Interventions: the question of collective organization in postcolonial capitalism as challenged by a small militant group in the Raval, Barcelona.

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What does it means to translate the categories of postcolonial thought in the practices of organization of a subaltern neighbourhood trapped in the hurricane of valorization and abstraction of urban space? Or better said, what does it mean to rethink radical forms of collective organization in the face of an attack of postcolonial capitalism on the urban life of a poor and derelict neighbourhood? The laboratory of 'Postcool' aimed to deal with the clash of these two questions in very practical terms. Here, the author, a member of the collective, recounts and problematizes the experience, situating it in the broader context of a reinvention of radical political practices in urban Europe.

In this article I recount an experience that dealt with the question of organization in the context of postcolonial capitalism. An experience on the edge between knowledge and practice, theory and intervention, where the virtue we have been pursuing – understood as the Machiavellian ability of intervening in the display of reality to produce a fruitful political transformation (Negri 1999) - was to introduce our analytical endeavours into the dynamics of gentrification in our neighbourhood, *the Raval*. It has been –and still is – an experience that intervened on a molecular level. That is not on the level of transforming the political asset of reality as apparatus, but possibly affecting the micropololitics of the subjectivities that inhabit everyday life (Guattari 1984).

I focus on the ways in which a small group of militants affected one another and their environment. Indeed, almost all the participants in the laboratory were (and are) actively involved in grassroots political organizations in the Raval and the workshop allowed us to transform our own understanding of the situation we live in and to think about the ways in which we can intervene in it. What I will refer to as militancy.[1]

The experience I address in this paper is a laboratory of audiovisual militant research in which I participated and that was informally termed *postcool*. Militant research is not only a committed analysis of the political relationships of exploitation of labour or in the urban space, but a problem-posing engagement with how capitalist relations affect the way in which we produce knowledge and the way in which our own production of knowledge can affect

[1] The group was composed by David Batlle, Lucia Delgado, Mamadou Diagne, Antonio Felices, Sebastian Herrera, Raquel Muñoz, Miriam Sol, Clarisa Velocci, and myself. The discussions and practices I refer here have been developed as a common effort.

the political practices we enact against capitalist exploitation. Militant research is therefore a committed and collective production of common notions (common analytical tools and practices) in and for a *political* space, that allows for the production of knowledge useful for struggles (Malo 2004; cf. Borio et Al 2002, Conti et al 2004, Colectivo Situaciones 2003).

Postcool began in the summer of 2010 with the intention of tackling the question of political organization in the urban transformations affecting the everyday life in and around the Raval, Barcelona. We used three specific tools. These three tools encompassed the analytical categories found in the postcolonial debate, the technical practices of radical documentary filming, and our experience of the barrio as actively involved members of political organizations, *militants*. Our idea was to link together different categories and tools to analyse, question and intervene in our everyday lives. As a way of organizing in the neighbourhood and as a way of facing the emerging inequalities, our practices spanned the discussion of concepts, the organisation of an audiovisual inquiry, the production of a film for distribution and a broader debate. I focus my account here on a) the context of the Raval and why we considered it a space of postcolonial capitalism, and b) our own work and practice as laboratory of audiovisual inquiry, with particular reference to the tension between *process* and *production* as dimensions for rethinking political organization.

Raval, a global history

Nomen est omen as the adage has it: the Raval is the old Arab name for a neighbourhood in the centre of Barcelona that means 'limit' or 'margin'. After being home to convents for centuries, it became the crucial territory of the first industrial revolution in Catalonia: factories, working class settlements, the harbor, and all kinds of formal and informal activities have shaped the streets of the Raval since the early 19th Century. Its new name, *Xino* emerged when the factories moved to the periphery of Barcelona (to the Poble Nou). The space of the Raval became a central point for brothels (that paid rent to the Church), poets, bohemians and poor people (who paid their bills working in the brothels), as well sailors (who spent their salaries at the cabaret shows) (Genet 1964, Vallmitjana 2003).

