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Movements, Institutions, New Militancy

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A set of recurrent symptoms is forcing us to imagine, remember, project and build institutions. Particular dates and events can guide us as a compass in understanding the necessity of institutional construction: January 1st 1994, the EZLN rose up in arms against the Mexican government and against world-wide neoliberal power. More than thirteen years have already passed since that event marked a way out from what Félix Guattari called the "years of winter". Slightly less distant are the days of Genova, July 20-22 2001, which without a doubt marked an inflection point in the capacity of political creation/creativity of the so called movement of movements. The declaration of war on the movement by the G8 (through the Berlusconi administration), and during the same year, the instauration of the regime of global war after S-11, closed the democratic political space that the global movement was building since its "foundational" moment, on September 30 1999 in Seattle. As we know, the movement against the war in Iraq was qualified by the New York Times as the "world's second superpower". This time though it was about the potential of public opinion, a new pole of influence within the "democracies of opinion", that is to

say, it was a domesticated and neutralized potential. This was six years ago, and the *in nuce* political space that the movements were prefiguring, (currently maintained by only a few experiments such as the Euromayday process), seems to be closing in leaps and bounds. This closure has been even more pronounced since the European Constitutional Treaty was rejected by French and Dutch voters, that paradoxically reinforced the non democratic, purely confederal and inter-governmental character of the process of European construction, Sarkozy *docet*.

The consequence (of this closure of political space) being political impotence, organizational weakness, and the dispelling of subjectivity (or said in another way, the crisis of subjectivity production, a crisis of its consistency and self-organization). Those seem to be the central traits of the current crisis of the movement form in the European territory. This translates itself in its inability, in the first place, to build local and regional struggles that can express force relationships. For example, specific struggles in the terrain of the precarization both of salary and social rights; and more generally, struggles against the an emergent form of *governance* intimately linked to the general mobilization of society as a production machine, to *workfare* and to *warfare*, which nowadays inform the current "social policies" and labor relations in the continent whose center of gravity is the European Union. [...]

Departing from these brief notes on the current "conjuncture", what is the usefulness or heuristic potential offered by the creation and/or replacement/destruction of institutions? There is indeed some usefulness to think though institutions, especially if we are able to simultaneously circumscribe concrete problems to concrete and current situations as well as to situate ourselves within the large amount of critique and theory around contemporary institutions in the current conjuncture. This conjuncture is marked

by the neutralization of the constituent power of social movements. It is also situated in a context where life is equally political and productive, in such a way that it is only formally possible to establish distinctions between the process of politicization of individual and collective lives on the one hand, and the matrixes of a new productive power (outside and/or against measures of value). That is to say, from the point of view of the capacity of capture and control over cooperative singularities, the technologies and mechanisms of networked biopower are only capable of dictating sequences of economic value in accordance with a social relationship among subjects, among creative individuals who are able to influence each other, to exercise power over each other, (and thus to change their own attitude), in accordance with mobile relationships and within an open notion of space-time. These criteria are marked by the generalized market of all forms of life, which is also a decisive dimension of the *project,* within which all the competencies of the subject should be concatenated in order to obtain the goals of self-valorization.

In this sense, the individual (as a form) as well as its relationships, interactions, experiences, etc. becomes essential for this neoliberal ontology of production and of government. It is possible to pose the following hypothesis: for this productive individual, the current regime of war –as a constitutive element of her/is own vital world- works in two ways. The war regime, within the concrete parameters of different levels of life stability, works both as a pile of risks and uncertainties, as a deficit of information, of fear and hope, as well as an incentive for its own performance within the productive network of total social mobilization, as a constant confirmation of the finitude and fragility of his/er own project.

Thus, an active selection of available tools and experiences becomes necessary. Let's make an effort to orient ourselves. Let's start by

delimiting what we are referring to with the notion of "institution" itself. I think the theme of institutions is of crucial and extraordinary relevance in its relationship with the problem of social and thus political counter-powers, with the project of a network of counter-powers able to bear a discontinuous and unpredictable dynamic proper of constituent exodus happening within the complex device of capitalism-*governance*-war. What does this active selection imply? As was mentioned before, it would chiefly imply a radical distancing from the contents and goals of previous periods, contexts and projects of institutional critique and require the imagining of a new world of liberatory institutions. It becomes evident that, outside of the conditions of contextualization and situation discussed earlier, we run the risk of inventing a new environment from scratch, separated and isolated from the problems of conflict, organization, subjectivity production and counterpower in new social movements. We run the risk then of making a virtue out of a necessity. We run the risk of using a generic reference such as "institutions" to cover the emptiness that critical practices hate or religiously adore, as well as to conceal the solid neutralization of the political space currently afoot within the European territory. [...]

