual. This might be due to the historical and present lack of familiarity on the part of unions in dealing with this kind of ‘atypical worker,’ most of the time under no formal contract or ‘semi-illegal’ contracts, and the reluctance to address the growing intricacies of informal economies and the increasing migrant working class. In this context, new lines of conflicts emerged around age-old questions, although articulated differently in terms of gender, ethnicity and forms of struggle.

7.3.2. *History of an Alliance*

“Alianzas como intercambio de energías, conocimientos y prácticas.

Alliances as exchanges of energies, knowledges and practices”

La Agencia evaluation meeting, Julio 15, 2007

The first alliance embarked upon by the recently created *Agencia Precaria* was with this turbulent sector of immigrant domestic work. In particular, it was with a concrete initiative called *Servicio Domestico Activo-SEDOAC* (Domestic Service in Action). This is a nascent attempt by a few domestic workers who, after having gone through a frustrating experience with mainstream unions, wanted to organized themselves independently. Sedoac women accidentally met women from the Agency and after some initial communication, decided to embark on a process of collaboration. The Agency would offer a well-located and welcoming physical space for meetings and more public gatherings, as well as free legal consultation thanks to the various lawyers associated to *Eskalera Karakola*. For its part, Sedoac, in a kind of political reciprocity, would provide the entrance to a labor sector usually quite inaccessible, share survival strategies and organizing practices. Many Sedoac members displayed a political expertise characterized by

great speaking abilities and creative and pleasurable activities, due to organizing backgrounds in their respective countries of origin.

However, the beginning was challenging due to the logistical difficulties in materializing the relationship. The activities done together were minimal and the communication hard given the disparity of work schedules and family responsibilities. The first assessment about the alliance, done in the annual evaluation meeting on July 2007, was quite pessimistic in regards to level of mutual cognizance and collaboration. However, in that same meeting, many expressed the desire to try it again. The consensus about working on the domestic question come mainly from the strength and reflection gained during the research phase. Through the next year, after some initial yet serious logistical difficulties, a routine of activities started to come together enough to enable each party to see each other more often and plan joint events together. In the process, as the ethnographic account shows, different visions of politics arose and became the source of misunderstandings but also mutual influence and collective learning. Also, the procedures being previously used by *Precarias* as research methods –mainly, drifts and workshops–, were put to work to strengthen the organizing goals. The spirit of research and inquiry runs through the different activities that make up the alliance, in the sense of investigating the intricate realities of paid domestic work as well as of nurturing the desire of knowing each other’s realities.

The following section is made out of my fieldnotes from attending a series of workshops. Having participated since the inception of this particular alliance, I selected a fragment of the development of this relationship, including the first joint activity between the groups, which consisted in the planning and execution of a drift as well as the first of three co-organized

workshops. These are particularly significant in terms of structure and content. These encounters are narrated as “scenes,” putting the actors on the stage by themselves. Each intervention is identified by collective figures: Agencia, Sedoac and other interested domestic workers, without specifying individual names. The goal is to show the process of alliance building and mutual politicization.

*The First Joint Drift:
Political Imaginaries in Tension: Law vs. Affect*

One of the main problems of a recently arrived or long-term migrant domestic worker is the isolation and lack of knowledge about one’s rights and consequently, the difficulty of organizing with others. Sedoac women were indeed concerned about how to increase the small numbers of domestic workers active in changing their conditions. *La Agencia* proposed to distribute flyers in different parts of the city where domestic workers would be passing through on their ways to work, publicizing a workshop for migrant domestic workers. Since the domestic servant’s workspace is a private home, it was necessary to think in terms of itineraries and transit spots as the places of potential encounter. The know-hows learned from the experience of urban drifting proved useful at this point. When trying to reach this kind of atypical worker, most in the informal economy, traditional publicizing venues such as posts at union locals resulted as inefficient.

After a long brainstorming session among members of Agencia and Sedoac while sitting around a map of the city, two itineraries were traced: one would pass along the different employment pool offices (*bolsas de trabajo*) for domestic work; and the other would target the main transportation hubs (*intercambiadores*) of the city early in the morning and late at night, following the domestic work schedule. So far the two parties seemed to agree in terms of

strategic planning, the divergences though arrived when discussing about what was the flyer calling for:

SEDOAC. We are calling for a workshop for domestic workers to demand the promised change of law in reference to domestic work: the transition from a special labor regime to the general regime in order to be considered with the same rights as any other worker.

AGENCIA. Yes, ok. But that demand is exactly what the president Zapatero is going to do, we need to ask for more, right?

SEDOAC. Well, he promised to do this, but when and under what conditions?

AGENCIA. My point is that what we are fighting for going even further than a particular legal change, right?...we are fighting for women's rights, undocumented workers' rights...we are doing a revolution!

SEDOAC. Mmm.... It is true that this change of law is not enough, but still it is important...what about adding to the main theme of the workshop –change of law-something like...“because we always deserve more!”

They finally agreed upon the content of the flyer. This was not a mere discussion about the terms, but about the very purpose of the first public event organized by this alliance. The disagreement upon the goals envisioned for this joint workshop shows two different ways of understanding political action. This clash of political logics will come up again and again, being reformulated through the process of alliance building.

*Drift-Flyering.
Plaza del Sol, January 15, 2008:12am*

During the day of the expedition, small mixed groups converged at the different places identified as targets for flyer distribution. The goal was not only to publicize an event, but to spark conversations that would potentially lead to more knowledge about the territories, institutions and itineraries of domestic work.

“Drifts are mechanisms to generate spaces of encounter and provoke conversations at places that are produced as absent and silent” (Interview Agencia member, January 15, 2008)

Aware of this function of the drift, I was part of the small group in charge of the itinerary through four different labor pools of the city. The expedition started at the metro stop of Plaza del Sol, where several participants of Agencia and Sedoac converged. The walk started with a conversation among the drifters themselves about the “legal question”.

AGENCIA. I don't like it, but I totally understand this legalist concern that SEDOAC has. It is a consequence of so much pressure on the part of society to have papers about everything: papers for citizenship, papers for contracts, papers for family issues... without those papers you are potential object of abuse...as if our lives would depend on pieces of paper...as if one would be made out of paper!

SEDOAC. Yes, I don't like it neither...and much less to think of myself as merely be made out of paper, but since they are so key to define issues of life and death...we want to focus our struggle to regularize our papers both as migrants without legal status and as workers of the informal economy.

AGENCIA. Hey, hey... I think through this alliance there is the possibility of learning something from each other though: we are realizing how vital the legal question is for many people, something we ourselves were really bad at admitting, except for the abuses suffered when not

having the right papers in terms of formalizing homosexual relations... At the same time, I hope we are showing how this “aferrarse a lo juridico” is not enough and many times even limiting the efficiency of the struggle ... focusing on the individual achievement of papers limit processes of collective struggle...

SEDOAC. Why is that limiting?

AGENCIA. The only certitude we can offer is that being alone we can not do anything, but together we are able to efficiently struggle: inventing ways to intervene in everyday conflicts and putting cooperation and collective creativity at the service of the battle to change our current conditions. Rather than focusing on each individual case, the goal is to generate a solid base of affect, as source to fight for individual and collective rights. Even if you personally are totally depressed, try to have the energy to share it in collective spaces and redefine individual problems into common issues.

This debate will run through the development of the alliance, starting a process of mutual contagion among distinct political logics: papers vs. *creacion de lazo*; law vs. affect; state vs. beyond the state... For instance, this clash of different notions of the political and thus new political subjectivities re-appears in the following account of the first workshop.

