

CHAPTER 6

Towards More Democratic Cultural Institutions?

6.1. The Self-Managed Culture in its Life Spaces

6.1.1. Traficantes de Sueños: Sharing conditions of possibility for culture

A few books on a folding table: a small stand for activist literature in El Rastro in Madrid.

The year is 1996, and the germ of what is today the ‘political production and communication project’ known as Traficantes de Sueños, a folding table, practically fits inside a suitcase. Almost 20 years later, this project comprises, among other things, a bookstore, a publisher, a distributor, a design workshop, an activist research group, a permanent program of self-education seminars, and a social space that houses all these and many other activities. In 1996, there probably weren’t many people who thought this transformation would happen by ‘giving away’ books. But somehow that’s just what happened.

So, essentially, since 1999, when that folding table became a publishing house, Traficantes de Sueños (TdS) has been making digital versions of all their published books freely available to anyone. Besides allowing copying through the use of Creative Commons licenses, TdS has always produced a pdf file of every one of their carefully edited texts, and has put them on its website for downloading. Contrary to what some skeptics claimed, *a priori*, would happen, people have not taken massive advantage of these ‘free products’ and ‘ruined’ TdS’s project or made it unsustainable. Quite the contrary. The determined support for the decommodification of the book as an object, along with other important factors I will discuss, has made TdS’s project especially attractive for many people, who, in turn, have found ways to support it. Through their work, TdS has become one of the clearest examples in all of Spain that the basic principles of the free culture can be applied successfully not only to digital resources like software, but also to other types of cultural processes, such as the publication of books.

The researcher and activist Jaron Rowan has published an interesting and exhaustive study about this multifaceted cultural project (2001). He indicates a number of significant factors that contribute to TdS's exponential growth. Beyond just offering free access to their books, they also possess the more general capacity to create infrastructures that others can use to carry out other processes of cultural production. In other words, they have the ability to create and share not only 'results,' which published books are, in some sense, but also the very conditions of possibility for establishing open, self-managed cultural processes.

Let's think about what happens in any given week at Traficantes de Sueños, or rather, at Embajadores 35, which is their address in Lavapiés, the Madrid *barrio* that is home to this project.¹ As I write these words, a vinyl scratching and mixing workshop is being held by DJ Caution. It's one of the activities on the program of Guacamayofest 2014, which defines itself as a 'playful platform for giving exposure to the more avant-garde artistic expressions of the heterogeneous Latin American sound space.' But in the space of a very few days before and after, this same physical space has hosted and will yet host a talk on cyberactivism in Africa, feminist theorist/activist Silvia Federici's presentation of the translation of the book *Revolución en punto cero* (published by Traficantes), a tribute concert to the Puerto Rican poet Julia de Burgos, a conference on transgenic foods, and the start of the self-education course 'The Legend of Time: Subcultures, Music, Social Change and Ruptures in Contemporary "Spain."' This latter will begin with a session on 'flamenco and power,' among other events that are free and open to the public.

In addition to offering this wealth of programming, the space is open to the general public during the day. People can browse in the bookstore or La Ceiba, the fair trade cooperative store that shares space with TdS and with the open-source software cooperative XSTO.info. Embajadores 35 is also regularly open to the *barrio* through activities for children, language classes, and workshops, and is shared with any local groups that may want to use it for their activities. This activity generates what Rowan calls a 'noticeably multiethnic and multipurpose dynamic space, quite the opposite of certain more traditional cultural spaces that have a more homogeneous demography' (2011).

From this daily activity, from this exuberant confluence of rhythms, bodies, desires, and projects springs the extraordinary production of all kinds of knowledge generated by TdS, hand in hand with the communities

1 Traficantes de Sueños has moved in 2015 to a new space, bigger and even more centric, in Duque de Alba 13.

and networks that move through the project. Among these kinds of knowledge are those gathered in and proposed by the press's books, which often have direct connections to specific needs and interests rooted in that everyday life. Perhaps the clearest case of this would be the books explicitly presented as 'users' manuals.' A prominent example is the *Manual de desobediencia a la Ley Sinde*, published in collaboration with Hacktivistas and the newspaper *Diagonal* in 2011, amid an atmosphere of effervescent opposition to this law. Another with similar objectives is *Copyleft: manual de uso*, which came out in 2006.