Institutions, *da capo*

Let's come back to the term. Let's depart from the extremely problematic notions of *institutio* and *instituere*. The term *institutio* refers to a *foundation* and a plan, a project, an elaborated intention, while *instituere* means to prepare, to arrange, to establish, but also to organize something that already exists, and to form and to instruct. These meanings are without a doubt quite generic; however they are interesting in order to productively focus on the question. The goal is to depart from the epistemic and political

imaginary blockage that arises with the "question of institutions", which includes references (images or icons sometimes) as serious as the state apparatus, as well as institutions such as school, prison, hospital, political parties, museums, etc. and other public infrastructures. In this way, we can get out, at least for a moment, to the open air offered by *instituere* and the *instituent*.

Gilles Deleuze offers a series of simple and naked considerations about the creative, positive and affirmative dimensions of generating institutions, in contrast with the law, with the violence of the norm. These considerations are written in a brief piece, linked to his work on David Hume, called "Instincts and Institutions" [1]. According to Deleuze, on the one hand institution and instinct share the search for satisfying tendencies and necessities; and on other hand, they distinguish themselves in the moment that the institution works as an *organized system of means* for satisfaction, an institutional means that is able to a priori determine social modalities that frame individual experiences. Institutions are, in contrast with laws, the main structures where the social is invented, where an affirmative and not limiting or exclusivist know-how is produced.

[...]

In this way, we are able to get beyond the exclusive fixation on the object of "institutions" in its meanings used by other trains of thoughts and by critical practices, from the dialectics of the inauthentic and the alienated essence that even today inform some Situationist and neo-Situationsist positions, as well as the institutional critique defended by the circles of art and artivism, to the analysis of disciplinary institutions, including its diagram power-resistances (psychiatric ward, hospital, prison, school) linked to the 'apparently' more 'politicized' period of Michel Foucault's

work and public life. [...] But we know there are "other" Foucault's'. The later Foucaultian work, mainly developed and lived in the North American territories (USA and Canada) offers us notes full of inspiration, even in reference to the question of institutional creation. The emergence of the themes around techniques of the self and its relationship with governmentality, and with the technologies of the government of populations, is intimately linked to Foucault's own experience and close relation to the minorities of desire and their political as well as academic expressions, from the late 70's until his death[2] .

[...]Through studying contemporary neoliberalism, [...] Foucault discovers a self-limitation practice on the part of government, a critique of the *raison d'etat* which is internal to the very problematic of "governmentality". The condition of this self-limitation practice is the definition of an absolute reference: "society", in which populations are inserted. Within society it is possible to discover of dynamics self-organization, processes that are autonomous in relation to governmental interventions; to the point that excessive interventionism on the part of the sate, the proliferation of unnecessary legal interventions, may contribute to the failure of the very same goals defended by the problematic of governmentality. [...]

Institutions and movement. The "great tactic"

Let's get back now to our own contemporary problems and ask ourselves about the following question: to what degree is an institutionalization process able to positively displace a neutralized political space? That is to say: could a concrete recognition and specific work on the issues of institutional formation be a relevant factor to support movements, and strengthen struggles against the

regime of cognitive capitalism and against the regime of war/ state of emergency, regimes that are informing the current system of governance both at the global and European levels? Before trying to provide a temporary answer to that question, we could look for inspiration in perspectives working on this issue, produced in the initial moments of the movements that followed the "existential revolution" of 1968. This is the case of Antonio Negri's work dedicated to the critical –that would later prove itself to be fatal- period of the social proletarian movement in Italy in the late 70s. [...]. This urgent, preemptory and practically unknown piece was submitted for publication from prison after the 'blitz' [on the part of the State] of April 7, 1979. The piece was called *Politica di classe. Le cinque campagne* [3] [Class Politics. Five Campaigns]

The situation at the time was one of total crisis of the different Italian autonomous political structures and perspectives. However, the text in question tried to interpret the crisis as a possibility for a total renewal of the movement, as a break with old and alien facades, tools, discourses and institutions, used by the political structures of the new movement. It was about trying to interpret that crisis beyond the terms of "autonomy from the political" as well as "the worse the better" enounced by terrorist groups or the catastrophic positions of capitalist elites. Negri's approach to the crisis as a creative crisis was based on a project of political mediation, both internal as well as external to the new movement, as a project of building its own similar and friendly political space.