The radical history of the Xino/Raval has been studied extensively (Villar 1996, Subtracts & Rios, 2005). It was a crucial site for resistance and organization against the Franco regime and constituted the core of counter-cultural and sexual freedom movements from the 1960s onwards. It is a place where migrants have congregated, from the rural urban exodus of the early 19th century to the current global movements of migration. Class struggle, popular and counter-culture, as cultures of opposition, sexuality and migration are the intertwined ciphers of the non-conventional history of this neighbourhood.[2]

[2] Since the 19th century anticlericalism and class struggle in Barcelona are connected, for role of the Church as the landlord of factories, houses and brothels in the Xino/Raval in the 19th Century. At the same time the nuns in the Convents – urban legends say – were competing on the labour market of the textile *domestic system* that employed working class women, providing free labour based on notions of charity and therefore lowering the wages of the latter. It has been argued that this was the reason working class women led the burning of convents during the *Semana Tragica ['The*

Considered an immoral space, the Xino was re-named Raval in the early 1980s in the discursive and material construction of an urban project of regeneration. The area was developed by the modern and civil socialist administration to 'democratize' the barrio after the dictatorship by avoiding its luxurious memory and going back to the preindustrial name. A rationalist and hygienizing strategy that followed the principles of *Haussmannization* (Benjamin, 1968) that attempted to transform a derelict neighbourhood into a "neighbourhood for everybody". This could have been the slogan of the urban planner Oriole Buigas (the Council's Director of Urban Plans and Projects in Barcelona from 1980 to 1984) in his attempts to reaffirm the bourgeois rationality of city planning in accordance with the Modernist Vocation of Barcelona and Catalonia (Resina, 2008). A model of urban development based on the 19th Century Catalan Utopia of the *First Metropolis* (Guallar, 2010) that aimed to regenerate the slums of the inner city and plan the rationalist urban area called the Eixample. A regeneration whose goal was no other than an "embellissement stratégique" [strategic beautification] (Benjamin, 1968:87),

> The real aim of Haussmann's works was the securing of the city against civil war. […] The breadth of the streets was to make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets were to provide the shortest route between the barracks and the working-class areas. Contemporaries christened the undertaking:

The first project to open La Rambla del Raval is presented in the early 1850s, just after the February Revolution of Paris, when Cerda proposed his Plan according to Hausmannian principles of urban planning (Magrinya 2009). "Why not transform Sarria [the rich neighbourhood on the top of the hills] into a place where everybody can live? Why the Raval?" one of the participants in our laboratory asked, recalling the debate of the 1980s on the (strategic) *beautification* of the Raval. And the battle is still ongoing: the building of museums, the opening of Ramblas (typical urban boulevards in Catalonia), the intervention of police and social services working to regulate and discipline the social space of migrants, precarious dwellers, street-workers and urban poor.

Tragic Week']of 1910. A few decades later, in the early 1940s, waves of migration from rural Spain to Barcelona (Bilbao and Madrid) became a *red* migration escaping the systematic political cleansing in the small centres by the regime: the anonymity of urban space, and the Xino/Raval in particular, permitted the *rojos* to survive, meaning the Xino/Raval became a place to organize against the regime.

Finally and more importantly, sexuality has always enveloped the Xino/Raval. It is possible to look at the role of sexuality in many little stories that populate the history of this barrio : the terrible story of Enriqueta Marti, a sex worker close to the high bourgeoisie, detained and condemned for allegedly kidnapping children for witchcraft rituals. A story full of mystery, contradictions and elements that allow us to scratch the surface of Catalan modernity (El Pais 2006); or the diaries of Vallmitjana (1910), a rich journalist who hid in the streets of the Xino/Raval to reveal the everyday life of a young girl working the streets of the *barrio*. Most famously, there is the *Journal of the Thief* in which Jean Genet recounts his adventures between brothels, violence and love in the early 1930s. Furthermore, it is also crucial to recognize the social and political role of sex workers in the Republic and the Civil War, as well as the importance of the 'immorality' of the Xino/Raval in guaranteeing a permanent State of Exception (Agamben 2005) during the forty years of Franco's regime, when this *barrio* became a space of unusual freedom both sexually and politically.

