

Something More on Research Militancy: Footnotes¹ on Procedures and (In)Decisions

Colectivo Situaciones
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Translators' Introduction

The translation of this significant article, a fundamental piece insofar as it lays bare the values and principles Colectivo Situaciones invoke in their definition of themselves as militants, calls for a reflection on our role as translators. It is important to share with the reader our urge to dispel any mythical (mis)understanding of the transparency of language. We share Colectivo Situaciones' conviction that abstraction inevitably impoverishes experience. Translation adds one more layer of abstraction. In this sense, we assume the full significance of the Italian adage *traduttore, traditore*. Not because we intend to betray anybody, but because the acknowledgment that every translation is a betrayal is our attempt to keep faith with the concrete situation in which the experience being communicated unfolds. In this introduction, we would like to go through some of the difficulties we had in doing the translation. We hope that by explaining the decisions we made, we will bring the reader closer to the work of Colectivo Situaciones.

We faced our first difficulty when trying to translate the title. We were unsure how to translate the term *militancia de investigación*. This phrase can be translated into English as either "research militancy" or "militant research." At the risk of taking words too seriously (always a risk in translation), it may be useful to spend some time on these two possible translations. "Militant research" implies a continuity with other examples of militant research, those presented in other parts of this volume and elsewhere.

“Research militancy” may sound strange to the English speaker’s ear and it is less immediately clear what the term means.

The grammatical difference between these two phrases is a matter of which word defines the activity and which word qualifies it; which word will be the predicate of the other. The difference seems to be one of emphasis. Does the Spanish phrase refer to knowledge production that happens to be radical in some way (militant research)? Or does it refer to radical activism that happens to take the form of knowledge production (research militancy)?

Our indecision brought us to ask Colectivo Situaciones which one of the two expressions they felt more comfortable with. To our surprise—or perhaps not—the response was “both.” “We think of our practice as a double movement: to create ways of being militants that escape the political certainties established a priori and embrace politics as research (in this case, it would be ‘research militancy’), and, at the same time, to invent forms of thinking and producing concepts that reject academic procedures, breaking away from the image of an object to be known and putting at the centre subjective experience (in this case, it would be ‘militant research’).”

Situaciones came together as a collective in the late 1990s. Previously they had been involved in El Mate, a student group notable for creating the Che Guevara Free Lecturership, an experiment oriented toward recuperating the memory of the generation of Argentinean and Latin American revolutionaries of the 1960s and 1970s that began at the faculty of social sciences at the University of Buenos Aires and quickly spread throughout several universities in Argentina and abroad. The Argentinean social landscape in which the men and women of Situaciones forged their ideas was a desert swept by neoliberal winds, in which only a few movements of resistance could stand up by themselves. Those were times in which dilettante post-modern thinkers had come to the conclusion that social change was a relic from the past and in which people involved in politics could only see their activity through rarely questioned models.

Research militancy was the response to the need to rebuild the links between thought and the new forms of political involvement that were rapidly becoming part of the Argentinean reality. In the prologue “On Method” of the book *La Hipótesis* 891, Colectivo Situaciones wrote together with the unemployed workers’ movement of Solano, the authors distinguish research militancy from three other relations to knowledge.³ On the one hand, academic research inevitably reifies those it constructs as objects. Academics cannot help leaving outside the scope of their investigation the function of attributing meaning, values, interests, and rationalities of the subject who does the research. On the other hand, traditional political activists—those involved in parties or party-like organizations—usually hold that their commitment and involvement makes their relation to knowledge more advanced

than the work done by academics. But their activity is no less objectifying, in the sense that it always approaches struggles from a previously constituted knowledge framework. Struggles are thus regarded not for their value in themselves, but rather in terms of their contribution to something other than themselves—the coming socialist or communist society. A third figure, the humanitarian activist, also relates to others in an instrumental fashion—in the justification and funding of NGOs (nongovernmental organizations)—and takes the world as static, not subject to being radically changed (thus, the best one can hope for is the alleviation of the worst abuses).

Research militancy does not distinguish between thinking and doing politics. For, insofar as we see thought as the thinking/doing activity that deposes the logic by which existing models acquire meaning, thinking is immediately political. On the other 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.

This brings us to a second translation difficulty. Two Spanish words translate as the English word “power”: *poder* and *potencia*. Generally speaking, we could say that *poder* expresses power as “power over” (the sense it has, for instance, when it refers to state or sovereign power) and *potencia* is defined as “power to,” the type of capacity expressed in the statement “I can.”⁴ To continue with the generalization, it is possible to say that *poder* refers to static forms of power, while *potencia* refers to its dynamic forms. *Potencia* always exists in the here and now; it coincides with the act in which it is effected. This is because *potencia* is inseparable from our capacity—indeed, our bodies’ capacity—to be affected. This capacity cannot be detached from the moment, place, and concrete social relations in which *potencia* manifests itself. This is the reason we are arguing, in this article, that anything said about *potencia* is an abstraction of the results. Whatever is said or communicated about it can never be the *potencia* itself. Research militancy is concerned with the expansion of *potencia*. For this reason, a descriptive presentation of its techniques would necessarily lead to an abstraction. Such a description might produce a “method” in which all the richness of the *potencia* of research militancy in the situation is trimmed off to leave only that part whose utilitarian value makes it transferable to other situations.

The thought of practices is enacted with the body, because bodies encounter each other in acts that immediately define their mutual capacities to be affected. History can only be the history of contingency, a sequence of moments with their own non-detachable intensities. Miguel Benasayag argues that act and state—to which correspond *potencia* and *poder*—are two levels of thought and life.⁵ Neither of them can be subsumed by the other. Each takes the side of *potencia* or the side of the *poder* (or of the desire for

poder, as expressed in militants who want to “take power,” build the Party, construct hegemonies, etc.).

