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Mental Prototypes and Monster Institutions. Some Notes by Way of an Introduction

Universidad Nómada

Translated by Nuria Rodríguez

Mental Prototypes

For quite a while now, a certain portmanteau word has been circulating in the Universidad Nómada's[1] discussions, in an attempt to sum up what we believe should be one of the results of the critical work carried out by the social movements and other post-socialist political actors. We talk about creating *new mental prototypes* for political action. This is due to the importance, in our eyes, of the elusive and so often unsuccessful link between *cognitive diagrams* and *processes of political subjectivation*. That is, the link between the *knowledge* that allows powers and potentials to be tested on one hand and, on the other, the semiotic, perceptual and emotional *mutations* that lead to the politicisation of our lives, become personified in our bodies, and shape the finite existential territories that are channelled into or become available for political antagonism. We believe there is a need to create new mental prototypes because contemporary political representations, as well

as many of the institutions created by the emancipatory traditions of the 20th century, should be subjected to a serious review - at the very least - given that, in many cases, they have become part of the problem rather than the solution.

In this respect, the anniversary of the 1968 world revolution – an unavoidable reference given the month in which we are writing this text - shouldn't be used as an excuse to wallow in amorphous nostalgia for the passing of the “age of revolutions”. Just the opposite - it should be used to demonstrate the extent to which some of the *unsuitable* signs of that world revolution are still present in a latent state, or, to be more precise, in a state of “frustrated virtuality”. “68” interests us because, even though it didn’t come out of the blue, it was an unforeseeable world event – a historical fork in the road that left a trail of new political creations in a great many different parts of the world. Ultimately, it motivates us because its unresolved connections and even its caricatures allow us to consider the problem of the politicisation (and metamorphosis) of life as a monstrous intrusion of the unsuitable into history (the history of capitalist modernity and postmodernity)[2].

Over the last forty years, this latency has been subject to a series of quite significant emergences. The latest and perhaps most important, the one that is generationally closest to us, is the one in which the “movement of movements”, or the global movement, played a central role. But in spite of its extraordinary power, it hasn't always been fruitful enough in terms of generating the "mental prototypes" that we believe are so necessary. At least, it’s not clear that it has been able to produce prototypes that are sophisticated, robust and complex enough to generate innovative and *sustained* patterns of political subjectivation and organisation that make it possible to at least attempt a profound transformation

of command structures, daily life, and the new modes of production[3]. The articles included in the monograph we are introducing here emerge from these issues – which, in the present context, we can only summarise and reduce to a few fundamental aspects. We've decided to avoid a merely speculative approach, and to remain as far as possible from declarations of how the political forms of the movements "should-be"; rather, we try to present a series of experimentations – not to *exemplify,* but more in the manner of case studies, as experiences that are being tested in practice – that are currently trying to overcome the predicaments and shortfalls that we've just mentioned.

The Universidad Nómada believes there is an urgent need to identify the differentiating features and the *differentials of political and institutional innovation* that exist in specific experimentations. We've chosen to place the emphasis on two aspects that implicitly constitute the two transversal themes for this diverse compilation of texts, namely: (a) we give preference to metropolitan forms of political intervention, specifically looking at one of their most frequently recurring figures - *social centres*; by this, we don't mean to lay claim to social centres as fossilised forms or political artefacts with an essentialised identity, but to try and explore the extent to which the "social centre form" today points the way to processes of opening up and renewal[4], producing, for example, innovative mechanisms for the enunciation of (and intervention in) the galaxy of the precariat[5]; and at the same time, and partially intertwining with the above, (b) the constitution of self-education networks that are developing in – and perhaps result from? – the crisis of Europe's public university system[6]. Ultimately, "Europe", not as a naturalised space for political intervention, but as a constituent process; the production of these mental prototypes and

mechanisms of enunciation and intervention as an instituent process[7].