But up to a point, many of TdS's books demonstrate that same vocation to serve some specific collective need as straightforwardly as possible. *La crisis que viene*, for example, is a remarkable example written by the activist research group Observatorio Metropolitano, which is also a part of Traficantes, and published just before the irruption of 15M. It became an essential reference for the wave of politicization produced by that movement. Two years after its appearance, this analysis of the neoliberal dogmas leading to the economic crisis had reached 50,000 downloads and 2,000 print copies sold. Another important recent example among many others is the compilation of experiences and ways of knowing resulting from the encounter between the Forum for Independent Life and the Precarious Agency in *Cojos y precarias: haciendo vidas que importan* (2011). And finally, it's worth mentioning the collective volume *La universidad en conflicto* (2010), compiled by Universidad Nómada and Edu-Factory to investigate and offer analytical materials on the corporatization of institutions of higher education under globalized capitalism.

As the neoliberal crisis has deepened, TdS has become an ever more necessary and requested knowledge factory because of its capacity to harbor a kind of reflection connected directly to attempts to escape the dominion of competition and corporatization. It has its own model of sustainability, as a project that supports the 'social economy.' As explained on its website, TdS is a 'nonprofit association where the workers give the orders,' and which 'survives thanks to the community that chooses to support it because they believe it's a valuable resource for everyone.' With the aim of offering channels for that community support, in addition to offering books for sale in its physical and virtual stores, TdS has set up subscription services to its bookstore and its press, and the ongoing possibility of making donations online.²

2 In relation to the 'social economy' label attached by TdS, there are various definitions and modalities of support. In the text '¿Quiénes somos?' TdS offers the following: 'numerous people can come together to begin productive projects that

A fact that may seem anecdotal, but I consider relevant to this support, is that the premises of Embajadores 35 are set back a little from the street, in a passageway located within a block of apartments. If you didn't know it existed, it would be hard to just stumble upon it. Deliberately burying themselves in the small corridor leading to their door could serve as a metaphor for the active, voluntary gesture that TdS requires from its community of users to survive, beyond mere consumerism. Even though book sales are used partly to support the organization, it would be difficult for someone to buy a book in TdS without knowing that by doing so, he or she was contributing to a space that tries to create a culture whose value is not decided commercially.

Of course, the created value of TdS can also be co-opted indirectly by being used by consumerist, commodifying logics, like any other socially produced value. But that does not invalidate the existence of a whole series of specific protocols that make TdS a social economy and free culture project that tries to complicate that co-optation: open licenses, workers self-managing assemblies, interruption of profit logics, constantly offering their resources to serve the communities that participate in the project, and in general—again in their words (online)—the goal of 'generating goods and services through fair productive structures, where the most important things are workforce and gender equality, and respect for the planet.'

It is no surprise, then, that during the neoliberal crisis *Traficantes* has experienced an increase in participation and remarkable support for its activities. In some sense it functions as a cultural catalyst, a repository of living knowledge, a meeting place, and an enhancer of the intellectual and affective abilities of anyone. In short, it is fulfilling many of the functions that other institutions closer to neoliberal logics—and more dependent on them for support, such as universities, museums, cultural centers, and

generate jobs, goods, and services based on ethical principles. This is the basis of social economy that already has, in the whole state and the whole world, thousands of cooperatives, associations, and businesses that produce according to a different economic model. Its goal is not to accumulate profits, but to generate goods and services through fair productive structures, where labor equality, gender equality, and respect for the planet take precedence.'

In TdS's case, these basic principles of social economy are combined with those of free culture. Regarding the convergence of these two models, Ricardo Amasté wrote, '[T]hey try to see how in addition to social good, organizations are capable of promoting the proliferation of the common good(s), that is, of enabling the conditions to ensure the possibility of transference, reproducibility, reuse, and remixing of the resources that manage and produce the greatest possible number of people and collectives (from natural resources or related to healthcare, education, culture, or economy to management models, software, and digital archives or situated ways of knowing)' (2013).

foundations—find themselves less and less able to carry out because of their growing commercialization, which involves an inevitable dependence on private economic interests.

It also seems particularly relevant to highlight that along with that more urgent type of knowledge tied to specific political or even tactical processes, Traficantes generates very interesting processes of self-education and research. These give rise to more speculative, experimental activities that may lead to rereadings of long-term historical processes that often require more tranquil temporalities. For example, Silvia Federici's text *Calibán y la bruja: mujeres, cuerpo y acumulación originaria* has generated enormous interest, attaining very high sales and downloads for a history book and political essay published by an alternative press. Federici, whose theory on the origin of capitalism and its effects on the reproduction of life is central for my own research, has given talks at TdS on several occasions, and she always fills the place to capacity. She typically attracts people interested in the convergence of feminism and the critique of capitalism. But interestingly, she also attracts those willing to participate in the type of long-term analysis that is usually more difficult to carry off in activist spaces, which are often more focused on the present.