Potencias found in different forms of resistance are the foundation of “counterpower,” but the terms are not the same. Counterpower indicates a point of irreversibility in the development of resistance, a moment when the principal task becomes to develop and secure what has been achieved by the struggle. Counterpower is diffuse and multiple. It displaces the question of power from the centrality it has historically enjoyed, because its struggle is “against the powers such as they act in our situations” (*La Hipótesis* 891, 104). To be on the side of *potencia* is to recognize that the state and the market originate at the level of the values we embrace and the bonds that connect us to others.

Potencia defines the material dimension of the encounter of bodies, while *poder* is a level characterized by idealization, representation, and normalization. Colectivo Situaciones avoid using a name to define their political identity, which would freeze the fluid material multiplicity of militant research by subordinating it to the one-dimensional nature of idealizations. “We are not autonomists, situationists, or anything ending with -ist,” they once told us. Identities have normalizing effects: they establish models, they place multiplicity under control, they reduce the multiple dimensions of life to the single dimension of an idealization. They make an exception with *Guevarism*, because Che Guevara clearly preferred to stay on the side of *potencia* and opposed those who calmed down concrete struggles in the name of ideal recipes on how to achieve a communist society.⁶

An investigation into the forms of *potencia* and the social relations that produce it can only be done from a standpoint that systematically embraces doubt and ignorance. If we recognize that the practical thought of struggles is an activity of bodies, we have to recognize as well—with Spinoza—that nobody knows what a body can do. To do research in the realm of *potencia*—to investigate that which is alive and multiple—militant researchers have to abandon their previous certainties, their desire to encounter pure subjects, and the drive to recuperate those subjects’ practice as an ideal of coherence and consistency. In this regard, one might say that Colectivo Situaciones seek to concretely embody two Zapatista slogans: “asking we walk,” and “we make the road by walking,” such that, the act of questioning and collective reflection is part of the process of constructing power.

Research militancy is a form of intervention, a practice that accompanies other practices, or *experiencias*. This is our third translation difficulty. Colectivo Situaciones, like many other activists belonging to the wave of new protagonism in Argentina, use the word *experiencia* to refer to singular, more or less organized groups, with flexible boundaries, involved in an ongoing emancipatory practice. *Experiencias* with whom Colectivo Situaciones have practiced research militancy include: H.I.J.O.S. (the human

rights group formed by children of the disappeared); MoCaSE (a *campesino* group); MTD of Solano (a movement within the larger *piquetero* movement, formed mainly by unemployed workers); Grupo de Arte Callejero (a street art group that works very closely with H.I.J.O.S.); the educational community Creciendo Juntos (a free school run by militant teachers); the political prisoners of Néstor Kirchner's government; and a number of other *experiencias* in Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Mexico. The word *experiencia* connotes both experience, in the sense of accumulation of knowledges of resistance; and experiment, understood as a practice. In this article, when the word *experiencia* displays this double connotation we translate it as experience/experiment.

We keep these words together because we find it important to keep present the experiential dimension to which the word *experiencia* makes reference. An *experiencia* can have territorial characteristics, such as MTD of Solano, whose roots are in a shanty town located in the south of greater Buenos Aires, or it can be more deterritorialized, like Colectivo Situaciones. But in all cases, *experiencias* are defined by a certain form of the life-world, a particular quest to redefine the bonds that define that group of people as a collective in such ways that they produce, in the situation, social relations that are superior to those of capitalism. The construction of a noncapitalist sociability is a key activity for the *experiencias* Colectivo Situaciones works with. For MTD of Solano, for instance, the production of subjective bonds that are different from those of the state and the market is a defining moment of their concept of autonomy. The material basis of support for both the market and the state are the bonds produced at the local level. Thus, one of their most important activities of self-reflection involves the critique of individualist values, contractual relations, and the instrumentalization of life as they appear at the most basic and concrete level. That is, on the same level, in the same temporal and spatial dimension, that *potencia* exists. There are certain types of social bonds that make *potencia* stronger. Others make it weaker. The research militancy theorized and practiced by Colectivo Situaciones is a committed effort to both producing bonds at that concrete level and weaving them in such way that they allow for maximum *potencia*.

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. Thus, research militancy becomes immanent to the *experiencias* it works with. This concrete relation is not achieved through conscious understanding, but by letting oneself be open to the dynamics of affect that define the possibility of *potencia* in the situation.

Here, Colectivo Situaciones moves away from a certain truism pervasive in much of contemporary activist culture, both in Argentina and in North America: the idea that a certain type of communication (be it the use of the Internet, grassroots filmmaking, or any other medium) has an inherent emancipatory effect on people. Communication produces abstractions of experience. The experience itself can only be lived. Even though there is *potencia*, for instance, in the activism that carries out grassroots communication experiments, the *potencia* in the situation cannot be communicated. In this sense, perhaps Colectivo Situaciones would agree with the thesis put forward by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, according to which there is no circulation of struggles.⁷ Except that, for Colectivo Situaciones, this is not just the case for this point in history. Struggles do not communicate their *potencia*, they never did and they never will. There is, however, the possibility of resonances between struggles and points of resistance, but that is something entirely different. There are resonances between struggles when there are “shared epochal problems” and they face similar obstacles, making possible the transference of “certain knowledges, feelings, and declarations.” Thus, there could be resonances between, for instance, Argentinean *piqueteros* and migrant workers in Western Europe, even if there is no actual exchange of words between them.⁸

Colectivo Situaciones makes a crucial distinction between the abstract perspective of “global thinking,” and the thought of the situation, for which the experiential dimension is the concrete form of existence of the world. Here, as the Malgré Tout Collective puts it, the choice is clear: either world or situation.⁹ The global standpoint is one in which we look at the world as spectators, the mass-mediated outlook that turns us into concerned individuals, concerned about issues that come to us only as representations. The constricted sphere of the situation, however, is one whose configuration we are responsible for. We produce and are produced by the situations we inhabit. Either our practices are those of the individual-spectator, and thus keep in place certain values, bonds, and affects that reproduce the centrality of state power and the pervasiveness of market relations, or we are the persons in situations who are open to producing and maintaining the bonds that assemble a different, noncapitalist sociability.