It is a battle engaged by postcolonial capitalism (Mellino, 2009) to dominate and exploit the forms of life that inhabit these streets. A strategy that attempts to abstract the urban life of the Raval, appropriating the singular life-worlds autonomously produced in this space (Chakrabarty 2000) and translating them into the global language of capital (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2008). In what follows, I will explain how this process of abstraction of space (Lefebvre, 1991) happened in Barcelona and more concretely in the Raval.

The translation of colonial tools for the segmentation of statuses in the space of the city is achieved by a process of *bordering of social life.* The proliferation of borders divides the population according to different citizenship status, as well as fragmenting the access to social services, and implementing new laws on the use of urban space following the lead of New York City's 'zero tolerance' policies (Larraurri 2007). In the construction of a policed urban space (especially through controls and raids to identify undocumented people), fear and safety operate as tools that instate borders over the smooth space of the city as subjective perceptions, imposing the segmentation of life-worlds in the urban space. Undocumented migrants, informal workers, the urban poor, precarious populations, 'traditional' working classes, international bohemians, artists, tourists, civil servants (from police to social services) and real estate developers share the same urban space. Yet, as in the game produced by the *CounterMapping Queen Mary Collective*, their mobility is differentiated and limited according to their status (article lateral).

At the same time the material construction of a hegemonic discourse of development imposes a subaltern condition on this *barrio*. Safety, sanity, hygiene, middle class regeneration and gentrification are the spine of the modern social-democratic discourse that permitted the making of hierarchies amongst the knowledges and cultures composing the contemporary urban space, materially constructing by clearing working class housing blocks or by building new avenues for the Olympic Games. It is the contrast between the clever discourses of the 'serious' museum or the patronizing words of 'generous' social services and the drunken cackles of dark nights or the malicious whispers in the clumsy streets.

This double process in which social life is first segmented and then hierarchized, permits the development of specific regimes for each labor market (and each life-world) in the urban space. The informal economies of leisure and tourism (sex, alcohol, drugs and so forth), the correlation between real estate speculation and cultural development (urban development, corruption and global investments in the creative city), or the developmental economies of social services and urban regeneration (welfare state, externalisation of social services, urban regeneration) are correlated spheres of social production.

Due to the separations and interconnections among these spheres, the possibility of maximizing profit depends upon the ability to impose an efficient border between the different labour markets, in turn adjusting the mode of exploitations to the specific conditions of each segmented labour market. Indeed, the governance of urban life id a mode of production where exploitation is based on the heterogeneity of status, and to situated relationships of power between capital and labour (Boutang 1998): in this sense the prevarication of labour – as the individualisation of the labor market (Fumagalli 2000) - is part of this process of proliferation of borders in urban production together with the

management of global classes (Ong 2006) or the fragmentation of the statuses for migrants (Stassen 2003). This is the translation of a *colonial dispositif* with which to govern labour in the postcolonial metropolis, here concretely: the Raval.

This double implementation (segmentation and hierachization) of the colonial *dispositif* is functional to the governance of "the constitutive heterogeneity of contemporary global capital" (Million 2009:88, cf. Mezzadra 2006). In other words, the possibility of valorising urban life is based on the complex articulation of different paradigms of capitalist accumulation: the mechanisms of postcolonial capitalism described above are assembled with the machine of codification and abstraction typical of a cognitive paradigm of capitalist accumulation (Vercellone 2006, Boutang 2002).

In this paradigm of accumulation, the subsumption of social life into the market of commodities works by subjugating the social cooperation of the general intellect to the command of capital – by translating the forms of social cooperation into the global language of exchange value (Hard and Negri 2009, Mezzadra 2006). Or, in the semio-capitalist definition, social cooperation is codified in ways that enable it to be included in the integrated semiotics of world capitalism (Integrated World Capitalism; Guattari 2005, Berardi 2008).

Since the early democratic transition of the 1980s, underground artists, counter-cultural communities and independent galleries are included in a neoliberal valorization of the city that aims to brand Barcelona a space of alternative culture in the emerging global competition of urban regions.

In the Raval the counter-cultural, migrant and transgendered milieus of the 1970s are involved in a generalized process of self-entrepreneurialization that aims to valorize this cultural production on a global market of culture and art (Expositor et Al 2003, Deutsche & Ryan 1984, cf. my interviews with Marcelo Exposito – 2008 - and Jorge Ribalta – 2009 - two radical artists and curators that participated in the Barcelona art scene through out the 1990s). A normalization that proposes a fruitful commodification of these life worlds, at the same time, it attacks their autonomy by subordinating it to the rule of exchange value.