Social Centres as “bodies without organs”

For a long time, and in many cases still today, squatted social centres (Centros Sociales Okupados in Spanish) have used the abbreviation CSO or CSOA (the "a" stands for "autogestionados", or "self-managed") as a differentiating element in the public sphere, as a kind of semiotic marker of the radical nature of their project. And inevitably, some of us who participated in them were bound to notice the virtuous coincidence between this label and the Spanish for Deleuze and Guattari’s “body without organs”, “Cuerpo sin Organos” or CsO[8], using it to try to imagine and put into practice the un-thought and un-spoken virtualities that we believe are present in the matrix of metropolitan social centres. The considerations found in the different articles in this *transversal/transform* dossier are heading in that same direction, that is, they point towards the ongoing reinvention of an *institutional mechanism* (a form of *movement institution*) that has already proven its validity and, in a certain sense, its irreversibility in terms of the politics of the subaltern subjects in the metropolis. But this doesn’t mean that the irreversible validity arises from a stable, self-referential, identitary “social centre form” that remains always the same as itself, but just the opposite, as set out in one of the collective texts included in this monograph[9].

Perhaps we could speak of the need to counteract the solidification of the “social centre form” through the production of “unsuitable social centres”, that is, projects of political and subjective creation based on specific powers of different configurations of the (political, cultural and “productive”) make-up of the basins of

metropolitan cooperation. Creations that wouldn't therefore try to seal themselves off as autarkic rather than autonomous islands, but to transform the existing context in accordance with the variable possibilities expressed by counter-powers that would then be capable of avoiding the dialectic of the antagonism between powers that tend towards equivalence[10]. This would thus open up new, constituent dimensions in terms of spatial, temporal, perceptive, cooperative, normative and value-based aspects.

Some twenty years have already gone by since *squatters* first made their appearance in the public sphere. From *squatters* to *okupas* to *centros sociales okupados*, there has undeniably been progress, evolution; but the experience hasn't emerged from its *neoteny* stage, so to speak. There are obviously numerous reasons for this, and they may be complex enough to deserve to be fully dealt with in this dossier. In any case, this complexity should not be simplified by labelling the factors that delay its growth as "negative", and those that implement the model without further critical consideration of its present condition as "positive". The problem-factor of the (politics of) identity that has characterised the social centre form, with its disturbing ambivalence, is proof of this: because identity politics can be blamed for many "evils" and we can claim that this kind of politics has considerably contributed to the underdevelopment of the experiences and to the same errors being repeated; but if we don't take into account this aspect of identity (politics), it is difficult to explain why the great majority of relevant experiences arose in the first place and persist.

Metropolis and identity

From the point of view of the production of subjectivity, the act of disobedience and direct reappropriation of wealth ("fixed assets"-

buildings, infrastructures, etc.) is and will probably remain fundamental in the evolution of the social centre form (and of other things). We should keep this in mind when we confront a relatively recent issue that is generating endless tense disputes in the heart of the social movements: the negotiation of spaces - whether we're talking about negotiating the ongoing occupation of squatted social centres through dialogue, or about approaching public bodies for new spaces to be self-managed. Basically, how can disobedience and reappropriation be reconciled with negotiation? or, in other words: how is it possible to articulate the conflict/negotiation dialectic? The crucial problem is along these lines, and undoubtedly a substantial source of controversy.

There is a permanent niche of political impulses – which doesn't just affect the younger participants in social centres – that cannot do without *a predetermined way* of conceiving the act of disobedience and conflict as an element of political subjectivation and identity. The political function of social centres and identity, militancy and identity, and metropolitan commons and identity thus emerge as some of the permanent problematic nodes that end up deciding whether the experience is to make progress or be annulled. That is, what's at stake here is the possibility of producing *a new type of institutionality of movement* that can profit from the experience gained over two decades of social centres in Europe. In this sense, the last thing we need is a new "argument" or a new "program". What we need is to explicitly question the way in which we confront the "singularisation" of collective existence in the productive, cooperative and relational medium of the metropolis; a singularisation that *always* entails – that "normally" implies – complex processes of difference/identity. If we think there is a need to re-start a cycle of creative experimentation in relation to the social centre form, it is not because of a fetishistic

attachment to novelty, but precisely because the forms of singularisation that we experience in our bodies and in our own lives are currently going through a phase of transformation in our cities, and inevitably require us to respond through the practice of risk-taking forms of political recomposition.