Research militancy takes an immanent commitment to the situation. The situation, as Colectivo Situaciones understands it, is a sovereign space and time that defines its own senses and subtracts itself from the senses produced by the state and the market. The working hypotheses of research militants are direct elaborations on the exigencies of the situation. In contrast with the academic researcher, the traditional militant, and the humanitarian activist, who are “extrasituational,” the militant researcher thinks and acts in the situation.

How to write about the *potencia* of an experience/experiment know-

ing that its *potencia* will not be transferred into the writing? What kind of writing can at least look for resonances? Certainly not a writing that presents itself as a blueprint, an outline, or as a forecast. The writing has to be anti-pedagogical. Militant research does not teach, at least not in the sense of an explication which assumes the stupidity and powerlessness of those it explains to.¹⁰ Research militancy is a composition of wills, an attempt to create what Spinoza called joyful passions, which starts from and increases the power (*potencia*) 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 or to be seen as an expert.

Of course, it should be clear that we as translators believe there is much to be learned from Colectivo Situaciones. But it is not a matter of transmitting their ideas, as if copying recipes from a cookbook. Rather, we believe it is a matter of learning to recognize and amplify the *potencia* in our own situations, and so to act in a way that resonates with the practice of Colectivo Situaciones. We hope that our translation helps people make use of the text for their own purposes and in their own situations.

I

This article tells a real story. This story—like so many stories these days—begins with a message, an email. It is signed by a friend from Madrid, who is a member of the group Precarias a la Deriva.¹¹ The message is addressed to Colectivo Situaciones. She asks us for an article about the collective's experience in Argentina, and more specifically in Buenos Aires. In particular—she tells us—the idea is that we say “something more” about the figure of the militant researcher. Something “more” not so much about the concept, but about the practice. “About the context, about difficulties, knowledges, procedures, notions,” our friend says. “Because,” she adds, “the piece *On Method*¹² leaves many doubts about concrete questions regarding the workshops.”

Our friend suggests that we further elaborate on four fundamental questions: “Decision,” “concepts,” “procedures,” and “knowledges” (know-hows). To begin the exchange, we were told about how each of these questions can narrate a dimension of an experience/experiment: she referred to that of the Precarias a la Deriva.

We tried to understand. Decision: refers to the decision(s) we made in order to produce and develop *research militancy*. A story not so much of Colectivo Situaciones as one of the ways in which we developed the idea of research militancy. Concepts: to show our relation to the notions we use. Not so much explaining them (which would be very boring), but introducing their operation in concrete situations. Procedures: namely, getting inside the material processes that configure the activity of research militancy as such.

Finally, there are the know-hows, which refer to the infinite local knowledges that make possible the creation and development of the procedures.

To be sure, this task turned out to be—then and now—*titanic*. In fact, we were capable of confronting it, in a very partial way, only because our friend was willing to maintain a more or less regular correspondence with us on these issues.¹³ As a result of this conversation, “decisions” and “procedures” related to two of the four proposed items were laid down: aspects of which we will give here central importance.

What follows, then, is an attempt to develop the context and the characterization of some facets of research militancy: not so much by doing a historico-political description of our circumstances, nor by providing a narration of the concrete experiences we have carried out (both aspects are partially registered in our publications);¹⁴ rather, the modes in which such experiences produced a trajectory.

II

The first problem we ran into when we started the correspondence was that of communication: what does it mean to *communicate*? On one hand, there is the fundamental, insurmountable impossibility of the nontransferable character of experience. We can tell this and that. We can even tell everything, but there is always something that slips away. And, moreover, there are differing points of view. How to bring them all together? And even when this can be done, there is an intensity of experience that can only be captured fully by being there, physically present, and subjectively involved.¹⁵

On the other hand, how to communicate what we do, if not by doing? That is, how to transmit a reflection (a word committed to an experience/experiment, to certain practices, to living thought) about reflection without making a metatheory about ourselves?

Moreover, how to explain each singular operation, in all its precarity, without turning it, in the same exposition, into a technique (our friend shares this concern: “Suffice it to think of all the Methods, with a capital “M,” and their disastrous consequences”)?

In the end, when we reject the word “communication” we don’t do so in the name of an *incommunicability* that would confirm the financial dispersion of experience, but as an impeachment of the accompanying assumptions of the “society of communication.” If the ideology of communication presupposes that “all that is communicable deserves to exist and all that deserves to exist is communicable,” only because technology provides the means to do it, what is cut out is precisely the affirmation of the experience (as a weave and experiential constellation) that causes the word to be spoken. From here onwards, to the word “communication” we will oppose the word *composition* (or processes of interaction, collective valorization,

system of productive compatibilities), understanding as such the sketching of a plane in whose interior the *word* does say *something*.

Finally, something that might be easy to say, however difficult to accept: how to narrate the fact that research militancy is not the name of the experience of someone who does research but that of the production of (an) encounter(s) without subject(s) or, if you prefer, of (an) encounter(s) that produce(s) subject(s)? How to admit the fact that Colectivo Situaciones is not the subject of its own activities, and that the encounters in which it found itself—fortunately—involved were not foreseen, planned, nor implemented at will by those who write this article? (We will come back to this.)