Those who refuse this entreprenuerialization and commodification have to struggle in at least two ways in order to survive: against the unscrupulousness violence of global capital and the pernickety bureaucratization of the cultural sphere.

Bodega Bohemia (closed in 1999) and other cabarets of homosexual and transsexual culture struggled in the first way mentioned above. Here, the kind of political culture that managed to scrape through the Franco´s regime has been unable to resist to the violence of urban regeneration (and real estate speculation) (Dolz 2000; Gual 2010). In the former, satire and transgression represented a dangerous attack to the legitimacy of the regime. In the latter, culture and innovation feed development but are expelled once they are not anymore competitive for the market.

The second way in which struggles have occurred was a struggle encountered by those counter-cultural and political spaces that were trying to avoid becoming enterprises and in so doing, ran up against the administrative policies

of the Council. . The Use Planning and the redefinition of commercial duties in the late 1990s as well as the Civic Ordinance on urban behaviours in 2005 limited the possibility of maintaining open those spaces not driven by a commercial logic by regulating a strict commercial regime of labor organization.

For many cultural associations accepting such regime it meant renouncing their traditional systems of cooperative (self-) management. This was the case with Ateneu Xino, one of the cultural spaces where a radical critique of the contemporary regeneration of Barcelona was forged. After twelve years of political organizing against the violence of urban dispossession (defined as *urban mobbing*) this space was foreclosed by the police in 2007 (interview with Manel Gonzalez – one of the organizer of the Ateneu Xino; Horta 2010, Taller VIU 2006).

We can recall here Lefebvre's understanding of the abstraction of urban space (1991). Concretely in the space of the Raval, this has meant a double take. First, a postcolonial regime of government has segmented and produced hierarchies along the plane of urban life; second, cognitive capitalism's mechanisms of codification have disciplined behaviours in order to valorise social cooperation. This shows clearly how the postcolonial mechanism, for which labour is abstracted by translating life-world into the global language of capital (Chakrabarty 2000), and the neoliberal commodification of the social cooperation, that incorporates the general intellect into the same global code (Guattari 2005), are heterogeneous but constitutive elements in the modes of governance of global capital (*ex supra*).

Furthermore, this violent abstraction is instituted on a double-bind of command and cooperation (Hardt and Negri, 2009) that allows for a reinforcement of capital as a relationship of power that intensifies social inequalities. On the one hand, this strengthens the dominance of capital over urban social life and, on the other hand, makes social life precarious and produces fragility in the spaces that manage to – at least for now -- escape capital's capture.

Chinese whispers or a laboratory of audiovisual militant inquiry in the Raval

This is the space where we have to organize! This is the enemy we have to face and the dynamics we have to contrast: the violent abstraction and expropriation of social life in urban space.

In this context, our attempt has been to engage with the complexity of the attack in an alliance of different actors in the neighbourhood, constructing a common space in which to introduce categories, instruments and experiences that can help us struggle. After organizing a series of seminars on the right to the city in the social centre *Exit,* we realized that the format we were using represented a dead-end, because it closed down discussion by funnelling it into a rhetorical analysis of the dynamics of urban spaces.

This is why we wanted to build a new space, an 'us' that involved people proceeding from different backgrounds by sharing spaces of production, not just discussion. We wanted to talk about the crisis of representation and the silencing of our voices. The postcolonial categories were very useful in this attempt, but we needed to find tools to make this debate a dynamic production

of alternative forms of expression. Tools with which we could both analyze and problematize. This was the only way – at least the only way we could see – that we could think the production of knowledge as a radical practice of organization.

When I refer to 'an original us', I think of the intertwining of different networks and communities that inhabit the neighbourhood: older or newer migrants, students, researchers, street workers, transgender persons, and paupers. The group that comes together in the laboratory proceeds from these different territories but never becomes a representation of the networks or communities (something that we probably secretly aimed at in the beginning).