According to Negri, the problem to be resolved consisted on breaking with the quagmire proper of the social counterpowers produced by the movement in a symmetric, purely military, relationship. This relationship was also "dialectic", that is to say, dependent on the initiative of capital and the party system, especially in regards to spaces and times of conflict. Behind this

approach, it is possible to see the difficulty of imagining a "transition" outside the frameworks, deformed ones, of a "taking of power" *à la* bolshevik. By transition meaning the exercise of collective effort (normative production by movements and the capacity to impose it) as well as the deployment of inventive potential, and the potential of cooperating in common in the process of social transformation. The combination of both, the exercise of power and the transformation of ways of life, liberation of production and of singularities, was presented as an insolvable puzzle. [...]

For Negri, the solution to this puzzle would come from the side of institutional dimensions. That is to say, from the new forms of productive cooperation used by the social proletariat, oriented towards expressing the power of freedom as well as of individual and collective enjoyment, both always expansive and open. This is what Negri calls "communist production". These new forms of cooperation are inseparable from the invention of a proletarian entrepreneurship, understood as the defining/determining of institutional creation. [...]

In this way we arrive at what we could call an antagonistic use of schumpeterian "creative destruction", in the realms of the self-valorization by proletarian subjects and the creation of institutions as means of self-organization of those very same processes. [...] The operator of this institutionality is according to Negri, negative work, "the intellectually and materially determined content that consists in rejecting current forms of social organization". [...]

The definitive defeat of movements both of social proletariat and of the minorities of desire during the 80s, in Italy as well as Europe in general, was parallel and associated to a process characterized by the full productive subsumption of society (of life and thus of

subjectivity as well) to a process tied to capital, which brought about an extreme political undermining of those identities linked to labor. Despite that defeat, it would be difficult to refute the validity and urgency of Negri's proposal: "building within the social, centers of alternative and independent *projectuality*, communities of negative labor, completely free and antagonistic towards the planning and programming of the reproduction of power of control. This is then the inspirational force of the approach towards institutional building as an element of a "big tactic" of reformulation of contemporary anti-systemic movements and their political potential.

No one is unaware of the complicated (in the anthropological, ethical, political sense) status of the new labor force –cooperative, cognitive, relational and affective- born out of the conjunction of diverse historical processes. Some of those incommensurable processes go from the rejection of the fordist labor by antisystemic movements of the 60s, to the postfordist restructuring of society since the early 80s, or even the impulse of massive schooling before and after 1968 in Europe and the new precarious subjects whose living labor is mainly cognitive, relational and affective. These are processes whose concomitant efficiency, -not without catastrophic results-, have produced hybrid and monstrous species, definitely distant from the organic framework of capitalist modernity, as well as from the emancipatory counter-models of alternative modernity, including radical liberalism or socialism.

Nowadays, the identity crisis around labor mentioned above, confuses this identity with an individual's life/vital activity, poses a series of additional problems to the design of institutional restructuring. The notion of negative labor used by Negri (in the works cited earlier?), the *self-valorization* practices used by proletarian subjects needed of a temporal, rigidly dualist, and

transitional dimension for the development of communist capacities on the part of all those exploited subjects, working towards the *self-determination* of such subjects. In contrast to this though, today living labor is *a priori* presented as multiplicity, and the deployment of common cooperative capacities is inseparable from the process of singularization of each of its operators. [...]. [However, it is precisely from] this process that new models have emerged, new agents of enunciation consistent with other machinations and developments of knowledge, political cooperation and enunciation. To the point that, *ex post facto*, it is possible to draw a *countergenealogy,* a diagram and program of those combinations, emphasizing their discontinuities of subjectification, of re-appropriation of cooperative nexuses and of the *creation* of new political machines. This is the case of various experiences in different parts of Europe. These experiences have desired to transform their communicative, relational, formative, creative lives, into a *political life*. That is to say, a life made of an interface between singularity and commonality. This is the case of institutions such as: squatted/occupied social centers, the political forms of global activism; internet use and the inverted juridical engineering of *copyleft* licenses and *hacker* cooperatives; and action-research groups and networks that are starting to grow within the (precarious) interstices of a university system in crisis and almost definitive restructuring.