In an era when communication is the indisputable maxim, in which everything is justifiable by its communicable usefulness, research militancy refers to experimentation: not to thoughts, but to the power to think; not to the circumstances, but to the possibility of experience; not to this or that concept, but to experiences in which such notions acquire power (*potencia*); not to identities but to a different becoming; in one word: intensity does not lie so much in that which is produced (that which is communicable) as in the process of production itself (that which is lost in communication). How to say something, then, about all this and not merely exhibit the results of such a process?

III

Let's turn to what our friend from Madrid calls "decision"—and we call experiment, or rather, "indecision." How does research militancy arise? What is that we call militant research? What is it made of? Answering these questions would be more or less like the *history* of the collective. But that history does not exist. In its place we can at best force things a little and reconstruct briefly a trajectory. But how to do it? How to say something interesting about such homely issues?

Toward the end of the 1990s, we began to look at our shared experiences. We found two issues we needed to come to terms with: on one hand, *militant commitment* as a directly political element and the efficacy of our experience thus far; and on the other, our *relation to the university* and the process of generating knowledge. This contradiction is a good starting point.

The group developed in spite of its two tendencies: one that arose by reflecting on its own militant practice, and the other that asked itself about the modes in which political practice is related "from within" to the production of effective knowledges.

There were two figures to interrogate. The first is the remains of the "sad militant"—as Miguel Benasayag (who was a key figure in this period and in many of our decisions) calls it.¹⁶ This figure is always "setting out the party line," and keeping for himself a knowledge of what ought to happen in

the situation, which he always approaches from outside, in an instrumental and transitive way (situations have value as moments of a general strategy that encompasses them), because his fidelity is, above all, ideological and preexists all situations.

The other figure is that of the “university researcher,” who links himself to his research as to an object of analysis, whose value is strictly related to his capacity to confirm preexisting theses. Here, once again, fidelity to institutional procedures, academic or para-academic, eludes any commitment to the situation.

The issue was, in any case, to transform the very foundations of our practice, the presuppositions on which research stands. Here we can identify a first decision: to create a practice capable of co-articulating involvement and thought.

In turn, this (in)decision implied a whole series of operational resolutions: we had to reorganize ourselves as a smaller group, an intense affective affinity, and reorganize our way of working entirely. This process, which culminated in the formation of the collective, was frenetic during the years 1999 and 2000.

In practical terms, what has research militancy meant for us since then? That politics abandoned power as an image in which to recognize itself and created in its place a more powerful interlocutor. And that our way of thinking was related precisely to practices, that thought and politics depended on the capacity for experience, involvement, and encounter; and that the subject of knowledge or political action could not be conceived as transcendent with respect to situations, but made itself present for us as a result of those encounters. If there was a hinge decision, in this sense, it was that of thinking from and within the situation; that is, without conceiving practices, theories, or subjects *a priori*.

The emergence of *Colectivo Situaciones* was directly linked to other practices that emerged in Argentina in the late 1990s, as both cause and product of the social and political crisis¹⁷ that was brewing at the time.¹⁸ We found ourselves involved in the hyper-accelerated dynamic of the crisis (which peaked with the events of December 19 and 20, 2001), and in the dizzying transformations that occurred in the country. In this context, we developed some working hypotheses, which were, perhaps, precarious but suitable at least in order to participate in this process—still open, under very ambivalent forms—in an active way.

At this point in the story, it might be useful to pose some of the questions that we formulated for ourselves in order to ponder the problems of this trajectory. We also aim to avoid a history of “happy decisions,” one that would erase every real mark of concrete labor. With what perceptual and conceptual mechanisms is it possible to capture the emergence of these new elements of sociability if they demand a new precise disposition to feel and

think? How to link ourselves to the fragility of this emergence, helping its development rather than contributing to its neutralization? What degree of ignorance do we need to arm ourselves with in order to make research a real organizer of our practices and not merely a tactical façade?

According to our friend in *Precarias a la Deriva*, “the driving force of our militant research is a desire for common ground when the common ground is shattered. That is why it has, for us, a performative-connective function: something like the activity of a communicative Wobbly, of a weaver of affective-linguistic territorialities.”

This force that gives impulse to *Precarias a la Deriva*, that search for the common ground that has shattered, remains for us a fundamental question: how to produce consistency between experiences/experiments of a counterpower that neither emerges as unified nor does it desire an external, imposed, state-like union? How to articulate the points of power and creation without developing a hierarchizing unity in charge of thinking on behalf of everyone, of leading everyone? How to draw lines of resonance within the existing networks without either subordinating or submitting to them?

Research militancy takes shape as a series of operations that, in the face of concrete problems (or of anguish that stubbornness turns into productive interrogations), establish bonds capable of altering our subjectivities and finding some sort of community in the middle of today’s radical dispersion. How to provoke interventions that strengthen horizontality and resonances, avoiding both hierarchical centralism and pure fragmentation? And, to continue in this line: how to co-articulate thinking in common with the experiences/experiments that have been elaborating hyperintelligent practices? How to produce authentic compositions, clues that later circulate through the diffuse network of counterpower, without being perceived as an outsider to the experience of thought, but, at the same time, without merging with experience(s) that is/are not directly our own? How to avoid ideologization, the idealization that everything which generates interest is welcome in our times? What kind of writing does justice to the singular situation? What is to be done with the friendships that arise from these encounters and how do we continue them? And, finally, what to do with ourselves, if with each experience/experiment we get further away from our initial subjectivities, without any mode of return?