*The first jointly-organized workshop:
Re-defining notions of expertise and representation*

During the preparations for the first public activity together, while women from SEDOAC insisted that the main goal was the integration of domestic work to the general labor regime, Agencia participants always framed it in terms of rights in the broader sense, or more open-ended struggles affecting different spheres of life. The first set of goals emphasized legal concerns such as gaining further knowledge on the specifics about workers' rights or having

access to lawyers. The second set of goals, (especially after witnessing frustrated efforts at organizing by undocumented street vendors who focused too much on the issue of *papeles*²³ recognized the importance of the legal question but wanted to go beyond that. For the actual workshop, Agencia members offered to distribute material about specifics on legal issues, but also avoided having a workshop reduced to individual consultations on particular cases addressed to a legal expert. On the contrary, for them it was crucial that this first workshop would function as a space of encounter among domestic workers themselves, offering the possibility to feel themselves, at least temporarily, outside of the usual state of acute isolation and fragmentation experienced in that sector. Rather than an expert to be consulted, the premise was to facilitate a self-empowering sense that ‘we are the experts’ on this topic, nobody knows ‘better than us’ about how it is to live under these conditions. During the preparatory meeting a week before the workshop, SEDOAC women showed certain enthusiasm about this idea proposing that if ‘we are the experts’, we have to start by sharing our own experiences and knowledges in order to create a common pool. The point of doing a go-around (each participant sharing her own experience) at the beginning of the workshop was to build a sense of collectivity instead of the usual path of facing problems on an individual basis.

After having participated in email discussions, informal meetings with domesticas and precarias as well as helping in the publicizing of their first public event together, I was excited when the day of the Agencia-Sedoac workshop arrived. On the walk to Eskalera Karakola from my apartment, I was thinking that rather than focusing exclusively on the topic of the discussion,

²³ Papeles para todos! Papers for all! This is the slogan of many migrant rights networks through the world demanding legal regularization for all immigrants. In Madrid, the initiative of Ferrocarril Clandestino, a project where many participants of La Agencia are currently active, is a network of migrants and non-immigrants activists working to fight the current consequences of the border regime in the European Union.

I should also pay attention to the procedures, since I heard Precarias counting the “taller” as a research method. What format and concrete methods are used? How are the roles of researchers and researched defined? Is the presence of a research agenda explicit? The first workshop centered on the new legal opening promised by the Socialist Party: the integration of domestic work within the general labor regime. This topic provided the possibility to show different notions of the political and concepts of expertise at work. The theme of the workshop was to explore the juridical regime of domestic work.

*Workshop about the juridical regime of domestic labor
Eskalera Karakola. Sunday February 3, 2008: 16 pm*

The workshop took place at an indoor space decorated with casual furniture, artistic posters and political flyers. There was a large red floor and a huge bay window at street level. A welcoming area with a sofa and coffee table greeted all entrants. Next to it, without an intermediary wall, a large space was filled with chairs in a circle. Around ten domestic workers that had heard of the workshop arrived on time, sitting around the little table and shyly introducing themselves to each other...A few minutes later, the room was packed with around 40 people, most of them domestic women, 3 men accompanying them, and around seven *agencieras*. Most of the workshop dynamic was facilitated by some Sedoac members (the 3 that had been most involved in co-organizing with the Agencia). Some logistical roles were divided among *agencieras*: note taking on a big blackboard; snacks; time keeper ...After a half an hour presentation about how Servicio Domestico Activo (SEDOAC) was formed out of the frustration emerging from one of the major meetings on domestic work organized by big institutional actors and central unions (ADESCO), the circle was opened to participation:

INTERESTED DOMESTIC WORKER. Oh! So are there any lawyers here today?...

Sedoac. Not today, our organization is too small yet to be able to provide legal services.

Agencia. For today, we are distributing a copy of the current rights in the domestic sector. We also have several copies of this guide explaining different resources for free legal assistance.

All the copies were distributed. The introduction to the workshop continued while the attendants were taking a look at that material. This time the workshop was framed in terms of building up on our own expertise.

AGENCIA. The workshop is also conceived as a way to create “herramientas de auto-defensa” (self-defense tools) to be used in unfair and challenging situations...useful tools, but not always legal solutions... the idea today is to start from our own experiences as real experts on our own situations...who else is going to know better what our problems are?...and share those knowledges to form a common pool of 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/what to avoid/etc....things a lawyer would be unable to know...

INTERESTED DOMESTIC WORKER. I really like that, what you just said...

After that brief interruption, the presentation about SEDOAC went on by a very articulate and empowering speaker from Colombia.

SEDOAC. Our expectations of getting legal status were defrauded by working in such a deregulated, invisible and exploitative sector. When you finally get your own papers (regularization in terms of migration status), suddenly you start paying “la seguridad social” (social security), you feel as if you were one more in this society and outside of the fears of being deported...however...you realize how even though you are paying as any other worker, you are not getting the same labor rights nor the same social treatment: no right to the

unemployment subsidy; no right to sick leave ...; not even the possibility of having a contract in writing, everything is just agreed upon by word.

SEDOAC. “Nos espabilamos” [we woke up]...we gained some consciousness about this unjust situation, and especially because of the need to feel accompanied we started this small organization that is just beginning...with four courageous women.

SEDOAC. I have to change my talk because of recent news: I was supposed to talk about the legal differences between the current status of domestic workers under the “regimen especial” and the promising status that would have been gained when this sector would have become part of the “regimen general”. However, during this past week the government announced that this would not happen yet.²⁴

AGENCIA. Well, the European Union wanted to eliminate all the “special regimes” in terms of labor policy within EU countries. The Spanish government has been doing that with some economic sectors such as agricultures, however with the sector of domestic work, there has been a delay...the excuse is that the concerned parts have not arrived to an agreement...however, the concerned parts are just a paradoxical representation of the sector: the employers’ association on one side, and on the other, the main unions.²⁵

²⁴ According to different news sources, the promised law that regulates domestic work as part of the Regimen General was not going to be possible before the end of the Zapatero administration.

²⁵ In order for the unions to be able to participate in the national level negotiations on the legal reform regarding domestic work, they had to have representation at work places in that sector, in other words unionized domestic work sites. The problem with the union model though, since it is workplace based, is that in order for ‘representation’ to occur there must be more than one worker at a worksite. In most cases though, there is only one domestic worker per home (this may be part of the reason why domestic work had been such a forgotten sphere on the part of the unions up until now). In order to resolve this dilemma and still be able to ‘represent’ domestic workers at the national level, the unions searched out domestic workers at the homes of the nobility, who would often have multiple domestic servants and tried to recruit them to the union.

The need of forming some kind of collectivity against everyday isolation as well as the question of gaining awareness about one's own expertise were rapidly linked to issues of representation.

INTERESTED DOMESTIC WORKER. So, who is representing us? Why aren't there more associations of domestic workers? We are trying to form one, there are others in Bilbao, Valladolid, etc...we have to put something together at the national level!!

INTERESTED DOMESTIC WORKER. Having this kind of association behind you would:

- give you more security and legitimacy at your workplace: our bosses will know that we are not alone, by ourselves... "they are always saying: let me consult with my manager "gestor" ...we will be able to answer, "let me consult with my association" ...

-we would also have more information about our own rights and about where to go in case of abuse: we can show this guide for immigrants' rights and resources you just gave us to our bosses...

-we could invite our bosses to these kinds of talleres...

The impulse for this kind of self-organizing came from the analytical realization of the importance of their work. Many domestic workers were thinking along the same line: "Why are we being so economically and socially underestimated, despite our critical contribution to families and society at large?" Sedoac women explain their analysis of the value of care work as well as some of the transformations they were observing as a result of the migration question.

SEDOAC. Exactly...all our organizing is based on our own analysis about how this sector, despite being forgotten by the government and undervalued by society, is actually the foundation for society. It facilitates the social, labor and family life of many women, and families of this country...

INTERESTED DOMESTIC WORKER.. We take care of someone else kids' with an intense love, the love that we are not giving to our own children –many times of the same age- in our countries of origin...

SEDOAC. Care work, now and here, is intimately connected with migration. This brings along a series of transformations into our role: the same way technologies and globalization have advanced communications and economic transactions across distance in real time, my care work is also taking place across distance in real time.

SEDOAC. Migration is not sequential, and even less now, when you are indeed living in two or more worlds at the same time...women not only have to be able to be simultaneously in two places –at work and at home-, this super-woman now must be able to be in a third place, the South.

INTERESTED DOMESTIC WORKER. Right. And not only the space gets multiplied, but also the time is “desdoblado”, simultaneously taking care of several people.