There are reasons for this. Firstly, we proposed to different people that they should participate in a laboratory for the investigation of the postcolonial dimension of our everyday lives. The participants were primarily from the social centre *Exit*, the *Universidad Nomada*, an association of people in mortgage debt (*PAH*), an association for sex workers' rights (*Genera*), an association of street vendors (*Nomadas del Siglo XXI*), and members of the film-maker collective *Circes*. The collectives themselves did not consider this project their priority, which seems obvious when considered in the context of the immediate struggles these different collectives faced, whether this was the social centre up against the violence of the urban bureaucracy, the PAH fighting evictions and repossessions, or the *Genera* street workers and *Nomadas del Siglo XXI* who are having to deal with fines, detentions and expulsions on a daily basis.

The Laboratory is about learning to use cameras, discussing Godard movies or political cinema, reading theoretical books and academic papers, and asking questions that have nothing to do with the *urgency* of our collective struggles. Beware! This does not mean the Laboratory is simply considered an intellectual quirk, but precisely about providing a contrast to the violence of capital.

In other terms, each of us who participated in the Laboratory came from these experiences and situated herself or himself in an apparently contradictory set of elements. The Laboratory was not a priority, but we lived these questions as crucial for organizing struggles in the contemporary Raval. The position we had to inhabit was therefore uncomfortable. The process necessarily had to take time out of our militancy in ways that contrasted with the urgency of the everyday life of our spaces, yet responded to the cry for analysis with which all of us wanted to engage.

This uncomfortable position, in which everybody expresses collective voices but no one is representative of any collective, shows us something typical of the way in which militancy engages with the complex assemblage of heterogeneous modernity. No one represents anyone because no one is an integer (in the sense proposed by Chatterjee (2002) representing any organization, community or network. However, the space of the Laboratory becomes a *living composition among singular expressions* that refer, evoke and connect collectives, networks, and communities. The shared space on terms that are different to this urgency is not the articulation of a unified discourse but the production of common space as *encounter*.

On the other hand, inhabiting this uncomfortable position allowed for a gesture of displacement. Ten persons and one thousand identities with different cultural,

sexual, economic and racialized backgrounds, overlapping and contrasting. What we had in common was the experience of the Laboratory as a transformative force for our way of being militants. What we shared was a *collective becoming* of militancy. A concrete learning process of how to produce organization in the Raval. In this sense it is important to stress that was not so much about understanding the difference between concepts but about hot to put these to work together with memories, practices and tools of expression.

For example, we focussed on the difference between history2 and history1 as proposed by Chakrabarty (2000). In the attempt of translating this distinction to our discussion, we used various terms: *histories* versus *History*, rumours and discourse, heterogeneous and homogeneous. We used the reflections of Chakrabarty to focus on the opposition between discourse and whispers and the heterogeneity of modernity that stemmed from our mapping of the sounds that inhabit the modern metropolis.

Borrowing from a practice of radical pedagogy used by the *ultrared.org* collective, we recorded the sounds of everyday life in different parts of our neighbourhood and discussed the composition of the different experiences of sound that we had. The map that emerged charted a myriad of languages from all parts of the world and the different tones and roles of each tongue: the tourist guide, the migrants on the benches of the Raval, the whispering and the kisses of sex workers trying to convince their clients to linger with them, or the silence of the streets when the police drove through, and the noise of the building sites that conceals the voices of undocumented workers. The rumours in the *ouvre,* understood as the complex social process that everyday produces the city (Lefebvre 1991) appeared to us as "a measure of the distance between a typical site of collective discourse and an ideal seat of official truth - between the bazaar and the bungalow, so to say'"(Guha, 1983:259), or, in our case, between the streets and the museum.

Following on from this sound mapping, a group of us presented the concept of rumour and discourse in Guha (cf. Barthes 1986) and Chakrabarty's critique of history (*ex supra*). Another group of us who had a background in audio-visual arts took charge of presenting documentaries or film excerpts that dealt with the problems we had identified in the sound mapping – not only (or not primarily) to analyze the contents of political documentaries and find an analytical narrative, but to discover and learn their techniques, along with the political consequences of using different tools as a mode of expression.