The list of these (in)decisions gives an idea of the problems that arise among experiences/experiments in militant research. Our friends from *Universidad Trashumante* say, when they begin a workshop, they know “how to start, but not how to end.”¹⁹ If there is a productive (in)decision, it is precisely that of not knowing in advance how are we going to go through all these issues and be ready to face them time and again, to the point that the absence of this insistence speaks more of the collapse of the ongoing experience than of its maturation—or its being overcome.

Indeed, the consistency of the experience that follows the encounter is based more on these procedures than on the invocation of a common ideal. In our experience, the labor of dissolving ossifying ideological cement (be it autonomist, horizontalist, situationist, or multiple) has turned out to be decisive. We hold that idealization is a destructive force. A real, contradictory, rich, and always conflicted experience is placed on the one-dimensional pedestal of the redeeming ideal. Operations are idealized, permitting the experience/experiment to produce an existence. This is, then, transformed into an example to apply anytime and anywhere, as a new set of a priori principles. It is then asked to be able to confirm this ideal for everyone. The fragility of the experience/experiment creates tensions. How to sustain that burden? Later, of course, deception comes and, with it, destruction continues: "I thought this time it really was it, but it was only a fraud." What to do when we are faced with this mechanism of massive adherences and rejections, which elevate and dethrone radical experiments, repeating the consumerist mechanisms of the society of the spectacle? What resources do we have in hand to look after this unexpected front of exteriority to which the ideal subordinates us? What can effectively place us inside these procedures—in their reality—and no longer in their idealization?

Indeed, in our experience, there is a very strong component of working against ideals in their function as promise. That is to say: how to work from the power (*potencia*) of what is and not of what "ought to be?" Above all, when the ideal is a—more or less arbitrary—personal projection to which nobody is obliged to adapt. Research militancy does not extract its commitment from a model of the future, but from a search for power (*potencia*) in the present. That is why the most serious fight is against the a priori, against predefined schemes. Fighting the a priori, then, does not imply giving up for dead any stretch of reality. Nothing needs to die. It does imply, however, a permanent introspective revision over the type of perceptions that we are bringing into play in each situation.

We believe that the labor of research militancy is linked to the construction of a new *perception*, a new working style towards tuning up and empowering (*potenciar*) the elements of a new sociability. Perhaps clay is the metaphor to describe it: it has the capacity to receive affections without opposing resistances, in order to understand the real play of powers (*potencias*). The question is not, then, to configure a center that thinks radical practices, but to elaborate a style that allows us to become immanent to this multiplicity, without being insiders to each multiple: a multiple among multiples, a *métier* that, while doing its own thing, is involved with the others.

It will be clear, then, that the main (in)decision of research militancy is shared by the multiplicity in which it operates, and does not belong (except in fantasy) to the group that claims to be doing the research, as if it existed before and outside this multiple.

IV

As we noted at the beginning of this article—there are not any procedures outside the situation. To produce a narrative on the activities that the collective carries out, a formalization of its knowledges, would be as pointless as a manual on research militancy, and that is no one's intention.

When one reflects on the work, things appear invested of a coherence and functionality they by no means had at the very moment of their production. That recollection, that anti-utilitarian insistence, is vital for the development of research militancy, at least in our view.

When we talk about workshops and publications as practices of the collective, we immediately find it necessary to remind ourselves that there are no such workshops: just an heterogeneous conglomerate of meetings without any threads of coherence other than those that suddenly spring up from chaos, and without our knowing exactly how to develop them. Something similar happens to the publications: they emerge as provisional needs to invoke the presence of other experiences by which to extend ourselves, but they do not represent a necessary phase of a larger system.

So, we only know how to start. And that very minimally. In fact, all the procedures (mechanisms) that we prepare prove to be authentically inappropriate when confronted with the texture of a concrete situation. Thus, the very conditions of the encounter are somewhat anticipated by the shared will to co-research, it does not matter much what about (the topic might change), as long as on this "journey" we all experience substantial changes, that is, that we emerge with new capacities to empower (*potenciar*) practices.

Whatever it is that sets the conditions, there is a prior functionality of the workshop: to produce an "uncoupling" (in each meeting, again and again) from everyday spatiality and velocity. The disposition to think emerges from allowing thought itself to spatialize and temporalize according to its own requirements.

According to our friend from Madrid, there is, in their "search in the surroundings of the experiences of self-organization, and in approaching them in order to propose work in common, an immediate problem comes up: that of their exteriority to the reality to which they come close, more so when their condition and their biography is so different from that of the people with whom they come in touch with. In fact, to break with the separation between 'we' and 'they' is one of the fundamental challenges of their workshops." Above all, if those encounters are animated by the "search for a radicality not from on high, that clings to the surface of the real; a practice of self-interrogation, of locating problems and launching hypotheses (always from the practices) that would constitute the 'hardcore' of militant research."

But, is this true? Does *difference* inevitably lead to *distance*? What distances and differences are we talking about? And regarding the image of “approaching,” to what *perception* does it refer?

We could call “procedures” precisely those forms of “putting into practice” that arise from the questions of coming to terms with *differences*. How to build an *us* of thought, albeit a transient one? How to lay out a common plane as a condition, however ephemeral, of joint production? These questions are as valid for the “close” social experiences/experiments as they are for the “distant” ones.

The movement of the encounter, then, is not so much about getting closer as it is about *elaborating a common plane*. And this refers to a more complex scenario, in which the mutual measurement of “distances” and “proximities” (the “insides” and “outsides”) is not simply a matter of one’s initial *positions* (of departure), but also of whether one’s own *plane* (which includes steps forward and backward, enthusiasms and distrusts, periods of production and depressive lacunae) is drawn or not.