As the time-keeper, at this point I made signals to put an end to the initial presentation since it was longer than planned. Nonetheless, it was worthwhile I think, because it gave people a much better idea of what this encounter was about, and also laid down the ground for encouraging participation sharing analyses about the intersections of domestic work and migration. After insisting on the value and expertise of domestic workers, it was time to listen to each other. The next part of the workshop consisted in a round of sharing experiences, particularly concrete moments of conflict and negotiation.

SEDOAC. The method proposed for having an efficient discussion is the following: we will go in a circle, each of us addressing two points: first, narrating a crucial experience of conflict, of abuse; and second, how you responded, or not, and how you negotiated...

After this, we will see what topics are the most repeated and do small groups to work on those issues, and there we will address the third question: what should I have done? What could I have done? By myself or with others? The result of this would be a list of strategies that we will put in common at the very end of the taller.

At this point we were around 40 people. Each woman started to narrate different episodes, some with many more details, others with more passion, some (around 5) said they were happy without problems so far....

INTERESTED DOMESTIC WORKER. Everything began like roses, as if we were in love, my boss would tell me "oh my dear how well you've cleaned!". But everything turned upside down when I asked her to help process my papers... she began to ignore me, to not look at me, to avoid me...until I finally got in front of her one day to ask her again. She told me that I couldn't demand anything, that in this country I was an illegal, and that "I couldn't even walk the streets of Madrid" ...I answered that "I was just as much a senora as she was" and I went running home to cry...

After many testimonies, the more frequent topics were written down on a blackboard:

- 1) conflicts around the question of migration documents;
- 2) irregular layoffs;
- 3) stories about racist and sexual harassment;
- 4) greater workload than originally agreed upon

The big circle was broken down into four random small groups by each participant choosing a number between 1 and 4. While the chairs were being moved, the ambiance was very warm, with chatter and laughter, everyone enjoying little snacks and drinks. People seemed quite at ease especially after sharing those personal stories. Right after, each small group worked on one of the four main problematics identified during the go-around in the big circle. After half an hour of focused discussion on how to respond to these different situations of conflict, it was the moment to put the material in common. Everything was written down on a large flip-chart. Overall, there was an unexpected eagerness to go out to the street and make the domestic work question visible. Many mentioned the importance of sharing and writing down the nitty-gritty about practical advice and everyday tricks in negotiations.

After the workshop, at the monthly internal meeting of the Agencia, everybody was quite positive about the workshop: “we saw much more energy and eagerness to do something than expected, although also being prudent about calling for mobilizations before the “vinculo” [link] among the current participants is made stronger and more people are engaged in the process” (February 23, 2008). They also discussed the tension among the legal priority versus the goal of self-empowerment and the importance of learning together. Some of the Agencia participants confessed that at times, during the workshop, the tension was felt as an irresolvable conflict.

This first workshop, in addition to being a long, yet fun encounter and a productive discussion on the question of domestic work, revealed a series of distinct notions of politics and expertise. For instance, in terms of political goals, many domestic workers emphasize the struggle for changing the legal status of domestic work, especially because formalizing the

documents related to migration was not a guarantee of better treatment at work or personal improvement. The domestic workers with papers testified how even after being legalized they were still suffering the abuses of the informal economy. Others, mostly members of Agencia but also domestic workers, were envisioning the generation of a space of encounter and self-empowerment, an opportunity for aggregation and mutual support to break their impotence and isolation. Related to this question are the understandings of expertise and representation: while some wanted to rely more on lawyers and mainstream associations, others defended the double statement of 'we are the experts' and thus 'we can represent ourselves'. Something that seemed to be agreed upon, was the centrality of care work and the need for its re-valorization.

All of these themes will be further developed in the next workshop, a month later.

Workshop about Strategies: Fears and Challenges
Sunday March 16, 2008: 17:00 pm

Familiar faces when I got to *Eskalera Karakola*. Also a few new faces started to arrive: domestic workers from Cote d'Ivoire, Colombia, Rumania...as well as a lawyer and a nun (from the popular Church of *San Lorenzo*, very involved in *Ferrocarril Clandestino* and an immigrant women's group). The workshop started with a member of SEDOAC welcoming everybody and asking for a round of introductions: say your name and something that rhymes with it, as an easy way to start breaking the ice. The new ones were asked to talk briefly about their experience: where they were from, how was their work and current migrant status. One of them, from Colombia, was very insisting asking details about the event. Even if it felt like a pain at the time, it was a way for everybody to get to know better what SEDOAC, la Agencia and these workshops were about. It is interesting how B introduce la Agencia and la EKKA:

INTERESTED DOMESTIC WORKER. And what is La Agencia? What about Eskalera Karakola, written with K in the flyer?

SEDOAC. They are going to tell you right now, but let me say that they have been great allies since the beginning supporting many of our calls, like this one, inviting us to their space. “Contamos con el apoyo de un grupo de chicas comprometidas con la causa” (We count on the support from a group of girls committed to the cause)

This way of representing the members and role of the Agencia was an object of discussion during the Agencia’s internal monthly meetings. It was an uncomfortable position because they look at the struggle of improving domestic work as part of a broader struggle against precarity and for the revalorization of care work. Instead of supporters, they felt and wanted to be seen as part of the same common struggle. This speaks to the broader challenges of processes of acompañamiento.

SEDOAC. We are going to present the methodology and structure that some of us from Sedoac and la Agencia have prepared for this second workshop.

AGENCIA. “La dinamica del taller” tries to build upon the main conclusion of the previous workshop, that is, the importance and yet underestimation of care work. In order to push this hypothesis further along we will do a spontaneous brainstorm about how to visibilize the problems faced in and the contributions offered by our work. After that, we will break in to small groups to discuss possible challenges and specifics in materializing those ideas.

In order to spark the imagination, the brainstorming session included the video-screening of “El Futuro de los Cuidados”, a fantasy based news report that portrays the consequences of a

hypothetical strike in the care sector.²⁶ What would happen if women stop taking care even just for one day? The goal to visualize the relevance of domestic work directly spoke to the larger question of care and its intimate connection with precarity. Sharing everyday experiences of conflict and brainstorming strategies of visibilization was the beginning of a long-term process of the politicization of care work.

SEDOAC. We have organized the main points coming up from our brainstorm in three clusters:

- 1) Fight for the right and the practice to speak up at the private workplace (answer back to your employer if necessary, don't swallow everything, share your story with others);*
- 2) Strategize tactics to make our supposedly individual problems public (street performances, media-grabbing attention actions (eg. collective sweeping of iconic buildings such as the Ministry of Labor or the Congress), collective legal suits, strikes?, participation on TV and radio programs, "escraches" to particularly abusive employers to make their behavior known among neighbors).*
- 3) Organize a consciousness rising campaign (de sensibilizacion) addressing politicians, public opinion in general but also geared towards domestic workers and employers.*

All of these proposed actions implied a significant transformation of assumed practices and stereotypes as a domestic worker: first, from being quiet and submissive to being eloquent and knowledgeable about their own rights and responsibilities; second, from remaining in a semi-hidden state, alone with their fears of employers and migration authorities, to feeling accompanied and supported enough to make their work public and an object of political discussion. Finally, from being under the burden of multiple super-imposed prejudices –as

²⁶ This is an independent production that was inspired by the concept of care strike developed by PD in one of their writings "Una Huelga de mucho cuidado". The video portrays an imagined scenario of what would had happen ten years later after a care strike.

woman, immigrant, from different ethnic background and being a domestic servant- to being able to participate in a struggle for recognition and re-valorization – in short, a struggle for dignity.

This struggle is based on the premise that care work must be recognized as essential to the overall functioning of a society. This postulate is shared and supported by la Agencia who arrived to the same conclusion, not only from the world of domestic work but also from other spheres. These workshops in search for actions were based on that premise. However, it was important not to take for granted the feasibility of political action among a sector under high vigilance and feeling all kinds of pressures and abuses...it was necessary to go step by step, doing politics of care with ‘care’, being attuned and sensitive to the challenges of those conditions.... The second half of the workshop was structured in small groups to address the delicate question of fears. This format provided a space for more intimate conversations and allowed for the discovery of affinities among the participants.