All of a sudden we were looking at/for the political (if not revolutionary, cf. Benjamin, 1970) tendency of the technique! After watching *Comizi d'Amore* (Love meeting, Pasolini 1965), a social inquiry by Pasolini on homosexuality, prostitution, sexual habits divorce, we discussed how the machinic fascination for the mechanical eye allowed Pasolini to produce a technological intimacy between himself and the public, to pose problems about sexuality in Italy in the 1960s. But our own space was post-alphabetical, that is to say used to the presence of optical and digital machines.

Watching Jean Rouch's film, *La pyramide humain* (The Human Pyramid, 1961)– on the French colonies of the 1960s - and the ethnographic cinema of John Smith in *Lost Sound* (on the East London gentrification, 1998-2001), we discussed the logical and political differences between a 'voice-over' (used by

Rouch) and ‘off-screen sound’ (used by Smith). A voice-over explains to the viewer how to interpret the images she is watching, in contrast, an ’off-screen sound’ accounts for something the viewer cannot see on the screen and that she can only imagine through the sounds she can hear. . From there we built a discussion upon a similarity between this contrast in audiovisual language and the difference between the discourse of History and the whispers of histories.

Shot by shot, piece by piece, we constituted a *common speech* (Rossi-Landi, 1968) that emerged through our cooperative labour. In this common space, signifiers and signified worked according to a particular set of relationships, a hybrid *technology* where categories, techniques and experiences are mixed up and can work together. The labour we did, in other terms, produced a *pragmatic* of language (Bakhtin 1993, Bazzanella 2005) where the links between significant-signifier where reconfigured in the relationship between postcolonial theory, audiovisual tools and experiences: linking rumour to off-screen sound, or the concept of *abstraction of space* to the specific policing of the Raval’s street.

In order to move from debate to a process of production, we began to work on different questions. For this, we divided into two groups. One group worked on the category of labor, while the other (the group I participated in) started to work on housing rights and moved towards a broader engagement with the question of housing and the abstraction of space. How has the Raval changed? What happened to the inhabitants of the buildings that were wiped out? What is going to be built instead? We finished by focusing on a particular parcel of land that has been affected by the public works of a construction site for many years.

We began to look for stories that could tell us about the everyday dynamics of urban space before the process of gentrification destroyed it. On the one hand, we found the discourse of a ‘coherent’ modernity that aimed to hygienise and develop the neighbourhood. On the other, looking for what social life inhabited this space, we could only find jokes, anecdotes, and little stories. Unreliable sources that talked with irony about the processes they experienced.

We moved into this gap of (un)reliability. The discourse of modernity is underwritten by recognized institutions as much as it is confirmed by architects, urban planners and criminologists. In the most of documentaries we watched through, the director would shot with a TV medium close up, in which the watcher can see the speaker face and his/her hands, and some didactic descriptions of the academic qualification of the interviewees in order to reassure the viewer of the truth value of the statements in the documentary. On the other end of the spectrum, rumours and whispers were almost never represented and, whenever they were, it was to make evident the imprecision of this kind of knowledge, the voices of the victims of ignorance[3] (Guha, 1983). So we decide to start looking at these contrasts and use the whispers as source of alternative truths against the homogeneous discourse of modernity.

In order to do this, we decided to search for the imaginary stories inhabiting a destroyed block of flats on Carrer d’En Robador, the most derelict of the streets on the side of the construction site. For us, the question of imagination and

[3] Although with a good range of very interesting exceptions. One above all *De Nens* by Joaquin Jorda (2003)

truth was compelling. Should we respect an historical truth and figuratively inhabit the block only with the stories that had inhabited it in its previous life, or could we start to populate it with all the anecdotes and jokes, with the contradictories pieces of truth on the demolition that we were hearing on the streets? We decided to maintain this ambiguity as the texture of the account and look for the "se dice" ['they say'], "me han dicho" ['someone told me'], "me recuerdo" ['I remember']. Phrases that did not deny the truth of the enunciation, but located its truth in the uncomfortable position of the rumour, there where any "official narrator [would] find merely a corruption of news; an additional irritant in the saga of control and subordination." (Kumar 2008:101). We wanted this additional irritant to be our position.