Without a doubt, a plane may be difficult to draw: counterpower exists only as a fold or knot between heterogeneous experiences/experiments. One dynamic is *territorial*, the other more *detrterritorialized*. The territory is *impoverished* and the more detrterritorialized experiences/experiments are *virtualized* without this common fabric (without this encounter between both). Deterritorializing spatiality and territorial modes are polarities inside the fold of counterpower and their being knotted together is one of the fundamentals of the new radicality. The experiences/experiments more linked to the territory—more concentrated—and those more diffuse—those more nomadic—can, in their dynamic differences, articulate, combine, or interact as occupations of the public sphere by counterpower.

Difference(s), then, call for a more in-depth interrogation. The postmodern impossibility of experience is nurtured by this “festival of difference” (which, strictly speaking, becomes indifference, or dispersion). But that says nothing about the potential of articulation among these experiences.

Moreover, we could ask whether an experience/experiment has value as such—and, in this sense, a profound political character—precisely when it manages to suspend that indifference of differences. When one manages to produce a conjunction (or plane) capable of subtracting itself from the “logic of pure heterogeneity” (which says “differences separate” and “there is no possible connection in the indifferent difference”). An experience/experiment—or situation—would be, then, that which is founded in the articulation of points (as relative as they might be) of a certain homogeneity. The question is neither to erase nor to disguise differences, but to stop them from setting up certain common problems.

Let’s go back to our friend from Precarias a la Deriva: “I wonder whether you interrogate yourselves about your own composition and biography,

about the position of your equals, and whether doing militant research with others involves self-analysis, above all in order to avoid the trap of a displacement, of not questioning one's own life and one's own practices (and thus introducing a split between militancy and life). In *Precarias a la Deriva* we consider a primary problem 'starting from oneself,' as one among many, in order to 'get out of oneself' (out of one's individual ego and the radical group to which one belongs) and to encounter other resisting people (hence, what I said above about being both outside and inside, in a dislocated position ourselves)."

Precarias a la Deriva claim to "politicize life from within." To turn life itself from immediate experience into something political, something committed. We would formulate this another way: in order to revitalize politics, it must be immersed in the most immediate multiple experiences. We use these phrases with a certain uneasiness because they sometimes refer to the idea that there is something missing in life and that life still needs to be well-organized. Perhaps it would be better to talk about a politics that measures up to life itself. Even if we did, it wouldn't be enough, because we prefer, without a doubt, a life that disorganizes politics rather than a good politics that manages to organize life, displacing it, proposing transcendental problems to it, determining its priorities and obligations.

But let's go deeper into our friend's questions: why does *Colectivo Situaciones* look for sites of intervention outside? What truth do we expect to find in different people? Isn't this an escape from the need to politicize our own lives in their everydayness? Moreover, doesn't this just renew the old militancy (classical exteriority) in new forms—in the sense that, beyond rehearsed languages and mechanisms, people keep going (approaching) places from outside, hoping for a more or less magical solution to their own subjective and political constitution?

These questions would be rhetorical if we only formulated them in order to refute them. It turns out, however, that these are not questions that can be eliminated in a single stroke. They live inside us and speak to us of certain tendencies whose control completely escapes our manifest intentions. Again and again we must insist on them, because they have no definitive antidote and, moreover, they are tendencies widely favored by the dominant social dynamics. In fact, the main value of formulating them is to force ourselves to work in-depth on the problem of exteriority.

Nevertheless, another image must be considered. Not only that of finite points escaping their tragic destiny of radical exteriority and producing simulacra of "interiority" (the union of the "separate as separate," as Guy Debord says), but also that of points that need (and work) to find resonances with the resonances of others.²⁰ The distinction might seem hollow, even though it describes opposite paths: in dispersion (exteriority) the alternatives oscillate between "irremediable fragmentation" or "necessary central-

ization”; but once we draw a plane (something very different than “inside and outside”), consistency refers to a transversality.²¹

Of course, we would still have to resist the accusation of spontaneism. A curious thing, since it’s not composition that is spontaneous, but dispersion. And we ask ourselves what to do with it. Is centralization the only viable alternative? Or is the common experience strong enough to prefigure new constituent modes of doing?

This is a fundamental question for research militancy, because the elaboration of a plane is neither spontaneous nor irreversible. Rather, it requires a sustained practice (“procedures” that we could not define abstractly) of collaboration in order to make commonality emerge in (and from) difference (immanence is a strategy of cutting in exteriority). Our obsession with composition is precisely inscribed in this concern about “ourselves,” but under a new set of suppositions: dispersal is not overcome through representation. The question of immanence, then, would be: how to be/with/others?

As in a phenomenology, we could then describe the path of research militancy as the manifestation of this rejection of exteriority and spectacle, along with—and as a procedure for—the production of keys for composition, for the construction of modes of immanence.²²

If collective experience has any meaning for us, it is, above all, in the way it allows us to actively confront, produce, and inhabit the context in which we live and produce: neither as a “subject who knows and explains,” nor as the passive individual of postmodernity. This capacity is a way of recognizing ourselves as multiple within a multiplicity, and of coming to terms with a certain mode of being of that multiplicity in practice.

Hence, the strong existential components of research militancy.²³ And the absurdity of pretending that it becomes a task (or, even worse, the fundamental task) of the movement.²⁴ Research militancy’s questions are the same ones that hundreds of groups²⁵ ask themselves: What new elements of sociability can emerge? Which ones will persist (do they persist?), and which ones disintegrate? What kind of relations (barriers and bridges) are drawn by the state and the market? How do the new resistances emerge? What problems are posed at the different levels?