That function of learning, research, and analysis maintained over long periods—which usually occur in universities—perhaps finds its most propitious place within the constellation of TdS in the self-education courses called 'Nociones Comunes' ('Common Notions'). In these courses, collective inquiries are opened about problems that the 'alternative' spaces critical of neoliberalism tend to deal with from the position of street protests, activism, or public condemnation. Common Notions courses provide infrastructures so that in addition to those answers, collective self-education also takes place, allowing a deeper exploration of subjects typically closely tied to the present. Examples include the neoliberal crisis, struggles for online freedom, or feminisms, but also others like migrations, countercultures, processes of urban gentrification, and the burning question of the moment, the possible democratization from within of representative political institutions.

So TdS is a kind of incubator of knowledge and resources—of different scales, dimensions, and speeds—that can address the needs and abilities that arise as much in the everyday life of a multiethnic urban *barrio* in the center of Madrid as they do in the ebb and flow of global opposition movements to neoliberalism. These range from eminently practical, tactical, or instrumental kinds of knowledge tied to immediate survival, to creative, aesthetic, theoretical, or investigative long-range processes, and go through a multitude of combinations between both extremes.

6.1.2. Self-Managed Social Centers as decommodified life spaces

On the other hand, TdS's ability to build and extend networks and constellations has increased considerably as its project has continued to join with other similar ones, mostly through the creation of the Fundación de los Comunes in 2011. For quite a while, Traficantes's distributing arm worked with bookstores and presses in other cities, circulating its books through a network that has now been strengthened. So now, for example, Nociones Comunes's courses are repeated in different versions and with different facilitators in cities like Terrassa, Zaragoza, Pamplona, and Málaga, which host the main 'nodes' of the network formalized by the Fundación de los Comunes. And perhaps the strength and uniqueness of this network lies precisely in putting front and center the connection of activities normally recognized as 'cultural,' such as investigation, self-education, publishing, and 'technopolitics,' with the 'channels of living social production'—in the words of Marisa Pérez Colina, coordinator of the Fundación de los Comunes—that are generated in cooperative spaces open to the flow of daily life, like Embajadores 35 itself. Pérez Colina recently said that the collectives of the Fundación de los Comunes essentially carry out their practices of activist research, self-education, and publishing within the framework of self-managed social centers (or CSA, from the Spanish initials of Centros Sociales Auto-gestionados) or centers of civic participation. These are 'spaces of aggregation or encounters' with a particular vocation for durability over time. She added that therefore, one of the first objectives of the Foundation is 'to serve as material and life support' for these Social Centers. (Entrevista Marisa Pérez Colina, Fundación de Los Comunes (FdC), MUSAC 2014).

In his research on TdS, Rowan also uses this concept of 'channels of social production,' which he thinks is fundamental for understanding what distinguishes the project from other 'cultural enterprises.' Following analyses originating in the Italian post-autonomist movement and in the French magazine *Multitudes*, Rowan explains that channels of social production would be 'places where new kinds of knowledge, words, ways of relating, and new imaginaries converge,' on which the 'cultural industries' feed in order to 'capture certain flows and extract rents from them' (2011). A classic example of this type of process on a small scale would be the appropriation of urban graffiti for the aesthetics of fashion design. On a more macro scale, we have the revaluation of urban land that these productive accounts produce, and of which the real estate speculation and tourism lobbies are the main beneficiaries. With a project like Traficantes de Sueños, this privatization of collectively generated wealth doesn't occur, at least not so easily. The social wealth of the 'urban productive channels' that

nourish TdS is constantly returned in the form of books with open licenses and a whole series of freely available cultural goods and infrastructures that will enrich those channels further.³

The support given by the Fundación de los Comunes to connecting their projects of publication, investigation, and self-teaching with the CSAs in which they take place is essential, because it's a way to indicate and pragmatically protect the concrete existence of those 'productive channels.' This makes their collective creation of wealth more visible, thus also making it easier to defend it from privatization of one type or another. It seems to me that this gesture to protect and fortify specific spheres of self-managed collective cultural production is what enables greater success in starting decommodification processes, since, as Wallerstein proposed, it makes it possible to work on particular 'structures' to open small spaces of resistance to the neoliberal logic.