A long shot of the works of building site told us about the construction of the discourse of modernity as coherent image made of cement and straight lines. An imagination without any voice. Left simply to the cinematic truth of images. Then we let the night come and hold the voices from our interviews, reverting the role of the voice-off and collecting the rumours and the ghosts proliferating in the *barrio*. Whilst our camera lingered on the public works in the construction site for the new Centre for Cinema of Catalonia - visual expression of the need for culture and beauty in the neighbourhood – we used interviews to revert the function of voice-over. Out of the screen, the cultures that once inhabited this space start to occupy the sound space of the movie. They are searching for their own precarious voices to tell their different stories about modernity.[4]

In the interviews and in the editing of the film, the critique of the homogeneous representation of modernity became entangled with the way we tried to contest and deconstruct the space, the way we chose to shoot or the stories we decided to stage. The political and technical discussions involved vivid translations of concepts into an optical point of view, as well as when trying to use concepts, techniques and experiences as different parts of the same machine. Moving knowledge from one territory to another allowed each of us to engage with concepts or techniques from different positions and therefore challenged the power relations due to the knowledge differentials within the group.

Furthermore, this method gave us a concrete product to work with in the moment we moved out of the Laboratory. However, a problem emerged (or better is emerging) here: we realised we had to turn the tension between product and process upside down. Now that the films are almost finished, we are engaged in discussing the process of distribution.[5] How can we transform this distribution into a tool of political organization? If we are thinking *distribution* as a process through which to discuss the possibilities of *proliferating* political practices, concepts, experiences or languages, it would be reductive to fix our attention just on the two films we are making, not least because they are not necessarily excellent pieces of art.

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[4] In the end, we decided to invert these two sections of the short movie for narrative reasons.

[5] The shift in attention from process to production does not dismiss, but has a different take on, the dynamics of the process and the micropolitics of the group, looking at these always in connection to the outcome, i.e. the product.

Distribution and proliferation

If we want the Laboratory to be a space for the discussion of forms of organizing and not just "urban problems", we need to present the product as a process, and to use *distribution* itself as part of this process of political organization. For example, we want to use the films (and the debates we had during the production) to question the position of new artists that inhabit the Centre for Cinema of Catalonia and in general the Raval, but we would also like to propose new possible alliances to the neighbourhood associations in the barrio to engage with the transformations in the material and with the subjective composition of the neighbourhood. In a way, we would like to continue experimenting with radical pedagogy as a practice of organization, able to break apart the barriers between the author of a piece and the reader – or the producer of a film and the viewer – and using these materials for thinking together with one another about *organizing*.

First, we thought about producing a DVD with different materials and intervening with them in particular debates or situations. For example, in a local school, we could use the materials to chat with kids about the histories of their barrio as an introduction to questions about the meaning of citizenship, but also to talk about and teach techniques of audio-visual art. In a workshop with activist groups, we could use different materials: we could listen to the recordings of some of the interviews and read excerpts of the transcripts in order to steer the discussion towards the limits and the possibilities of our own practices. A broader range of materials allows us to move beyond a linear representation of our *products* and use the products as stepping-stones as we move forward, thereby investigating the "decisive difference between merely transmitting the apparatus of production and transforming it." (Benjamin 1970).

Yet thinking about how to generalise access and how to use distribution as a step forward in the process of production made us move from the DVD to a GPL *drupal* platform where we could embed public virtual spaces such as pad.ma or diaspora* as a way of thinking the author as producer in the network society (Benjamin 1970, Castells 1996) and specifically within the techno-political assets we are immersed in today.

> The only way to make this production politically useful is to master the competencies in the process of intellectual production which, according to the bourgeois notion, constitutes their hierarchy; and more exactly, the barriers which were erected to separate the skills of both productive forces must be simultaneously broken down. When he experiences his solidarity with the proletariat, the author as producer also experiences directly a solidarity with certain other producers in whom earlier he was not much interested. (Benjamin 1970:92)

In this sense, investigating the revolutionary tendency of a website would mean to trespass the borders between the different spheres of production involved in *distribution*.