Three small working groups discussed for almost two hours the possibilities of the actions proposed, starting from personal fears to thinking through feasible and concrete strategies. Our group, made out of participants from Agencia, Sedoac and new interested domestic workers, gathered women from Morrocco, Colombia, Ecuador, Cote d’Ivoire, Rumania, USA and Spain.

Care Workers Strike? Relato en caliente de una discusion sin precedentes

Our group dove into the idea of a strike: Before anything else, we made sure that all of us knew what strike meant, since we represented many different political traditions and distinct situations in each country. We all knew in theory what it meant, but in the moment when we

asked ourselves if we had participated in one...the majority of us had no experience.²⁷ Asking about personal experiences of strike participation and about the references it brought for each of us was somehow a way of creating a joint understanding of the meaning of strike and what it would imply to strike in the domestic care sector.

We spoke about the difficulties of striking in relation to carework and domestic labor in particular...stopping the machines, not going to the factory for a few days is very different from refusing to take care of a blind person, of children, etc. So, how could we reinvent the formula of the strike in order to adapt it to a sector where the space of work is the private residence; where the workday is lived alone, without other workmates; and where the raw materials of the work are people, normally very dependent people, instead of machines? After getting stuck for quite some time, and thinking that it was nearly impossible to conduct a strike in such a situation, we recuperated our energy by reminding ourselves that the state of things needed to be changed. Then we began to imagine that it was possible to *STOP* caring temporarily, though taking previous concrete steps: letting people know with enough time in order to find family members and friends that can help as caretakers, or finding a way to provide ‘minimal service’ (such as leaving prepared food).

Starting from Fears

In order to avoid triumphalist solutions and filling our mouths with grand plans that at the moment of truth would be unrealizable, we had to start from the most micro, from the most everyday experiences and above all from those fears that would stop us from conducting such an unprecedented feat: a strike of domestic workers! The goal being that by sharing common fears

²⁷ I personally shared my experience of responding to the general call to strike against the war in Irak during the first day of the invasion of Baghdad in March 2003. However, striking as a part time translator of an international wine testing contest was not comparable with striking when the workers is totally dependent on that particular job.

the situations of the different domestic workers would be de-individualized. By speaking of concrete experiences from each workplace, the fears began to appear...the idea suggested by the organizers of the workshop was to talk about fears by representing each of them with balloons decorated with different material distributed around the several small groups. Our group came up with the following fears and corresponding representations:

- The fear of being fired was represented by Don Joaquín, who appeared here as a red balloon with hair made out of several wool strings, cotton eyes, pointy eyebrows made with a marker and a flat mouth made with a wool string. The live-in domestic worker for this blind person explained the strong sense of responsibility she had towards him; but also spoke of him as a boss that could pay her better and help with questions related to migration papers for her family but did not, and that is why she felt the need to complain.
- The fear of abuse was represented by el Sr. Embassador, who was recreated via a balloon with curly hair made of cotton. The live-in domestic worker for the ambassadors of the Ivory Coast in Madrid had gone through abuses such as being quasi-locked in her living quarters and paid a monthly salary of only 100 euros!
- The fear of being falsely accused was represented by Dona Ana, the boss of a Moroccan girl working part time for her. Dona Ana was a minimalist white balloon, with one woolen string for hair and an anonymous face of panic! Dona Ana had refused to pay her the last several months. Even though the domestic worker did not have her papers, she dared to legally denounce the case with the support of the *Ferrocarril Clandestino* and a group of women from the *Church of San Lorenzo*. Her boss responded by threatening to accuse her of theft, a false accusation, that would have to be settled in court.

- The fear of continuous pressure and stress was represented by Dona Rosa, with long hair made out of blue tissue paper and a face drawn with black marker. She looked pretty but very angry. Dona Rosa was the owner for various bar-restaurants in the city. She was a continuously nervous boss and always bugging her employees. Working as domestic worker for her, she could not imagine asking such a boss to go on strike, when this boss wouldn't even give her a little time off when her family came to visit from Romania.

The pooling and visualization of fears becomes a way of identifying a series of common collective problems, and thus generating situated analyses and potential strategies. At the end, what emerges goes beyond a self-help tool box to fix individual problems. Rather, the result moves towards the creation of a collective identity and a common political strategy. This effort of *indagación de nosotras mismas* (“investigation of ourselves”) was channeled through the simple research technique of a focus group discussion – assisted by balloons – to fuel processes of collective self-empowerment. The format of the small group used in many activist and community development settings was truly envisioned as a research focus group, potentially able to generate analyses and conceptual contributions. The practices of documenting during the discussion spoke to that realization: what was being discussed was carefully recorded, treating the material as a source of knowledge, the basis for a new political lexicon, and possibly for publishing and reaching broader publics. This modus operandi resembles many of the traditions of engaged inquiry from which activist research draws upon, particularly feminist consciousness rising, Participatory Action Research and engaged scholarship more broadly speaking. The pooling together of fears in this case serves as an example of how a simple research technique such as a focus group discussion could serve as the generation of new analyses and political tools

that come from rearticulated subjective positions, and like a balloon, could these fears once articulated be able to float and fly away?

Finally, we discussed different strategies to supersede the fears of striking and propose formulas of public action adequate to the circumstances, including a clandestine strike of care takers.²⁸ What Precarias advanced once as a hypothesis of political action, “una huelga de cuidados,” was now being put to test. The evocative power of this concept –a generalized stoppage of care related tasks- was a formula to call attention to the crucial yet invisible role of care work. Now, the role of constructing imaginary and discursive production encountered the concrete terrain of bodies and everyday practices ready to embark in the enactment of that concept. The concept of striking, however, will be re-articulated according to the concrete needs and pressures lived in the everyday. In particular, rather than jumping to the colossal organizing strategy of organizing a strike among domestic workers, the alliance decided to start a long-term process of low-intensity requirements, yet highly powerful in their contents. This brought back the original tension between the two groups of a politics of law versus a politics of affect: while some wanted to limit the organizing process to making sure the promised law was finally passed; others wished this coming together was the source of a collective identity able to put effective political strategies without precedents, such as a strike of care takers. Finally, as if product of a mutual contagion, it seemed that those two sides of the spectrum reached a consensus: the important matter was to put care at the center of the public debate. Such a daring goal required

²⁸ Some of the concrete strategies concluded in our small group were:

-Huelga clandestina: es decir, no decir que ese día hacemos un paro laboral y vamos a una manifestación. Dar otras razones, tomar un día por asuntos propios, avisando con tiempo.

-Movilización durante horas libres: para evitar posibles complicaciones en el trabajo, no hacer la acción durante horas laborales.

-Dado que no hemos explicado que vamos a una acción, en caso de ser vista por otros o en los medios de comunicación, optar por disfraces...

mostly a struggle upon well-engrained values and long-lasting prejudices. This brought along a re-articulation of political strategies, instead of the strike, what was needed at this point was a campaign for the re-valorization of care work. The campaign was the theme of the next series of workshops.