Wallerstein was talking about hospitals and universities, but what is interesting about the model proposed by the Fundación de los Comunes is that it understands the self-managed social centers as 'spaces of social production' (and, we could add, simply 'spaces of life'), endowed with a multifunctionality that, to my way of thinking, directly attacks the logic of dispersion and division of experience which is at the heart of neoliberalism. One of the most important expressions of this logic of dispersion consists of separating symbolic production, 'culture,' from its material support: universities on one hand, hospitals on the other; minds on one hand, bodies on the other.

'The market is constantly assembling and disassembling ties according to its incessant quest to maximize profits,' asserted Franco Ingrassia with regard to the phenomenon of dispersion (2011). In this way, the relations of constitutive interdependence that enable the material and symbolic subsistence of humans tend to be made invisible and subjected to profound inequalities. But if, along with open licenses and spaces for planned 'cultural' activities, the life of a nucleus of organizers is independently supported so they don't have to depend on an outside salary, and useful infrastructures

3 TdS itself has published several studies about the processes of appropriation of common wealth produced by so-called 'cognitive capitalism.' In fact, it is one of the most useful Spanish-language presses for studying the Italian post-autonomy tradition and the environment of the magazine *Multitudes* on which Rowan bases his analysis. See, for example, the collective volume *Capitalismo cognitivo, propiedad intelectual y creación colectiva* (Blondeau, Lazzarato et al. 2004). Of course, an essential reference in this theoretical tradition regarding the 'channels of social production' and its capitalist appropriation is Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's trilogy, *Empire* (2001), *Multitude* (2005), and *Commonwealth* (2009).

for the lives of those who participate in the project are provided, as occurs in TdS, the possibility of counteracting that logic of dispersion is very significant. And if, besides, all this is done within a context in which there is a daily tumult of other projects of decommodified life—like food or software cooperatives, spaces of community-supported sociability, etc.—the possibilities seem to multiply for the people who make and enjoy that culture to be able to establish its value for themselves, without the interference of external criteria based on maximizing profits, which bring dispersion with them.

The ways of knowing, the narratives, the research, and the learning that take place in places like *Traficantes de Sueños* do not depend entirely on neoliberal commercial logics for their production and maintenance. Thus, they challenge the neoliberal world's separation and erasure of specific, interdependent lives from which 'culture' arises. Similarly, the CSAs provide bases where the value of the everyday, material collaboration that always enables any production of meaning is reserved and even 'accumulated.' And in using them, we could say that one can't help but *see materially* those collective processes that would often remain hidden behind commercial means of capturing collective value, such as the privatizing, speculative uses of the author figure, his 'work,' 'aesthetic quality,' fashions, 'hypes,' etc.

6.1.3. The tradition of CSAs and 'cultures of anyone'

The question of the reciprocal intensification of collective value is fundamental. This is particularly so in regard to the value produced between projects of cultural, alimentary, housing, social, and any other type of decommodification in the bosom of the CSAs. Likewise, it's important more generally as well, in any instance where they manage to protect and defend the social wealth of certain productive channels (as might happen, for instance, in the multiplication of CSAs or similar projects in a given *barrio*, town, or territory). Fortunately, research on this subject is increasing, as community and cooperative projects spread across Spain, creating fabrics of exceptional participative richness. And as this is increasingly demonstrated, in the crisis of state institutions, the function of these fabrics becomes doubly important. And so it has recently been proven, to cite a familiar example, in the mass defense of the CSA *Can Vies* in the Barcelona *barrio* of Sants, which ultimately stopped the city council's planned mass eviction and demolition. This inspired important protests and widespread displays of regional solidarity; it even went as far as to begin a brick-by-brick reconstruction of the demolished part of the building.⁴

4 For more information about this social fabric formed by the CSAs, see, for

But delving into the importance of the community fabric generated around the CSAs is not my only purpose. My focus now is the question of the relationship between ways of collectively self-managing the cultural value produced by communities defending themselves from the neoliberal ‘capture’ of that value, and the experience of potentiating the abilities of anyone outlined in the previous chapter. So it seems to me that despite the obvious similarities, it is worth asking whether those CSA cultures defended by the Fundación de los Comunes are also ‘cultures of anyone,’ in the sense that they break with the theoretical divisions between ‘those in the know’ and ‘those in the dark’? Are they ways of bridging between specialized and everyday ways of knowing? Are they able to empower anyone by creating situations that foster the recognition of various values, and not just those endorsed by the technoscientific tradition and the modern power/knowledge complex?