Now that we are at this point it is, perhaps, possible to perceive the difference between thinking the situation in its universality or simply assuming it locally. When we talk about a situation we are concerned with the mode in which the universal appears in the local, not the local as “part” of the global. That is why the drift of the situation is much more interesting (sinuous) than the locality itself. While the local is defined by a fixed environment and a limited and predefined set of resources—reducing its alliances to neighboring points—the situational is actively produced, determining its dimensions and multiplying its resources. Unlike the local, the situational expands the capacities for composition-affection.²⁶

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While exteriority denotes the spatial impossibility of connection, dispersion is produced by acceleration in the temporal plane, which prevents us from finding a point to stop, to elaborate. In this context, what does politics (a “nocturnal politics,” as Mar Traful says) consist of?²⁷ Are the elements of our practices powerful (*potentes*) enough to become constituent of experience, of a new politics? How do we measure their efficacy? These questions come up because there are practical elements that justify them. But those elements neither explain nor develop the questions.

What would a new type of politics be like? And, more specifically, what exigencies would a new understanding of politics present to research militancy? What can the experience of research militancy contribute to this understanding?

From our angle, these questions refer to the efficacy of forms of action: what kind of intervention is constructed? What does the power (*potencia*) of the act depend upon? Research militancy experiments, as we have said, concern the development of new modules of space-time. It experiments with the becoming-agent (*agenciamiento*) of heterogeneous elements in points of homogeneity that turn dispersive experience (a desert) into a situation in which it is possible to elaborate and produce notions of composition (beyond the discourse of *communication*).

In a concrete situation, intelligence springs neither from erudition nor from cleverness, but rather from the capacity for involvement. In the same way stultification can be explained by very concrete forms of distraction.²⁸ Hence the possibility of establishing a concrete link between the affective-fabric that operates in a situation and its operational productivity.²⁹ Thus, what determines the efficacy of the act is not so much the number, quantity, or massiveness of the situations (aggregation capacity), as it is the aptitude for composition of the relations (consistency capacity).

As is evident, what we are suggesting is linked to a very concrete situation: the current Argentinean crisis. Here, a desert blown by violent neoliberal winds blasted existing bonds and intensified the process of dispersion. In the development of a counterpower, we experiment with the tension between new bonds and the massive demand for containment. This tension, in fact, manifested itself as a contradiction between quantitative presence (of dispersed elements waiting to be reunited) and need of a system of new relations capable of sustaining this process of aggregation, no longer as a mere reunification of the dispersed but as a new type of active configuration.

One feature of Argentina in recent months has been the meteoric growth of numerous social groupings, immediately followed by their rapid decomposition. We are not talking about some kind of absurd invalidation of mass

actions or organizations, but rather about an interrogation in order to make experiments affective.³⁰ There is probably no single valid criterion in for efficacy. Each experience/experiment of struggle and creation necessarily produces its own resources and procedures. We only intend to raise the following question: what does “aggregation” add to composition, given that aggregation organizes people and resources according to certain constituent relations (valid at any numeric or geographic scale)?

Hasta Siempre,
Colectivo Situaciones
February 29th, 2004

Notes

1. “Footnotes” refers, literally, to a second level of writing of this article, in which the notes do not constitute a complementary set of references, but rather a fundamental articulation with the central body of the text.
2. The translators are involved in an informal network dedicated to supporting and encouraging translation of radical social movement and theoretical materials. Interested persons may get in touch by emailing notasrojas@lists.riseup.net. –Tr.
3. MTD of Solano and Colectivo Situaciones, *Hipótesis 891: Más Allá de los Piquetes* [Hypothesis 891: Beyond the Roadblocks] (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de mano en mano, 2002). An updated version of this passage will appear as an article in the book *Utopian Pedagogy*, edited by Richard Day, Mark Coté, and Greig de Peuter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).
4. For further discussion of this distinction, see John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power* (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002). Translators of works by French and Italian philosophers inspired by Spinoza usually run into similar difficulties. See the translator’s introduction written by Michael Hardt in Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).
5. Miguel Benasayag, a former member of the Argentinean Guevarist guerrilla army PRT-ERP, is now a philosopher and activist residing in Paris. He participates in the collective *Malgré Tout* and played an important role in the early life of Colectivo Situaciones.
6. Cf. Miguel Benasayag and Diego Sztulwark. *Política y Situación: De la potencia al contrapoder* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de mano en mano, 2000), 217–21. Diego Sztulwark is one of the members of Colectivo Situaciones.
7. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2000), 52–59.

8. For a discussion of the notion of resonance, see “Dignity’s Revolt,” in John Holloway and Eloína Peláez, *Zapatista! Reinventing Revolution in Mexico* (London: Pluto Press, 1998).
9. “Manifeste,” Collectif Malgré Tout. Available online at <http://libertaire.free.fr/malgretout02.html> (English translation forthcoming). In 1999, El Mate (Colectivo Situaciones had not appeared yet), Malgré Tout, Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, along with other collectives from Latin America and Europe, gathered in Buenos Aires to form the Network of Alternative Resistance. Their joint declaration outlines several of the principles of Colectivo Situaciones’ philosophy. An English translation can be found at http://www.voiceoftheturtle.org/library/nar_manifesto.php.
10. See Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons In Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).
11. Precarias a la Deriva, whose name translates as Precarious Women Adrift, are a collective who undertake militant research on precarious and feminine labor, primarily in Madrid. More information on and by the Precarias can be found at <http://www.sindominio.net/karakola/precarias>. This article originally appeared in a Spanish language collection dedicated to militant research, entitled *Nociones Comunes*, edited by Marta Malo of Precarias a la Deriva. *Nociones Comunes* is available at http://www.nodo50.org/ts/editorial/librospdf/nociones_comunes.pdf.
- 1.2 This text is the prologue of *Hipótesis 891. Más allá de los piquetes*.
13. The exchange took place during the last trimester of 2003 and, as we said, constitutes the basis for this text. In our experience, productive friendship turns out to be the greatest source of inspiration, with the bonus of giving us the greatest satisfactions.
14. Many of which can be found at www.situaciones.org.
15. Faced with these deliberations, our friend asks, “Why don’t you believe in communicating and publishing texts?” To separate ourselves from the alienating image of communication, in its ingenuous version as a message from one consciousness to another, we suppose that writing, implicit in a practice, in a living thought, is particularly moving for those who search. We experience publication more as a search for (producing-receiving) *resonances* than a transmission of messages. The final goal of publication is, in our case, to extend experimentation, to establish links with experimenters in other places. This bond is incompatible with the pure “will to communicate.”
16. The notion of Militant Researcher itself came up, for us, from the encounter with Miguel. See Miguel Benasayag and Diego Sztulwark, *Política y Situación: De la potencia al contrapoder*. Later published in French and Italian under the titles *Du contre-pouvoir* (Paris: La Découverte, 2002) and *Contropotere* (Milan: Eleuthera, 2002).
17. And, yet, it is not productive to reduce the presentation of these experiences/experiments to their relation—of cause or of effect—to the subsequent social