7.3.3. Building a Campaign to dignify domestic labor

The rest of workshops of the year 2008 centered around conceiving an effective awareness campaign (*campana de sensibilizacion*). The other issues discussed in the very first workshops co-organized by Agencia and Sedoac –speaking up in the private and public space– also remained part of the campaign discussions. For instance, in order to support the process of self-empowerment in domestic space, several work sessions were organized to share “*trucos*”: that is, the nitty-gritty of mastering the diplomatic skills required for the delicate balance between professionalism and intimacy proper of domestic work. Also a list of domestic workers’ rights and responsibilities was put together to be distributed among the upcoming participants. This simple legal tool was something absent thus far and greatly welcomed by both veterans as well as new domestic workers. In terms of interventions in the public space, several ideas of street performances were considered. Finally, on the eve of one of the negotiations about the new law about domestic work, *agencieras* and *domesticas* performed the first street action at the Plaza del Sol in November 23, 2008. The action consisted in series of theater scenes about everyday episodes typically encountered by domestic workers. The improvised actors were prepared with all kind of artifacts associated with domestic work: from *cofias* to brooms, and strollers, together with hand-made signs expressing simple and direct statements: *¿Si te importa cuidar a tu familia, por que no cuidas tambien a quien la cuida?* As a way of closing the different scenes

everybody joined in big applause and a common shout: “Porque sin nosotras no se mueve el mundo”.²⁹

In order to move the campaign forward, there were two items to be resolved: first, an attractive slogan and second, a direct logo able to capture the goals of this long-term campaign. It was a campaign not only addressed to politicians, but especially to the general public with the goal of dignifying care work. In order to fight the increasing normalization of hiring a domestic worker without any kind of contract leading to many potential abuses, the idea was to generate a series of statements, sound bites and powerful visuals to communicate that having a “maid” under those conditions was not acceptable. It was a long-term project intended to shake common sense and generate an awareness about the how non-common sensical it was to mistreat care takers, who are the very ones taking care of loved ones. This message ideally would be soon travelling through soundbites and stickers through radio, newspapers as well as metros and public spaces. Throughout 2008, several brainstorming sessions around the two questions were organized. A particularly productive workshop took place in June 2008. These were some of the slogans that came out of the small group I was participating in:

“Si no te gusta ser explotada, no explotes”

“Si el amor no tiene precio...
¿por que me pagas tan poco?”

“Si valoras el cuidado de tus hijos o de tus papas,
¿por que lo pagas tan mal?”

Soy domestica, pero tambien soy madre, tengo amigos, me divierto...
¿acaso no tengo estos derechos?

²⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jyPcM1mAfc>

Si ya se acabo la esclavitud,
¿Por que nos esclavizáis asi?

¿Estáis seguras de que se acabo la esclavitud?
Pues dejadnos volar como palomas...³⁰

After brainstorming slogans in small groups, we gathered in a circle again. Several images of a potential logo were passed around the 40 participants at that moment in the workshop. The ideas for the different images were brainstormed and discussed in the previous meeting. One of the images was an octopus-woman, speaking to the ‘orquestra syndrome’ that domestic workers go through doing multiple tasks simultaneously. However, people did not like it, because the image of the octopus reminded them to something negative. The most popular icon was the “mujer-engranaje” (gear assembly or machinery woman). The goal was to send the message that when a domestic worker does not labor, many things collapsed... “conmigo se mueve el mundo”. This image attempted to call attention to the centrality of domestic work as the basis for the overall society to function: kids, office work, important meetings, the factory, eating, well being. Another domestic worker added: “La sociedad funciona porque hay un motor que empieza en la casa, y mueve el colegio, la oficina, la fabrica, etc.”

Also, people like this image because it was a woman figure with whom to identify. Actually, it was the photo of one of the domestic workers, but without super clear markers and stereotypes. The age and the ethnic background were vague on purpose.

³⁰ Key word during the conversation, slavery, *inspired by a nation-wide alliance between domestic workers associations in the United States that is using that term for their campaign.*



Figure 7.1. Poster of campaign to dignify domestic work

The third image was an Asian goddess with many hands to suggest the multitude of tasks undertaken by care workers. People preferred this to the octopus, but with the drawback that this image did not send the message of the centrality of domestic work as did the machinery woman image. Finally, in order to choose the final candidate among the possible logos, the decision was made by the intensity of applause. The machinery-woman won by enthusiastic applause concluding a very celebratory workshop. Again, the format of the workshop served beyond a self-help tool for each individual domestic worker. Rather, workshops and small group discussions function as veritable spaces of knowledge-production from which to collectively analyze the meaning and political economy of care and think together ways to communicate the problems of current forms of valuing care labor.

The campaign was then a point of encounter among the different political imaginaries that initially came into friction: politics of law versus politics of affect. It was an strategy that could act as a pressure point for the necessary legal change, but also it had the potential to go beyond an strictly juridical and individualized treatment of the problems faced by domestic workers. Without calling for a general strike of domestic workers, but through more subtle and feasible interventions, a process of self-empowerment had already started, where domestic workers were simultaneously speaking up both in the domestic and public spaces; building a community of affect and mutual support among a very fragmented sector; and finally, interpolating the general public by trying to break prejudices and re-dignify domestic work.

7.4. The Cultural Politics of Care

The ethnographic description of the alliance between la Agencia and domestic workers has shown how the five concepts advanced by Precarias around the question of care emerge through the organizing process in different ways. For instance, the centrality and meaning of **care** runs through most of the workshops becoming the leitmotiv for the strategy of the campaign; the question of the **care crisis** is taken as an implicit point of departure while the notion of **global care chains** is overtly addressed when speaking as migrant mothers and grandmothers; the more slippery question of **carecizenship** appears through the conflicts on the legal question; and finally, the possibility of the **strike** when debating about strategies. As such, the new phase of alliance building embarked upon as Agencia acts as a way of testing the political hypotheses advanced during the most overt action-research project. The ethnographic discussion also shows the concrete procedures to carry out this research phase of not only testing, but enacting, political hypotheses.

Care then becomes a conceptual focus for the current phase of *Precarias* as Agencia. However, it does not limit itself to being a key analytical category from which to think many of the shortcomings of previous understandings of precarity. Nor does it reduce itself to being a useful organizing tool to respond to the urging realities knocking at the door of Eskalera Karakola. Rather, according to what they say about themselves and as many others witness, including myself, care begins to be understood as a lived practice among the Agencia members. Care constitutes a practice that does, or at least tries to, permeate different spheres of the Agencia. One of the instances that became a pattern in all their meetings, workshops and public events was paying attention to the “petty” stuff. In contrast to most of the activist scenes in Spain where smoking is not an issue at all, rather a constituent trait of a political meeting, this was not the case for the Agencia. Also, their gatherings were exceptional in the providing of food and drinks, including the succulent pot luck dinners arranged for the internal meetings. The same attention was put into the cleaning of the space, always looking crystal clear. Childcare – something completely ignored in most Spanish political circles- was also a point of concern, although not always fully achieved.³¹ All of those are instances of “prefigurative politics”, one of the main principles of autonomy. In this particular case, a politics of care calls for practicing care itself in the everyday life.

Care was also a practice for mutual support among the very members of Agencia. Taking care of each other was part of doing politics. Moments of illness, childcare, computer crashes,

³¹ It is interesting to note how this new phase of alliance building focusing on the question of care was paired off with a sudden arrival of several babies from participants of La Agencia, including myself. This supposed a drastic change in the regular modus operandi of the group (in fact, having babies within activist circles is a rare phenomenon in Spain). From accommodating meeting times to gaining familiarity with the strange world of motherhood, this mini baby boom was a real challenge both in theoretical and practical terms. This topic and my reflexive notes on this matter might be explored for another paper. Here I wanted to signal how ideals of care (e.g. childcare) break down in the “nitty gritty” of everyday practice, and how despite their best intentions and analyses, there were still aspects that had to be worked on.

work related problems, legal issues, or love crises, were just some instances where some would take time, energy and skills to support others and vice versa. Asking for help was a common practice, either in person or via email through the large list-serve of “instinto precario”. In that sense, even if these practices remind us of an ordinary relationship of friendship, they were framed as a broader issue and part of a politicization process: the urgency to respond to precarious lives. The whole idea of the Agencia was conceived as a tool to channel mutual practices of care: “through the exchange of affect, knowledge and resources, la Agencia is a political response to the precarization of existence” (interview, summer 2005).