These are pertinent questions, since the capacity for self-management and maintenance of cultural processes through collaborative, relatively decommodified methods doesn’t guarantee only the kind of cultural democratization that I have observed in the 15M movement and the ‘post-15M.’ The decommodified self-management of the cultural needs and abilities of a community could still harbor hierarchical logics or logics of exclusion: perhaps not everyone is welcome in that decommodified community, perhaps they reproduce separations between different hierarchical identifications of ‘those in the know’ and ‘those in the dark.’

However, I think there are at least three reasons for dismissing these doubts and answering in the affirmative, at least on a generic level, to the questions raised above. In the first place, the key question of the opening up of infrastructures and cultural processes—and not just ‘results’—necessarily points at least in the general direction of that ‘empowerment’ produced when there is confidence in the abilities of anyone, when culture is understood more as something that is developed collectively, in open ‘workshops’

example, the collective volume *Okupa Madrid (1980–2010)* (Seminario de Historia Política y Social de las Okupaciones en Madrid-Metrópolis 2014). Several newspaper articles have echoed the growing legitimacy of the CSAs, not only in relation to the incident in Can Vies, but also, more generally, in the wake of the politicization caused by the crisis (see, for example, Cabrera (2014), Lenore (2014), León (2010), and Peiró (2014)). In Barcelona’s case, the mapping work and research being done by the Observatorio Metropolitano de Barcelona is exceptional, and can be found on its website, bcncomuns.net. With respect to the collective project Barcelona en Comú, the fabric of this city’s community and self-managed projects is garnering increasing recognition for it is being presented as one of the pillars of this municipal project.

that need a material logistics, than as something that is produced in a kind of vacuum 'behind the scenes' and enjoyed in solitude, individually. Furthermore, since these cultures are deeply rooted in the everyday life generated in the CSAs, in principle it is to be expected that those culture 'workshops'—of publishing, research, self-education, etc.—that inhabit it soak up those knowledge bases and qualities so often unacknowledged by the hegemonic cultural tradition, but so fundamental for maintaining the everyday nature of the CSAs: practices of mutual caregiving, intuitive, 'amateur' social skills, traditional or extradisciplinary ways of knowledge, etc. Finally, the assembly configuration and the increasing tendency to mount projects in open networks that facilitate the construction of new 'nodes' are marks of egalitarianism that facilitate the opening of these 'social center cultures' beyond closed communities, regardless of how strong their ties are to local spaces.

None of these aspects completely guarantees that hierarchical or exclusivist reterritorializations can't occur. There could be reappearances of 'avant-garde' phenomena or sectarianisms that, in any event, are not at all alien to the history of social movements, nor, in particular, to the sphere of autonomy and anticapitalist self-management, or even to that of the Neighbor Associations Movement, which is also important to the genealogy and composition of the CSAs. The development of a sufficiently detailed and complete history of these spheres of 'living social production' is completely beyond my abilities and purposes here. Likewise, it is not my intention to establish value judgments as a supposedly neutral observer.⁵ What I do want to do, however, is propose some inquiries into specific protocols of decommodified cultural self-management. This will allow me to identify the complexity, limits, and challenges raised by some institutions that practice, in one way or another, this very self-management, in relation to the type of democratization that the 'cultures of anyone' are assuming during this neoliberal crisis. The objective, therefore, is to track the possible emergence of a democratic 'cultural ecology'⁶ starting from those who might construct

5 I must add that here I only mention a minimal sample of the many CSAs and CSOAs that exist in the Spanish state. I am particularly interested in those linked to the Fundación de los Comunes because these allow me to better analyze the problems related to self-management and cultural democratization in which I am most interested. In no way do I want to minimize the complexity of the huge number of social and cultural experiences related to self-management, I simply do not have the space here to address them all.

6 I borrow this term from Reinaldo Laddaga, who in turn borrowed it from the sociologist Charles Tilly to apply it to the field of aesthetics. Quoting Tilly, Laddaga talks about recurrent transactions among units that 'produce interdependences

its most stable nodes, those who, in some way, are suggested as ‘institutions,’ or who simply, as Pérez Colina said, ‘have a vocation to remain.’

In this regard, it is very important to observe other self-management and cultural democratization experiments that come from a very different environment that is also able to offer durability to their projects. I am talking about public institutions, and these, in turn, present their own possibilities and limits. So I will now talk about an odd, atypical institution that in many ways is the standard-bearer for these self-managing, democratizing drifts of public space in the sphere usually recognized as ‘cultural’ in Madrid: Medialab Prado.