This is why the institutionalization of the movement is proposed as a *means*, of course. However it is a means towards self-determination, the free constitution of individual and collective subjectivity departing from a re-appropriation of the conditions of production and reproduction of the self.

It should be said that this institutional revolution is inseparable from the ability to express counter-powers. This is to say, the

capacity to carry out a *metropolitan strike* against the total productive mobilization of the populations. Is it possible to think about defeating of the regime of war/exception/emergency outside of this capacity to exercise a collective and ethically regulated potential against the violence proper of the total mobilization of the metropolis? This kind of strike is only feasible as a result of trial and error, of material processes of composition and cooperation, of multilateral networking among the multiplicities that nowadays constitute metropolitan living labor in an irreversible way [...].

Institution as a political-productive machine and existential territory. For the immediate present

However, the *ex ante* multiplicity of forms of life and figures of living labor do not directly imply an antagonistic value, nor an automatic resistance to the production of forms of life subsumed by the capitalist circuit of imitation and differentiation. Our problem is precisely one of the consistency and resistance to the lamination of the production of political subjectivities, as well as its coefficients of transversality, its disposition towards an experience of metamorphosis. In order to achieve that we need a much richer concept of subjectivity production than those that are circulating among most political groups and movements. The most common concepts currently in circulation avoid contrasting the forms of subjectivity compatible with total productive mobilization, with pre- and trans- personal terrains. Additionally, they invisibilize many everyday life experiences where impulses of freedom and transformation are lived within the microphysical registers of perception, affect and *agencements* of "non significant" enunciation. These are experienced by each subject and his/her relations within the productive and communicative networks that constitute the

material and machinic support of the so called “cooperation among brains” [4].

Felix Guattari offers a formal definition of subjectivity production related to what he calls the procedure of “meta-modelization”. This refers to a theoretical discursivity capable of reaching the maximum number of ontological descriptions or cartographies, saving the inherent pluralism of the cartographic practice. This allows us to trespass established domains and to avoid the anti-productive restrictions of legality in each of the paradigms in dispute [5] For Guattari, subjectivity is an effect of the consistence and existence of the agglomeration of entities that we can map according to four ontological functions: material and semiotic flows; concrete and abstract machinisms that work on those flows, the embodied universes of reference and adjacent value to each *agencement* of subjectification; and, last but not least, the existential territories marked by their precarity and finitude. These are the decisive elements in contemporary subjectivity production, and this is why they are in the center of the problematics of resistance and autonomy in new political creations. [...] This subjectivity production, insofar as it is oriented towards rupture and battle against its capture, control and exploitation on the part of the mechanisms of new forms of capitalism, should be up to the task of being able to “navigate” regimes of signs, and capitalist semiotics. This semiotics, in which one “swims” and “bathes”, are concatenated in pragmatic montages, in straight-up capitalist agencies and institutions of enunciation. They saturate and distort efforts of both individual and collective singularization.[...]

We may ask ourselves now: could the institution be a privileged site or *topos* for the production of non-controlled subjectivity, a *topos* which is also able to ethically treat that subjectivity and care for its consistency? And at the same time, would not this notion

of institution imply its permanent openness, a condition of continuous process and self-critique, subordinated to the irruption of metamorphoses, by new *agencements* of enunciation and of life?

Experiences of institutions in this sense are not lacking. These experiences are intimately linked to the formation of cartographic tools of schizoanalysis and the coining of notions such as "transversality" and "group-subject". Transversality is nowadays almost a requirement for technical use in group dynamics, in departments of human resources, etc., though it goes without saying that these are a distortion of the original concept. We can blame this distortion in great measure on the "systemic" and official diversion/drifting of the trend of institutional analysis, a problem of which Guattari was aware even during the same period when those notions were being elaborated[6]. It is interesting then to remind ourselves that transversality "works in groups as a dimension which is both contrary to and complementary of structures that generate pyramidal hierarchies and transmission modes that sterilize messages". [...]