The practice of care also appeared during the initial research process, as eloquently put by a *Nextgeneration* activist and PhD Philosophy student, also linked to the *Precarias*’ project:

“Setting off to understand the frailties and strengths of their own survival strategies in dislocated patterns of labour, they explore the setting of precariousness in the city of Madrid. They also show us, describe to us, webs of care and affects that sustain an urban world in constant dereliction –for instance, the undervalued work of migrant domestic workers... but by researching these patterns, by “drifting” the city, encountering its people and re-encountering themselves, they are also *re-creating webs of care and solidarity, practicing care in-situ, building (other) possible connections and caring knowledge*. [...] There are efforts to re-discover the revolutionary aspects of feminist visions and practices of caring, to produce both descriptive and transformative skillful knowledge – a process of collective empowerment. One of the things we learn from *Precarias*’ work is to stand for care, because we cannot afford to throw it away with its essentialist traps” (Puig de la Bellacasa 2008: 7-8, my emphasis)

If we look at the current work of alliance building, there is also quite a lot of care practices involved in materializing relationships between distinct populations. It was indeed a real challenge to arrange unconventional alliances with the baggage of layers of socially-ascribed hierarchies: how to acknowledge and behave towards the abysmal differences in terms of physical health with a group of people with disabilities? How to deal with the actual ranking among ethnic backgrounds, and the extreme fear among many domestic workers working

without legal status? Agencia members tried to address some of these delicate questions. For example, the construction of the EKKA space had taken into consideration the accessibility for people on wheels, having no stairs and an equipped bathroom for that reason. Also, the co-organized workshops with both groups of domestic workers and people with disabilities were co-planned in advance in order to make sure that these sectors that usually experience discrimination and lack of space to speak, would take ownership through the process.

As such, care, while being a conceptual finding and a pre-liminary practice during the initial research phase, was further elaborated during this second phase. Somehow, the centrality of care brought along important research transformations at the level of research and politics, encouraging epistemological, methodological and political transformations for the group. Activism becomes a practice of care, not only in the immediate sense, caring for the small things; but also in a broader sense, caring as loving for others, nature, life, etc. Care as an overall philosophy of concern. This speaks to one of the main traits of activist research as the production of affect and alternative sociability.

7.4.1. From “partir de si” to “acompanamiento”

While the epistemological foundation of the first phase was mainly on the idea of taking the self as a point of departure for exploring the reality of precarity and the principal methodology were the drifts as a mechanism to thread different selves into a common realization of shared problems and singularities, the goal was always “partir de si para salir de si”. The second phase as Agencia would push even more this initial move outwards going out of the self to engage in processes of alliance building. This involved the acknowledgement of greater differences than expected. The logic becomes one of accompaniment. The position of

acompanante represented a series of challenges for a research and political modus operandi used to speak in first person. These concerns were expressed at one of the internal meetings of the Agencia focused on sharing impressions about the last domestic workers workshop and making a collective evaluation of the ongoing alliance with SEDOAC. The following are a series of challenges identified in this new process of accompaniment, engendering re-defined subjectivities and signaling emerging political imaginaries.

*Internal meeting of La Agencia, May 15, 2008
Eskalera Karakola, Putlock lunch*

What about our practice of speaking in First Person?

The meeting started by commenting on the frustration about: “where are our voices in this alliance? Precarias voices were actually quite absent in the workshops, they were not speaking about themselves but facilitating the workshops and the small discussion groups, summing up the points discussed by domestics, but not really in first person. That’s why, when the composition of a group was not well balanced, and there were a lot of Precarias voices, the conversation became very mono-thematic, with one or two people talking. To this problem, the *agencieras* emphasized the necessity to think of shared problems starting from our own experience: for example the problem of housing. The following are a series of quotes from the lively discussion on that matter during that internal meeting of La Agencia:

- “Sometimes the bridge of difference to be crossed feels very large...the experiences are so specific you can not find similar stories of your own to share...”
- “Well, sometimes you don’t need to be so explicit, complicity emerges from the mix among the different parties, the continuous contact and care to sustain it [la afinidad surge del roce].”
- “It seems to me that there are two models: the intellectual researcher that goes to the factory on the one hand, and on the other, the process of building a common language, building a link [vinculo], that is not only based on a formal setting for talking and

listening, but on sharing common experiences: in this case, with the domestic workers, focusing on being woman, getting old, being alone, being financially tight”

- “Maybe we don’t need to focus on our past, but whatever is being built together, on what we are sharing right now...”

This notion of activist research and its concomitant dilemmas resemble to the experience and writing by *Colectivo Situaciones*. The militant researcher was not conceived as the outsider expert visiting a community in trouble. The process of research, they say, would enable to find a series of concerns in common to be analyzed together. Research becomes a process of collective production and re-articulation of epistemic roles:

“Militant research is processing what you are living through. Working with others, working with texts. [...] overcoming the stupidity that distinguishes researchers from researched [...] What happens when the discussion is no longer about “who is who”? who is on the inside and who is 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).³²

This definition, embraced by Precarias as an ideal of what would activist research look like at its best, implied a series of challenges on the ground. In this case, the importance to find points in common and re-start talking in the first person during the alliance with domestic workers had not to be taken for granted. The new role taken by Precarias/Agencias as predominantly listeners was indeed object of discussion. Again, the question of listening brings back the more abstract discussion on activist research from chapter three. In particular, listening speaks to the ethics of permanent questioning, and the ability to “locate questions” more than finding enduring answers. Within this ethics of research, the practice of listening becomes an important although delicate must.

³² This definition by Colectivo Situaciones was sent around the list-serve of Precarias a la Deriva when it first appeared in one of the recent works by the Argentine Collective. See *La Esclavitud del Alma*.

The Risks of Listening and the Limits of the Word

There were also reflections about the new site inhabited by Precarias: the site of listening. They insisted on the importance of a welcoming attitude towards those personal histories of lived injustice, listening taken as an act of support and recognition. However, as one Agenciera said: “are we becoming Maoists?”. To what another Agenciera replied: “sometimes you feel like a voyeur of the supposedly authentic revolutionary subject...Also, the focus on individual dramas could not lead us into the risk of easy victimizing?”

Another question of concern was how the word was not enough to depict the realities of care work, and therefore, how could the group facilitate other ways of expression? The enthusiasm of using balloons to deal with the experience of fear by representing their bosses -including hair, eyes and mouth- was evaluated as a success: “It is a tool that goes beyond the word. Through the process, they are expressing A LOT (*te esta contando mucho*): gender, class, colonial, or geopolitical questions”. This question of modes of expression and different registers spoke to the multiplicity of sources of knowledge, including the long narrative of apparently anecdotic information.

The Value of the Anecdote

Some Agencieras expressed their confusion about listening to long stories of distress and drama in the following way: “what do you do with those detailed episodes about situations of injustice at the domestic workspace? Another one would pose the question in more research oriented terms: “How to leap from some of the anecdotal information to develop a broader analysis of the problem?” To that anxiety to develop analytical production in the process of alliance building, these were some of the responses:

- “However, is not the anecdote itself telling you a lot, making a fine analysis of unknown situations? The anecdote acts upon both teller and listener, by piercing through the teller and churning the listener [anecdota atraviesa al que habla y remueve al que escucha]. It is important to express that lived reality which is often inappropriate to share, even at times among your family and friends, because of the fear of being looked upon as a failed person. It is important to listen to those realities that are distant, listening until they become familiar and not exotic in order feel them closer to oneself and think through them.”
- “Now the question is: How to link the intensity of the testimony, story telling and experience to a constructive articulation of those forces of rage and sadness? As listeners, how to redirect those forces of discomfort? [escuchar y reconducir esa fuerza de malestar]”

The anecdote, finally, was re-evaluated as a performative act, able to fuel processes of mutual connection and understanding. Also, some were pointing how the anecdote might be considered as a form of self-knowledge worth while to take in consideration for more sounding and complex analyses. On all these methodological considerations, the question of care emerges in multiple forms. In this new phase as *Agencia*, care is not just the object to be analyzed but the basis of the research production process, engaging all the dilemmas that such practice of care implies when dealing with differences and new positionalities.