6.2. Under the Ambiguous Umbrella of the Public Sector

6.2.1. Medialab-Prado: Institutional protocols for the participation of anyone

Medialab Prado is a ‘program of the Arts, Sports and Tourism Area of the Madrid City Council,’ self-defined more specifically as ‘a citizen laboratory for production, investigation, and diffusion of cultural projects that explore forms of experimentation and collaborative learning that have arisen from digital networks’ (Medialab-Prado). Medialab introduces itself, therefore, as a type of experimental public cultural institution that departs from classical models like the library, the museum, or the auditorium. Nor does it prioritize the publication or distribution of written culture, unlike the tradition of associative bookstores or ‘social center libraries’ from which *Traficantes de Sueños* and the other nodes of the *Fundación de los Comunes* arise. Instead, it takes as a reference those ‘forms of experimentation and collaborative learning that have arisen in the digital networks’ to institute something like an attempt to ‘translate’ certain aspects of digital culture to the physical realm.

In this sense, Medialab’s support for procedural aspects, for the opening of infrastructures and processes of cultural production, for the search for formats alien to the modern culture based on the division between authors and public, is still more explicit—which doesn’t mean that it is necessarily verified with greater intensity—than that of the model of activist research collectives, self-training, and publication proposed by the *Fundación de*

among places, change shared understandings in the process, and return to vast cultural resources available in each particular place through their connections with other places,’ through a spontaneous organization that implies ‘the training and activation of individuals who initiate advances or demands on a local scale, but who in some way articulate them with large-scale identities and collective struggles’ (Laddaga (2006); Tilly (2002, 49)).

los Comunes. These collectives come from the world of social movements and, of course, they have encountered the explosion of technopolitics and networks along the way. But (at least with regards to its self-representation) Medialab perhaps drinks more directly than do other collectives from these latter founts, which carry inscribed within their own DNA the centrality of procedurality and open collaboration.

The model of meaning production in social movements, on the other hand, has traditionally depended more on ideas like ‘alternative information,’ which continue to stipulate the need for a ‘public.’ It has also revolved around militant and activist figures as centers from which that meaning could emanate, although all this may have changed considerably with the intensification of the logics of ‘anyone’ around the 15M movement.

Perhaps Medialab’s most paradigmatic activity is what has been called the ‘collaborative project development workshop’ or, simply, the ‘prototype workshop.’ This activity occupies the central position that in other cultural spaces would be occupied by book publishing, research seminars, informational conferences, art exhibitions, or musical and stage performances. It is a model inspired by the collaborative practices of open-source software and experimental technology, and has been formalized as a protocol with very precise organizational guidelines. First, Medialab sends out a call for projects, always with a very broad conceptual frame. For example, the premise of the most recent one is ‘Madrid, Urban Laboratory: Practical Infrastructures and Tools for Theorizing Shared Life.’ Each call is backed by three advisors chosen by Medialab, who in turn choose about ten projects to participate in the workshop.

Once these projects are chosen, 50 collaborators are convened to participate in the development of the ‘tools, platforms, and actions’ the projects propose as concrete objectives. Thus, in the example mentioned, these 50 collaborators, who are admitted on a first-come-first-served basis, will work to ‘prototype’ anything from ‘a low-cost, noninvasive electroencephalograph (EEG) to use as a BCI (brain-computer interface)’ to ‘a proposal to help the public administration understand and standardize civic initiatives that use public space as a commons’ (for example, urban orchards in vacant lots), including ‘a mobile application that helps locate accessible and adapted places’ for people with diverse functional needs, or a historical tour, all the way up to the present, of the Barrio de las Letras ‘straight from the hands of its inhabitants and users through testimonies and photographs.’

The workshops take place in intensive sessions, in this case in two phases of six and three days respectively, and are sometimes accompanied by other reflection or exhibition modules. For instance, in this case an international conference will be held between the two phases. There is also a whole series

of telematics and material infrastructures available to the projects, which can make use of Medialab's digital tools and physical space during the months that separate the two phases of intensive work.