Open discussions in the streets or on the web would allow us to connect the materials in a transversal way: interviews, films and photos, as well as the recording of discussions, of seminars, the fragments of books and films we used to imagine our own work. The discussions could be considered to make up a complex machinic space in which partial products become the first step of a

new process. Also it would enable us to keep track of discussions and interlink the real and the virtual. This also includes blogging and recording seminars, using forums, piratepad.org and comments to trigger *real* discussions during workshops, and reporting – in real time – the discussions happening in the physical encounters on the Internet.

This constitutes not only a process of reflection on what we have done, it is also a process of organization, because it would allow us to share techniques, to build alliances, and to envisage possible campaigns and to experiment with new ways of doing politics. This process of proliferation could allow us to trigger an autonomous accumulation of knowledges: in the discussions, debates or web forum, the interventions would no longer be contingent on or subordinated to the voice of the author, but instead they would be part of a collective production of critique on how the violence of capital is affecting our lives (Foucault 1997). In so doing, the voices of the listeners would modify the laboratory of *postcool* itself.

However, even if this proliferation is just beginning, we can already prefigure and problematize some of the ways in which the process of valorization intervenes in our project, codifying and possibly abstracting it. In the academy (or for film-makers) this chain of valorization is fast and simple. It works by commodifying the product (a film, a paper, a seminar) and individualizing the author.

This article is an example of these very processes. By adapting the reflection of the laboratory to the academic code, I am able to publish this piece in a peer-reviewed journal and increase my competitive edge in the market composed of my peers. The limits of social and individual labor are obviously blurred by the complexity of the process - but at the end of the day only my own behaviour (maybe my ethics, or hopefully my politics) can determine an inverse flow to move resources from the academy back to the clumsy streets of the Raval.

A second set of problems emerges when we reflect upon how to institute a *valorization* of this laboratory for the organization of struggles. For example, organizing a session with street-workers or a screening in the local association necessitates a massive amount of labor and social cooperation. It entails a collective attempt at translating and producing codes and modes of working to challenge the unequal positions participants occupy. The question is how to make concepts usable, not only intelligible, for people not used to theoretical discussion. It implies a form of political work that makes it possible to share in the complexity of debates, but also to distinguish (and possibly discriminate) those elements that are useful. With respect to the techniques of production, the challenge is not any easier. In order to build spaces of production from this project, it is not enough to simply avoid the privatization of the code – for example through the individualization of the author.

This valorization has to go in the direction of, forgive the repetition, a committed and collective production of common notions that allows us to produce knowledges useful for struggles: to proceed through a method of "problem-posing means "to create a problem that did not exist before" (Vercauteren 2007), rather than solve already existing problems.

This is meaningful to us because it represents a concrete way of tackling the question of *inventing new modes of organization*. For example, beyond the

Laboratory, some of the participants started to use video streaming during the repossessions of mortgaged houses as part of a strategy to publicly denounce the violence of the crisis. This served to define a common project with people in a vulnerable situation, enabling them to discuss the use of images in their struggle and the networks of proliferation of such images.

The possibility of taking such decisions relied upon trust between the people involved in the struggle of PAH and the audiovisual artists that participated in the Laboratory. This kind of trust facilitated the positive dynamics of discussion, cooperation and production that took place in the *Postcool* laboratory and that helped all of us to collectively rethink our militancy, infusing our own political spaces not with solutions, but with new problems.

For me, the question is how to connect this process to other similar experiences such as the Instable Theatre Company of Madrid, in ferrocarrilclandestino.net, the militant inquiry ciudadessinfronteras.net, the podcast of ondaprecaria.com, the project communia.org and madrilonia.org, as well as many other techno-political projects that are engaging – especially after the Spanish Occupy movement - with network culture as a space in which to invent new ways of doing radical politics. It is about building a network of experiments that engage materially with an alternative way of organizing social production.

Finally, and to conclude, the process of militant research that we developed in this laboratory helped us - both practically and theoretically – to realize the importance of entangling categories, techniques and experiences as a way of constituting new modes of political organization within the contemporary functioning of global capital.

In this sense, it was a collective practice that helped us to translate complex categories into everyday practice and to empower ourselves with new tools of expression. However, what I consider to be the most significant outcome of the project is that it posed a new problem to deal with the institution of new forms of organization: how can we organize a social practice for the collective production of knowledge outside the capitalist abstraction of life in the contemporary techno-political assets of urban life?

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