One's "immersion" in the metropolis of total mobilisation can't be simply a willing act. The development of aspects of *political entrepreneurship* — as foreshadowed in the social centres' production of services, aspects that are bio(syndicalist) and cooperative, based on public self-education projects and so on[11] — requires that we confront the dead-end streets of endemic, self-marginalised political experiences in the city. But it also implies the need to clarify what we could call the *supplements of subjectivation* that allow languages, value universes and collective territories to be re-founded as part of a device that can continue to be *subversive*, particularly on the level of forms of life. This means no longer aspiring to be subversive simply in terms of a dialectic of molar confrontation between subjects that are always pre-formed, channelling us towards a binary dynamic in the face of forces that have already been counted, with results that are already taken for granted.

Governance as an adversary

Social centres' *geometry of hostility* in the productive metropolis becomes fixed in accordance with the establishment of government figures that try and combine the power of centralised command with social diffusion of (metropolitan and transnational) powers. The multicentric scheme of capitalist powers demonstrates the crisis of party-like, representative forms of integration. *Governance* has become its transitional mode. "Thus when we speak about

metropolitan governance we are alluding to a set of public practices that represent, in the face of the harmonisation of irreducible and heterogeneous interests, the response to the inability of deriving decisions from an initial process of institutional legitimisation. The weakening of traditional mechanisms of social regulation and the channelling of interests has in fact rendered subjectivities impervious to the practice of government. Governance, in a certain sense, constitutes the struggle to continually produce, through variable and flexible structures, subjectivities that are consonant with the 'administrationalisation' of life, where the boundaries between public and private become transient and elusive"[12].

Governance is the device that opposes social centres, the counterpart with productions of consensus, obedience and exclusion that have to be dismantled, destabilised and sabotaged. The main objective of metropolitan governance consists of making the shared conditions of life productive in accordance with the concept of the city-company; it consists of organising the total mobilisation of its inhabitants and of linguistic, emotional and financial flows in political and institutional terms - a total mobilisation that neutralises the political and existential valences that emerge from cooperation and from communal metropolitan life; it consists of producing a "government of difference" based on a constant inflation of statutes, segmentations, regulations and restrictions that allow the subordinate groups to be ordered hierarchically, isolated and divided. Social centres are one of the crucial operators of practical criticism of metropolitan governance (and are destined to become even more intensely so). The fight of the social centres against governance takes place in the field of practices of de-individualisation; in the reappropriation of spaces that can then be used to configure political situations that transform the conflict arising from placing a heterogeneous mix of

population singularities up against the devices of urban income into a new motor for urban dynamics; in the production of new service relationships, such as those that try out a reappropriation of the relationships involved in care provision, which can de-privatise and denationalise the processes of reproduction and valorisation of life that remain confiscated by metropolitan biopower institutions; and in experimentation with ways of practicing and experiencing the time of the metropolis in the face of the total mobilisation of frightened, anxious individuals.

Education, self-education and research in *monster institutions*

Ultimately, the medley of experiences that this dossier deals with reveals unequivocal traces of the *monster institutions* that are necessary today in order to bring about the inevitability of new manifestations of the "frustrated virtualities" resulting from the long and unfinished sequence that followed the existential revolution of 1968: this takes us back to the beginning and closes a circular argument that considers present emergences by making the most of the virtualities of the immediate revolutionary past. Needless to say, the case studies shown here aren't exhaustive and don't inflate these virtualities. In agreement with the challenges set out in the articles (greater innovation, increased cooperation, more contagion at the European level and beyond), the Universidad Nómada is interested in tackling the possibility of constructing these new mental prototypes linked to the desired monstrosity, to the need to think and do another, different kind of politics based on education, self-education and research. We believe there are four basic circuits to be implemented, as follows:

(a) A *circuit of educational projects,* to be developed in order to allow the circulation of theoretical paradigms and intellectual

tools suitable for producing these *cognitive maps* that can be used to (1) intervene in the public sphere by creating *swarming points* of reference and producing counter-hegemonic discourses; and, in addition, to (2) analyse existing power structures and dynamics, as well as potentials;

(b) A *circuit of co-research projects*, to be organised for the systematic study of social, economic, political and cultural life for the purpose of producing *dynamic maps* of social structures and dynamics that can be useful for guiding antagonist practices, redefining existing conflicts and struggles, and producing new forms of expression endowed with a new principle of social and epistemological intelligibility[13];

(c) A *publishing and media circuit*, to be designed with the aim of influencing the public sphere, areas of intellectual production and university teaching, for the purpose of creating *intellectual-analytic laboratories* and, consequently, new segments of reference and criticism of hegemonic forms of knowledge and ways of conceptualising the social situation;

(d) A *circuit of foundations, institutes and research centres*, to be devised as an autonomous infrastructure for the production of knowledge, which would constitute an embryonic stage for forms of political organisation by means of the accumulation of analysis and specific proposals. Its activities should link the analysis of regional and European conditions with the global structural dynamics of the accumulation of capital and of the recreation of the global geostrategic options that are favourable to the social movements.

In some cases, the devices that make these tasks possible are already operating, and their manifestations can be found or intuited

here and there, peppering the texts in the monograph we are extending with this short introduction. To finish off: we are talking about devices that are necessarily *hybrid and monstrous*:

hybrid, because right from the start they make it necessary to create networks out of resources and initiatives that are very different and contradictory in nature, that appear strange and even seemingly incongruent among themselves; these resources and initiatives mix together public and private resources, institutional relations with relations of movement, non-institutional and informal models for action with forms of representation that may be formal and representative, and struggles and forms of social existence that some would accuse of being non-political or contaminated or useless or absurd but take on a strategic aspect because they directly give a political and subjectivity-producing dimension to processes of allocation of resources and logistical elements that end up being crucial for bursting onto nationalised and/or privatised public spheres and transforming them;

monstrous, because they initially appear to be pre-political or simply non-political in form, but their acceleration and accumulation as described above must generate a density and a series of possibilities for intellectual creativity and collective political action that will contribute to inventing another politics;

another politics, that is, another way of translating the power of productive subjects into new forms of political behaviour and, ultimately, into original paradigms for the organisation of social life, for the dynamic structuring of the potential of that which is public and communal.

[1] The original document (in Spanish) presenting the Universidad Nómada can be found at the head of our web page (http://www.universidadnomada.net/spip.php?article139); a recent text that has become something of a summary for the new phase of the Universidad Nómada is “Towards New Political Creations. Movements, institutions, new militancy”, by Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, published in *transversal: instituient practices*, July 2007 (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0707/sanchez/en).

[2] Also along these lines, see “On the Breach” (http://transform.eipcp.net/correspondence/1209407525), a recent text by Gerald Raunig that — in reference to Claude Lefort and Gilles Deleuze — recalls precisely the unexpected, unforeseeable and unsuitable nature of that “event”, while also vindicating the nature of its “latencies”, which may still be reactivated or verified. Anti-68 “reaction” theory and nostalgic evocations of the events both serve to suspend these latencies indefinitely.

[3] This is also what Paolo Virno seems to be saying, using an accurate image, when he states that in recent years the global movement was like a huge battery that had been charged in a short, vertiginous process, but couldn't find where to connect itself and discharge its power, and that it specifically couldn't manage to connect with "those forms of struggle that are necessary in order to transform the situation of precarious, temporary and atypical work into political assets"; see "Un movimento performativo", in *transversal: precariat*, July 2004 (http://eipcp.net/transversal/0704/virno/it). In any case, in these notes for (self)critical reflection, we continue to declare that the configuration process of the global movement already constitutes the inalienable genetic code of the cycle of struggles that is currently in course.