The coining of terms such as transversality and group-subject happened in the midst of a political, institutional and existential adventure that is relatively well known. However, the particularity that the institutional invention supported by *bande à* Guattari created is not so well known. This invention intended to achieve the potential to politically act, think, write, intervene, and exit those apparati of capture of intellectual labor and political militancy. The most relevant and foundational experience of this domain of entrepreneurship for political minorities [minor politics] and subjectification was the CERFI (Centre de études, recherches et formation institutionnelles). According to François Fourquet, one of its founding members:

> "It was founded in 1967 in order to finance, thanks to contracts for social research, the functioning of a federal organ, the FGERI (Fédération des groupes d'études et de recherches institutionnelles). [...]. In contrast with the paralyzed apparati of the communist party and other leftist organizations, in contrast with those activists fascinated with and fooled by the hierarchies common to those organizations [...], it was about forming a new race of militants able to encourage, not a party, but a network of autonomous groups that would discuss among themselves and would act together. Also, these gruops would be able to recognize and affirm their unconscious desires, the denial of which was, for us, the main cause of the political paralysis of many leftist factions" [7].

Another founding member, Anne Querrien, insists on the CERFI as an *agencement* of life for a small network of activist intellectuals and technicians. Today it is difficult to understand that a small group of radicals could achieve research contracts with French public ministries, with total freedom to do what they wanted. Those contracts allowed around twenty people to live, research and organize, and even to be in charge of "analyzing" the very unconsciousness of the State at work with the "advanced" civil servant with whom they dealt:

> "In some way, the CERFI was about resisting our own tendency to become public employees, university members or part of a union's or political party's bureaucracy, [...] Our lives can be perceived as failures, but also as brief testimonies that resistance was possible. [...] Felix's and my own main hypothesis was that our institutional patrons were as schizophrenic as us, and that our schizoanalysis did not have to limit itself to the

> analysts' office, to the hospital walls or the interior of our group [...] In this sense we were neither inside nor outside power structures, we ha a schizoanalytic relationship with several people on the inside of different structures of power that at the same time had relations among themselves. [...] The scale of our tentative was too small to be able to last for a long period. The global context restructured power forces and our intellectual guerrilla may have merely contributed to reinforcing some countertendencies." [8]

Today our challenge is to reinvent such gestures, impulses and modes of operating in the context of our current conditions. Our problem is very concrete: to transform those active minorities of intellectual and artistic labor into operators of a perspective capable of relaunching the movement[9].

Above all it is about promoting those modalities of experimentation within those domains mentioned earlier. Those domains are related to capture of creative capacities by: new forms of networked power; market institutions of cognitive capitalism; juridical structures of labor markets. Such creative potential is also captured by those modules or molds of subjective expression and identification inscribed within the new tendencies of the neoliberal possessive individual, who is now creative, cooperative, owner of (fixed) capital which is itself inscribed mainly in her/him self, in his/er capacity for adaptation and discrimination among the possibilities offered by the market.

Another substantive problem to be resolved, according to my view, is that of forming real networks of political research, thinking and action. These networks would not be exclusive, identity-based, nor "action-ist" nor "campaign-ist". Networks that would go beyond

the banality of the “new paradigm” and would passionately tackle the question of their own destructive and constitutive effectiveness. They would know how to generate and give birth to political and communicative war machines, suitable, finite and irreverent war machines.

It is time then for creating an (in many senses) unknown terrain of political invention, organization and growth. It is a terrain based on the self-organization and institutionalization of the collective production and processing of knowledges. We have also discussed that the very *co-extensivity* of such dynamic in regards to the networking of precarious collective intelligence allow us to do certain things. For example to apply our forces, to form our recombination values in a variety of metropolitan territories such as: from universities to social centers; from museums and cultural agencies to peripheries in which there of plenty of groups and cooperatives of educators, social workers and intercultural mediators. The ethical and political subjectification of those spheres is a necessity and a task that is in our hands to carry out. Given that the path walked by different collectives (hackers, ‘infoartists’, independent musicians, interns/researchers, etc.) is long enough to be able to overcome astonishment we can move to putting a series of initiatives into practice to change the current tide: from the property-based offensive towards a recombination (in a public sphere yet to be created) of the communities of ‘infoproduction’, creation, research and education. It is about putting together an “aguascalientes, a “caracol” formed out of the cooperation among brains.