In this way, a framework is established to provide continuity for the processes. At the same time, it also inherits the typically pragmatic vocation of open-source software programmers or those who experiment with technology, who are accustomed to working on concrete objectives for which the ideas must be proven. It should be kept in mind, on the other hand, that although collaborative workshops are perhaps the main paradigm for Medialab's activity, they are not by any means the only one. Perhaps not so unlike what happens in the CSAs—and anthropologists Corsín and Estalella have indicated the permeability and proximity of Medialab to the world of community self-management—an everyday routine is established that is rich in encounters and heterogeneous situations, going beyond the logic of the regularly scheduled events or intensive work sessions. In this regard, Medialab has been able to construct a network of participants or daily users of its infrastructures that enjoys a quite unusual autonomy in public cultural institutions, which typically rely very heavily on timely proposals from their management teams.

Furthermore, all this is not at all accidental or 'improvised': in Medialab there is a constant process of reflection about this very atypical institution that has been created and is constantly seeking to improve itself. The working group 'Thinking and Doing Medialab' indicated, in this respect, that perhaps one of their greatest challenges was precisely the creation of greater continuity for the cultural processes that Medialab facilitates or drives, as well as broadening the communities participating in these processes. Towards this end, permanent 'Workstations' were recently established, allowing Medialab's most eminently productive and procedural functions to be operational at any moment, without depending so much on the routine scheduling of intensive prototype workshops.

So Medialab's very condition as an 'experimental' institution reinforces, in a certain sense, that aspect of open cultural infrastructure creation—which is also inseparable from community culture projects like *Traficantes de Sueños*—with the creation of protocols, such as these 'Workstations,' designed solely to intensify it. But Medialab has also produced other protocols more directly dedicated to dealing with the no less central question of the possibility of anyone's participation or, more precisely, of the possible empowerment of anyone's abilities. (In this regard, they may have an advantage over the community culture institutions, which may not always be so well supplied with sophisticated tools.) Medialab's basic official objectives already include 'offering different forms of participation that allow the collaboration of

people with different backgrounds (artistic, scientific, technical), levels of specialization (expert and beginners), and degrees of involvement.’ But I think the most significant thing about it is the importance that Medialab gives to the figure of its ‘Mediators,’ now associated with the ‘Workstations.’ Their function is specifically ‘to respond to the needs of different types of publics and users: from general information and consultation to training, material resources, and spaces for listening and meetings,’ as well as ‘to explain the nature of the space and to put people in contact with people, people with projects, projects with projects.’

In dedicating this particular effort to, say, ‘getting someone through the door’—i.e., in giving priority to welcoming and listening to the various needs and desires of potential participants—Medialab is explicitly offering support not only for collaboration, but also for inclusivity and plurality. In recognizing the importance of ‘beginners’ or ‘amateurs,’ Medialab is trying, it seems to me, to tear down those barriers between those supposedly ‘in the know’ and those who are ‘in the dark’—barriers bequeathed to us by the tradition of artistic, technical, and scientific disciplines with which, at the same time, Medialab is officially affiliated.

This all has to do with something that in principle does not exist so concretely in the tradition of CSAs or other community cultural institutions: the desire for universality associated with the public arena, the vocation of being just that: ‘a public service.’ However, in Medialab’s case it also has to do with a particular interpretation of the public arena, which Marcos García, the institution’s director, clarifies very well:

The difference between a public project that is for everyone (the general public, a homogeneous entity) and a public project that is for anyone is one of individuality, of personalization. It means paying attention to the particular needs of each person who comes; that is, helping each one of them develop their unique abilities.⁷

6.2.2. Risks of neoliberal capture of public cultural value

Having said this, I also want to highlight a certain contradiction. On the one hand, Medialab’s very experimentality as an institution and its calling to public service allow it to develop protocols both of intensification of procedurality, such as inclusivity and plurality. On the other, and paradoxically, its very condition as a public institution, dependent in this case on a local administration heavily involved in the application of neoliberal policies, always constitutes a threat to these same tendencies.

7 Personal communication from Marcos García.

At the risk of oversimplifying, I think this is so mainly for two reasons. In the first place, the tradition of public cultural institutions continues to be strongly associated with the power/knowledge monopoly. Those working within Medialab itself often make the self-critical observation—and they work intensely to come up with a solution to it—that many people perceive the institution as a space of ‘specialists,’ people with highly technical and not very accessible knowledge bases. I can’t take the time to dwell on this now, but I will say that it does not seem to be an unsolvable problem by any means. In fact, everything seems to point towards Medialab already being in a position to change that perception and the realities of exclusion to which it can lead. For example, there are programs designed specifically for *barrio* residents, or for children; they could also prioritize activities for traditional, amateur, and everyday abilities and ways of knowing that do not require any technical specialization.