[4] We refer to the reflections contained in the text by Andrej Kurnik and Barbara Beznec “Rog: Struggle in the City”, in *transversal: monster institutions*, *op. cit.* (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0508/kurnikbeznec/en).

[5] Which constitutes our explicit response to the problem set out in *supra*, note 3.

[6] How can we avoid mentioning the centrality of “the university" in the 68 world revolution, how students discerned the paradox of an institution that is in crisis in terms of its historic model, but meanwhile plays an increasingly central role in capitalist modes of production and valorisation? See, among many other recent reflections, Gigi Roggero, “The Autonomy of the Living Knowledge in the Metropolis-University”, in *transversal: instituent practices, op. cit.* (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0707/roggero/en), and the related experience described in "The Metropolis and the So-Called Crisis in Politics. The Experience of Esc", in *transversal: monster institutions, op. cit.* (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0508/esc/en). See also two Universidad Nómada texts by Montserrat Galcerán, “¿Tiene la universidad interés para el capital?” (“Are universities already of interest to capital?”) (http://www.universidadnomada.net/spip.php?article242) and “La crisis de la universidad” (“The crisis of the university”) (http://www.universidadnomada.net/spip.php?article184), both n/d.

[7] See Francesco Salvini, “The Moons of Jupiter: Networked Institutions in the Productive Transformations of Europe”, in transversal: *monster institutions, op. cit.* (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0508/salvini/en).

[8] See "'Mil mesetas' y los espacios liberados metropolitanos. Notas para un agenciamiento" ("'A Thousand Plateaus' and metropolitan liberated spaces. Notes for an assemblage") (1998) (http://www.sindominio.net/laboratorio/documentos/milmesetas/laboratorio.htm), which contains reflections that some of us participated before becoming involved with the Universidad Nómada.

[9] Pablo Carmona, Tomás Herreros, Raúl Sánchez Cedillo y Nicolás Sguiglia, "Social Centres: monsters and political machines for a new generation of movement institutions", in *transversal: monster institutions*, *op. cit.* (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0508/carmonaetal/en).

[10] Thus the type of asymmetry between powers and counter-powers that characterises the movements in the new cycle of struggles that we've called "another geometry of hostility". See Amador Fernández-Savater, Marta Malo de Molina, Marisa Pérez Colina and Raúl Sánchez Cedillo, "Ingredientes de una onda global" ("Ingredients of a global wave") *Desacuerdos 2*, Macba, Unia and Arteleku, Barcelona, 2006 (http://www.arteleku.net/4.0/pdfs/1969-2bis.pdf; and http://www.universidadnomada.net/spip.php?article188).

[11] One of the richest and most hopeful cases along these lines is certainly that of the *oficinas de derechos sociales*, as explained in the text by Silvia L. Gil, Xavier Martínez and Javier Toret, "Las Oficinas de Derechos Sociales: Experiences of Political Enunciation and Organisation in Times of Precarity", in *transversal: monster institutions, op. cit.* (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0508/lopezetal/en).

[12] Atelier Occupato ESC, “The Metropolis and the So-Called Crisis of Politics”, *op. cit.*; see also Francesco Salvini, “The Moons of Jupiter: Networked Institutions in the Productive Transformations of Europe”, *op. cit.*

[13] See Marta Malo de Molina, “Nociones comunes”, introduction to the collective volume *Nociones comunes. Experiencias y ensayos entre investigación y militancia*, Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid, 2004 (http://traficantes.net); also published in two parts, as “Common notions, part 1: workers-inquiry, co-research, consciousness-raising”, in *transversal: militant research,* April 2006 (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0406/malo/en), and “Common Notions, Part 2: Institutional Analysis, Participatory Action-Research, Militant Research”, in *transversal: instituent practices*, *op. cit.* (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0707/malo/en). Also useful along these lines, is an overview of the texts included in the monograph *transversal: militant research*, mentioned above (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0707), in particular the text by Javier Toret and Nicolás Sguiglia (members of Universidad Nómada), “Cartography and War Machines. Challenges and Experiences around Militant Research in Southern Europe” (http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0406/tsg/en).