and political crisis in Argentina. In fact, all these experiments had been producing an extended elaboration whose fundamental point of origin was the failure of revolution in the decade of the 1970s. In relation to this balance—in which the issue was to maintain a commitment but rediscussing at length the conditions and procedures—a vast spectrum of comrades recreated ideas and ways of approaching struggle. Our participation, at that moment, in the Che Guevara Free Lectureship was inscribed within this fabric.

- 18 Our first activities had to do with the articulation of our encounters with the experience/experiment of *escraches* by H.I.J.O.S., with the MLN-Tupamaros, with the Peasants Movement of Santiago del Estero (MOCASE), and with the Movement of Unemployed Workers (MTD) of Solano. [The word “*escrache*” is Argentinean slang that means “exposing something outrageous.” *Escraches* are street demonstrations in front of the houses where people involved in human rights violations during the dictatorship live. H.I.J.O.S. is the acronym for Children for Identity and Justice, against Oblivion and Silence. Also, “*hijos*” is the Spanish word for “children.” This organization was formed in 1995 by children of the disappeared during the dictatorship (1976–1983). –Tr.]
- 19 Universidad Trashumante is an itinerant collective based in San Luis, Argentina, whose activities include popular education, the recuperation of popular memory, and the production of grassroots networks. After publishing this article, Colectivo Situaciones published a book based on dialogues with those involved in this experience/experiment: *Universidad Trashumante: Territorios, Redes, Lenguajes* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2004).
- 20 Of course, *outside* and *inside* do not refer to a predefined spatiality, but to different immanent or transcendent ways of conceiving the bond: when we establish bonds with others seeking to create new worlds, are we looking *outside*? Or, put another way, what to do if those “other worlds” already exist in the process of creation, in acts of resistance? Would we sacrifice our *common* being with others in the name of a purely physical vicinity determined by crudely spatial criteria?
- 21 Which helps understand the *non-institutional* horizon of research militancy.
- 22 In this sense, both the knowledges produced and the current questions about the *construction of networks* acquire a very precise value: Isn’t it valid to look for transversal forms of composition that articulate the social practices of different groups on the basis of what they can have (and defend) in common? It seems clear that these experiments in networks can be very useful in order to know each other (and ourselves) and to relate to each other (and to ourselves), but, what happens when we reach the limit of the tensions that a network can generate? Isn’t it necessary, then, to de-center the networks, to produce new nodes, to conceive heterogeneous planes, and to open oneself towards stretches of the network that have not been *made explicit*?
- 23 *Falling in love* or *friendship* is how we express the feeling that accompanies and envelops *composition*. And, precisely, we experience research militancy

as the perception that something develops between us and in others, at least for a moment; above all, when, instead of being lost in anonymity, this *moment* sparks off other moments, and the memory that is the result of that sequence becomes a “productive resource” of the situation. This is the most persistent feeling we have about the concrete meaning of becoming “something else.”

- 24 Above all, if what we take into consideration is the extent to which research militancy does not seek to “organize others.” Not because it renounces organization—there is no research militancy without high levels of organization—but because its problem is posed in terms of a self-organization that collaborates with the self-organization of networks.
- 25 Shared problems in the face of which there is no subject-object distinction. The researcher is the person who participates in the problematization. And the research objects are problems, ways of posing them, and self-research about dispositions to be able to pose those problems.
- 26 The exchange with Precarias a la Deriva has for us a fundamental immediate value. Moreover, the exchanges maintained on the basis of this article have left the trace of a certain style of work that it is necessary to deepen and, in this sense, are not very far from what we call “workshops.” “Workshops” are, then, just like that. They do not constitute themselves—nor do they aspire to—into the General Staff of the situation: they constitute themselves as a point of encounter capable of thinking and, in the best of cases, elaborating practical hypotheses with the force of an intervention.
- 27 *Por una política nocturna*, (Barcelona: Editorial Debate, 2002). [There is an online version available at <http://www.sindominio.net/ofic2004/publicaciones/pn/indice.html> –Tr.]
- 28 On this, see the very interesting lessons of Joseph Jacotot, brought to us by Rancière in a book that is fundamental for us: Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).
- 29 In this sense we can fully rehabilitate—from our most immediate experience—the theories that speak about an “affect-value.”
- 30 There is no doubt that the insurrectional actions of the Argentinean December of 2001 opened a new and fertile field of actions and debates of all kinds and, even closely, the same sequence is empowered (*potenciada*) by the revolts that took place in Bolivia in 2003.