Beyond Advocacy: Building an Agency and a Common Lexicon with Care

According to some of the participants, although the Agency is functioning non stop, it is still very much in the very process of being defined, both in terms of its role, and its concrete actions. Once the initial research project was more or less finishing, a series of reflections and languages emerged leading to the idea of the Agency. If part of the goal of that initial research project was to discover how to produce a commons while maintaining the singular (“the singular in common”) and to experiment with new forms struggle around the multi-faceted faces and sectors of precarious labor in the metropolis of Madrid, the Agency is an attempt to respond to those results. Yet, the new process of alliance building poses multiple challenges: how to put mechanisms of self-organization among distinct precarious people in place? How to avoid

political strategies merely social service based and enhance those useful for the everyday lives of all? How to put in place mechanisms of reciprocity, conceiving these relationships as made out of several moments of “back and forth” (*toma y da*)?

Part of the goal of the Agency is to serve as a node, where people could come as collectives wishing to reach out, or as individuals with particular issues to solve. Thus the Agency serves as an info point, resource base, network of contacts, but also as a place to mobilize on different issues, that is, to politicize seemingly individual problems and to provoke new conflicts. The idea then being to serve as a point where disparate issues (from domestic work, to job-firings, to people with disabilities’ rights) could be linked through some common understandings while each maintaining their autonomy: a space for singular struggles to thread together with other seemingly micro-level struggles into a sort of common set of tools and experiences fighting or dealing with the “precaritization of existence” and “politicization of care”. The research phase generated a new vocabulary and a concrete *modus operandi* in self-organizing: less coded in the jargon of a particular political culture, less ideologized ... more focused on politicizing everyday life and practical issues. This somehow materialized in this Agency. As such, the Agency and all the political challenges involved might be seen as the result of a research process, as a response to how bringing the disparate itineraries and singularities into a common orbit of political action. This political action understood in terms of autonomy.

7.5. Conclusion: An Ethics of Knowledge Production

This chapter maps the transformation in Precarias’ activist research practice at two levels. First, in terms of conceptual production, they shift the attention from precarity to care. Second, in regards to the research practice itself, they become more focused on local issues and alliance

building. This transformation is linked to the third contention of the dissertation, namely, the place of knowledge production in the creation of new subjectivities and world-making practices. The chapter makes extensive use of ethnographic material, particularly in showing or enacting the transformation through an account of workshop practices with a particular group. The process of alliance building among *La Agencia* and *Sedoac*, though speaking more directly to the third contention about the transformative power of research, is an exemplary case of the two other contentions advanced in this dissertation: 1) the production of concepts by movements; and 2) the development of a series of concrete procedures, shared with a broader community of research practice, which is predominately based on the logic of political autonomy. Along the way, the chapter outlines *Precarias*' theory of care, on the one hand; and on the other, the role of care itself in the research process –care as the foundation for an ethics of knowledge production, for an ethics of research that links knowing, being, and doing.

In this phase as Agency, practicing care is part and parcel of the political-research process. This attention to care reveals a belief in “*how* we know is often as important as *what* we know” (Puig 2008: 14). That is, knowing is not just about discovering worlds but creating relations and even alternative worlds. This generative potential of research based on practices of care brings along notions of the political based on everyday experiences of mutual support, leading to solid and sensitive networks and alliances. Care, in the work put forward by *La Agencia*, becomes both a question to be critically analyzed and a form of doing politics. First, care constitute the very object of inquiry. As such, the re-conceptualizations of care both in theoretical and practical terms advanced by *La Agencia*, become crucial to understand the generative and transformative potential of research practices among social movements. The

centrality of care impacts the political imaginary of many precarious struggles in Europe, for instance: caring practices enter into the activist repertoire pushing forward more everyday understandings of solidarity and sensitive ways to deal with differences. Second, care as a political practice implies paying attention to “petty” stuff in the day to day organizing. Also, bringing care into politics means a special sensibility to alliance building, aware of differences and with the desire to go beyond the ghettoized self-reliable individuals that usually constitute the activist population. Taking care of each other, being aware of responsibilities and needs, constitutes the raw material of the political. Activism becomes a practice of care.

CONCLUSION

*Por una Europa donde quepan muchas Europas*¹ Other Forms of Knowing, Being and Doing Europe

“You are 15, we are 400,000,000. We are Europe.
Against [neo]liberalism, war and racism.
For another Europe.
Come October 4th to the Main Piazza,
Rome, October 2004.
(*Call for Action against EU policies*)²

This dissertation has explored *activist research* as a growing practice within contemporary social movements, specifically focusing on those located in Europe. I have investigated the traits as well as the theoretical and socio-political implications of this specific *practice* of activist knowledge production. In particular, the research principles and activities engaged in by certain contemporary movements have been identified as a concrete instantiation of a broader theoretical shift in the understanding of knowledge production. Under this framework, the development of the three contentions through the different archival and ethnographic chapters have signaled how activist research, succinctly put: 1) produces concepts and analyses relevant for a given conjuncture; 2) develops a series of distinct research procedures increasingly shared by a growing community of research practice; and finally, 3) facilitate processes of subjective and collective transformations.

¹ English translation: For a Europe where many Europes fit. This expression is inspired on the Zapatistas' call to fight for “a world where many worlds can fit”

² Call for action during the occasion of the intergovernmental conference of 25 European heads of state to discuss the content of the new European Constitution. The protest had been called in order to contest the continuing commitment to neo-liberalism in the new Constitution for the European Union.

Furthermore, the preceding chapters have focused on the conceptual and analytical production as it relates to a given conjuncture: in this particular case, the Spanish Economic Miracle and a globalizing Europe. I have shown how activist research initiatives among European movements working on the question of *precarity*, are indeed offering rather unique renderings of the current configurations of the European Union and facilitating processes of political transformation. By centering on a prolific activist research project whose analyses, methodologies and strategies have gained significant notoriety transnationally among social movements and beyond, my dissertation then engages in the triple mission of rethinking knowledge, Europe and social movements.

The Predicament of Knowledge

Part I situates this dissertation within the broader anthropological engagement with the question of knowledge. The same way Anthropology problematized and further complexified the notion of culture –a contribution captured by the title of a landmark book for the discipline *The Predicament of Culture* (1986)– Anthropology has also been attentive to the recent debates on knowledge, boosting the subfields of Science and Technology Studies, and the Anthropology of the Contemporary more broadly. This dissertation brings the question of knowledge to the fore in the realm of the Anthropology of Social Movements. Trying to condense the common denominator among a variety of theoretical debates coming from different disciplines and traditions, I frame the paradigmatic shift they are signaling as a *Knowledge Turn (KT)*. Although knowledge is a keyword of this compound, this turn does not limit itself to the epistemological sphere. Rather, under the prism advanced by the new realisms, this KT also reaches the

ontological domain, that is, of what is seen as constituting the real. Therefore, the dissertation has shown how this KT involves diverse levels of transformation.

For the sake of my argument, this KT has been understood as a paradigmatic shift in three interrelated registers: at the level of grand theory; social movements studies; *and* social movements' practices. The first level is mainly engaged in chapter one, offering a synthetic review of some of the key epistemological and ontological debates taking place in a wide variety of fields including biology, phenomenology, science and technology studies, feminism, pedagogy and post/de-colonial studies. Coming from different traditions, they emphasize distinct but interrelated traits of knowledge that were usually neglected –and even denied– by the dominant Cartesian paradigm. I synthesize such post-Cartesian understandings in a five-fold working definition of knowledge as material, networked, situated, political and plural.

The KT also refers to a change of approach in a second level. By tracing some of the recent literature on collective action, I argue that those ongoing debates about a novel understanding of knowledge is informing the field of Social Movements Studies, having a series of consequences. In relation to methodological approaches, I devote chapter two to an initial exploration of how the ethnographic endeavor is reformulated under this framework of the knowledge turn. In particular, focusing on my concrete research experience. Precarias, by embracing networking practices of knowledge production, called for a different methodological repertoire. On the one hand, Precarias's political-intellectual work, far from being easily delimited and circumscribed to a particular location and set of individuals, stretches both in terms of structure and function along decentralized networks, in particular the transnational wave of activist research and the pan-European struggles against precarity. This requires a multi-sited

research. On the other hand, the current process of Precarias is much more committed to place-based issues and oriented towards building alliances among non-standard “precarious subjects”. This is narrated through denser ethnographic material gathered in the *trans/local field* of the Lavapiés neighborhood, showing how this activist research project is indeed eager to embody more relational ontologies.