[..] In the final analysis it is about creating an instrument or way of doing things, that if not literally union-like, then at least one that is capable of promoting the care and guarantee of a new set of rights and the struggles against exploitation in cognitive capitalism.

This would be done on the basis of an institutional collective enunciator that is both polyphonic as well as autonomous with respect to the institutions of cognitive capitalism and the capitalization of productive and aesthetic (producers of the sensitive) excess. This instrument would put into practice new prototypes of collective subjectification based on "class" (so to speak) capable of including within that subjectivity all the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the new forces of contemporary living labor. This would be done from a perspective and promotion of the maximum existential singularity of each of its components. More precisely, the attempt is to impose the statute *on the basis* of the networks of cooperation, breaking in the first place, the *individualization of cooperation* with such institutions, which h constitutes one of the primary means of vulnerability and division of collective intelligence. How? By imposing from the get go, negotiation and hiring/employment as a *network* of cooperation, finite, concrete, but open and political in its own definition.

The figures of the curator, of the intern and researcher in break speed competition in order to obtain their project or financing, the precarious worker that is employed intermittently in museum and cultural institutions in the same condition as and company of crappy little jobs, while in a few months that same worker may come back to the same museum or institution, but this time with the status of "artist:" or "creative activist" with better or different work conditions, etc. Faced with these practices, we are trying to impose *collective hiring/contracting* and autonomous management of resources on the part of the network of cooperation and artistic-intellectual-political work (that, let it be understood, should make the effort to build itself as a new type of institution, not a union, not a party, note a "creative club", but a new political machine). In

second place, we are trying to make all property common: all the products of the labor of networked collective intelligence, especially of those created by members of that particular network. Daily use, the legal battles around copyleft licenses, the arguments and negotiations with operators of art and knowledge institutions that such product s should not be privatized, are other elements of this new "charter of rights under permanent drafting". We could imagine that from this type of panorama of the precarization of subjectification and political organization of "immaterial" living labor in the European metropolitan regions we could see a significant swerve in favor of the 'monstrous' return of class struggle and constitution (always multitudinous) of the commons in the coming years.

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[1] Gilles Deleuze, "Instincts et institutions", *L'île déserte et d'autres textes*, Éditions de Minuit, París.

[2] See "Michel Foucault, an Interview: Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity", interview with B. Gallagher and A. Wilson, Toronto, June 1982, in *Dits et écrits II, 1976*-1988, París, Gallimard, 2001; *La naissance de la biopolitique*, Gallimard, París, 2004 (forthcoming in English *The Birth of the Biopolitical*, Palgrave press); *Sécurité, territoire, population*, Gallimard, París, 2004 (English version *Security, Territory Population*. Palgrave press 2007). An exhaustive study of these Foucaultian courses can be found in Maurizio Lazzarato, *Por una política menor*, Traficantes de Sueños, Madrid, 2006.

[3] Antonio Negri, *Politica di classe*, Macchina Libri Edizioni, Milán, 1980.

[4] See Maurizio Lazzarato, *Por una política menor*, *op. cit.*

[5] See Félix Guattari, *Chaosmose*, Galilée, París,1992 (English versión- *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*. Indiana University Press 1995). .

[6] See Félix Guattari, "La transversalidad" (1964), in *Psicoanálisis y transversalidad*. Siglo XXI, Buenos Aires, 1976.

[7] François Fourquet, "La acumulation du pouvoir ou le désir d'État" (1981). A part of this text is available at <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/article2751.html>.

[8]Anne Querrien, *Cerfi*, *1965-1987* (2002), available at <http://www.criticalsecret.com>, nº 8-9.

[9]See the recently published *Micropolitique des groupes*, by David Vercauteren (in collaboration with Thierry Müller and Olivier Crabbé), HB Editions, Forcalquier, May 2007. The book constructs schizoanalytic theoretical tools from the practice of militant groups, basing itself (also from the point of view of the narrative) in a collective experience of ten years of common work with new movements in Belgium.