Finally, the KT is also taking place at the level of social movements practices. Chapters three and four centered around developing my argument of how activist research might be considered as an exemplary enactment of this *Knowledge Turn*. The conceptual production advanced by activist research projects embraces the materiality of knowing, constitutes a highly networked and relational practice, acknowledges its own positionality without pretensions of neutrality, and claims to be a political project playing in a contentious field of power/knowledges marked by hierarchies. Activist research also speaks to the post-Cartesian call to admit the “unbroken coincidence of our being, our doing and our knowing” (Maturana and Varela 1987: 25). I argue that activist research actively engages in the connection between research on the one hand, and subject *and* world making on the other hand. As such, as a process able to transform subjectivities *and* nurture processes of collective agency, reinvigorating political participation and imagination, activist research might be considered a knowledge production practice indeed able to illuminate the debates on the changing nature of knowledge and its relation to processes of world-making. As such, the chapters of the first thematic part of the dissertation offer an interrelated elaboration upon the theoretical, methodological and empirical underpinnings of a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of knowledge and its consequences for the study of social movements.

Europe Adrift or Other Europes in Movement?

Part II situates the context of emergence of the broader discourse of precarity, constituting the background to further understand the case of Precarias and their interest in ‘in-house’ research. Chapter five reviews historical specifics on the political economy and cultural politics of Spain as becoming part of the European Union and broader globalization processes. This is the scenario where precarious struggles began to emerge. Furthermore, this conjuncture constitutes also the very object of inquiry for those activist research projects under consideration. The project of the European Union as currently unfolding is under social movements’ scrutiny, increasingly becoming the target of civil unrest and object of critical inquiry by activist research projects. The landing of global justice movements in Europe catalysed a series of *malestares*, dispersed explosions of social unrest coming from different sectors of the population, which were hitherto unconnected and yet to be articulated with one another. The global justice movement made the EU into the object of an intense social critique. Indeed, it might be argued that this was the *caldo de cultivo* for activist research initiatives to emerge. Yet, these social movements were not merely about making critiques but also advancing and enacting alternative visions of Europe. These actors and instances of civic contestation to the EU are currently engaging in the development of novel theoretical and practical proposals alternative to those advanced by the official institutions of the EU. According to Escobar, one of the main arguments laid out through this dissertation is that “while the policies of the EU are based on a conventional concept of development subordinated to a decontextualized economic model, social movements

are elaborating cultural and political proposals based on their territorial specificity and responding to multiple contemporary subjectivities” (email communication June 2009).³

Current precarity struggles as well as migrant solidarity networks, currently constitute the main inheritors of that initial global justice wave in Europe. These contemporary struggles hold to many of the political logics and imaginaries enacted by global justice networks –such as emphasis on autonomy and difference. These struggles continue to work on further elaborating more concrete alternatives, particularly in terms of labour regimes and notions of citizenship. Indeed, the last two chapters of the dissertation entertain two of the main conceptual-political proposals articulated by precarious and migration struggles via the work of PD: this is *precarity* in its feminist version and the new rights associated with the notion of *care*.

Therefore, if chapter five lays out some specificities of the EU project via the Spanish case, the next two chapters further develops how Europe is known and thus lived by social movements. Besides the official studies and mainstream experts speaking on behalf of the EU, which usually tend to foster the idea of one single Europe, are there any other knowledges –and concomitantly other ways of being and doing- Europe? What are the consequences of those different modes of enacting Europe?

In tandem with those scholarly studies of the European Union deconstructing reductionist readings of Europe, such as the burgeoning fields of the Anthropology of the EU (Bellier and Willson 2000) and those responding to the call for “new critical geographies of Europe” (McNeill 2005); I propose that social movements are simultaneously advancing their

³ “Mientras las políticas de la UE; están sustentadas en un concepto de desarrollo convencional subordinado a un modelo económico descontextualizado, los movimientos sociales elaboran propuestas culturales-políticas basadas en su especificidad territorial y respondiendo a las múltiples subjetividades contemporáneas”. Letter to Zacatecas Institute of Critical Studies of Development, June 2009.

own analysis of Europe. What are some of those renderings of the EU? This dissertation explored how Europe is seen under the prisms of precarity and care. On the one hand, the process of increasing “precarization of existence” and on the other hand, the major transformations in the realm of care. Both constitute parallel processes reinforcing each other: increasing economic flexibilization brings along a series of radical changes in the notions of labor, leisure, welfare, rights, etc. with immediate consequences for the everyday. This is accompanied by a profound restructuring of the conventional *infrastructures and cultures of care*, due to a combination of factors including changing gender roles, global migration flows, welfare cuts, among others explained in the preceding chapters. Activist research projects such as *Precarias a la Deriva*, now acting as “an agency of precarious affairs”, are exploring the complexities of the *precarity/care complex* trying to advance situated analyses and concepts able to act as tool-boxes in the terrain of concrete struggles.

As such, this thematic part emphasizes the conceptual *and* political contributions by social movements in the context of a changing European Union. The dissertation has argued that the current wave of activist research speaks to a distinct way of producing knowledge. In particular, my work suggest how *Precarias* might be located in an alternative epistemological/ontological order of things, meaning, that despite being located at one of the urban cores of Europe, and self-defining themselves as “researchers”, they still yearn for a non Euro-centric nor logo-centric mode of knowing, being and doing Europe.

Social Movements as Decolonial Thinkers?

Based on additional ethnographic and archival material gathered during the dissertation research, and building again on the growing literature that posits social movements as knowledge producers, in my future work I will elaborate upon how social movements are enacting post-Cartesian ways of producing knowledge. This dissertation already hints towards that interpretation. Throughout the chapters I have highlighted how their knowledge production practices might remind us of “nomad thinking” a la Deleuze, and how they exhibit material, networked, situated, political and plural traits signaled by the new realisms of the *Knowledge Turn*. Identifying these traits in the work of activist research projects such as Precarias, is a way to suggest that regardless of being located at the heart of Europe, these movements might nonetheless escape from some of the most common features of euro-centric thinking. This claim though, needs further development, which I am trying to pursue in my developing research. Specifically, I plan to work on one of the most promising conceptual productions found during this research, that is, the cultural-political proposal of “citizenship otherwise” (Entránsito 2004). The first time I heard this term was from the mouth of an organizer working on migration struggles. Building on criticisms to the present migratory legislation implemented in Europe, she energetically emphasized the need for a completely different notion of citizenship: *una ciudadanía otra* (interview to Ferrocarril Clandestino’s member, Madrid July 2008). Another instance where the notion of citizenship was being put in question during my research was through the playful concept of *cuidadania* or “carecizenthip”, advanced by feminist and care related struggles. Additionally, due to an engagement between Precarias and social movements working on questions of disability, I noticed how there is an implicit call to further expand legal

frameworks such as citizenship not only to the realities of multiculturalism, multiple populations and tasks, but to one of the most challenging form of being different, what they name as *diversidad funcional* or “functional diversity”. These three initial reconceptualizations of citizenship might serve as the point of departure to further engage how social movements working on disability struggles, care struggles, precarity and migration struggles, are articulating a notion of citizenship that tries to go beyond state-centered paradigms as well as modern understandings of political belonging.

There is indeed, an anthropological study of migrants’ social movements in the US and Europe as extending the concept of citizenship (2007). Starting with an appraisal of the concept of citizenship in political theory, the authors point out how even contemporary readings such as the “multicultural citizenship” advanced by liberal philosopher Kymlicka (1995) are not enough to integrate what migrants are envisioning. Building on this work, I would like to further investigate how social movements are developing alternative notions of citizenship, which might reveal the advancement of post-enlightenment concepts. This future research is inspired by the urgency of the current moment where the notion of *European citizenship* is being defined and implemented on the ground. In line with Balibar’s concern expressed in *We, the people of Europe*, the current development of a real “European apartheid” begs for a different understanding of collective belonging beyond modern logics of nation (2004). Perhaps this rethinking is already being carried by unusual suspects.

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