What *does* seem to me to be a manifestation of an ingrained structural problem is that, despite all of the above, Medialab’s very condition as a public institution dependent on an administration that strongly pushes neoliberal logics also involves the inevitable activation of forces for capturing and accumulating cultural value that necessarily counteract that same continuity. The most extreme expression of these forces—and certainly we live in a time that favors the expression of neoliberal extremism in its worst forms—took place in the form of a recent threat against Medialab’s very existence. A rumor made the rounds that the city council was on the verge of handing over the building that Medialab now occupies, the recently restored former Belgian Sawmill, to Telefónica’s ‘Open Future’ project. If this threat had become a reality, a single blow from above would have put paid to practically everything Medialab stands for, in favor of a private multinational corporation. And such a decision would have had nothing to do—in fact, quite the opposite—with the people, from both institutional positions and from outside, who have managed, given life to, used, and directly and daily encouraged that institution of participative culture for about 14 years.

But this is, as I say, perhaps only an extreme example of a tension that inevitably runs through all public institutions dependent on a state that has embraced neoliberalism as a primary means of support for social life, and therefore for basic aspects of human existence like cultural production, education, healthcare, and housework. In the case of institutions like Medialab, which have a strongly democratic operation in many senses, this tension is perhaps doubly overwhelming. It means that the protocols created to help people generate their own cultural value (e.g., workstations, prototype workshops, mediators, etc.) clash head-on with an institutional

framework that constantly exerts pressure to redirect that value back towards forms of neoliberal privatization.

An important way in which this neoliberal pressure is articulated every day is through the recurrent demand for the isolation of units of meaning—such as an event, a tendency, a name, or a concept—or, more classically, the insistence on the identification of ‘authors’ and ‘works,’ to turn them into merchandise susceptible to producing financierized value—i.e., ‘brands.’ This always occurs at the cost of interrupting or complicating the continuity of processes of self-managed production of cultural goods that can be used directly every day by those who participate in this production.

This demand can sometimes be made directly by the public administration, for example when they continue to use quantitative criteria to value the operation of cultural institutions, at the same time as they cut their budgets. In this sense, not only Medialab but all public institutions have suffered from the infamous ‘austerity measures,’ also called ‘cuts,’ that have characterized the neoliberal management of the crisis. And yet still their activity is constantly supervised, often from productivist criteria that, instead of valuing the capacity to empower and promote cultural self-management among those who participate, simply tend to demand more events, more visibility, more attendance by the ‘public,’ etc.

On the other hand, and no less importantly, neoliberal pressure is also exerted indirectly through a widespread climate of precarization. This causes the work, energy, and time the communities that use Medialab can contribute (for example those ‘collaborators’ who participate in the ‘prototype workshops’) to be severely limited by their dependence on more and more demanding ways to earn an income, which are also necessary for their survival.

In this sense, it’s true that, as Domenico Di Siena indicated, even the notion of ‘prototype,’ which has proven to be so fertile in the context of Medialab, can run the risk of minimizing the importance of, or even fueling a certain tendency towards, self-exploitation. This is why it assumes the provisional state of what continue to be thought of as ‘projects,’ more than as tangible realities in the present. In the end, an excessive focus on that provisional state associated with the prototype process could lead to the type of devaluation that takes place in educational institutions in the prevailing neoliberalist conditions: they tend to become a kind of incubator of a value that will only be able to be put into effect outside their walls. That is, that value only *has* value in ‘the market,’ when the newly prepared students leave to look for work or, in the case of the prototypes, when they are finally ready ‘to be made real’ by companies that commercialize them.

6.2.3. Participation without the power of decision in the economic model (the case of PECAM)

I want to put special emphasis on these tensions because I believe that they are strongly representative of the pressures that not only the public cultural institutions but also, to a certain extent, the community and self-managed ones are feeling during the neoliberal crisis. So what becomes obvious in the problems that institutions like Medialab face is that, in fact, the assumption by the public administration of the privatizing, financiarizing, productivist, and jeopardizing criteria of neoliberalism is being turned into support for public institutions that are increasingly similar, in many senses, to community self-managed ones.

As some cultural policy critics, such as the previously quoted Rowan (2013), Rubén Martínez (2014b), and Adolfo Estalella (2012), are shrewdly noting, this is nothing new. Perhaps the best-known example is what was called the ‘Big Society’ model by British Prime Minister David Cameron, says Rowan, ‘to pressure the social base to compensate and assume the tasks not performed by the state due to budget and competency cuts.’ Opening the doors of public institutions decimated by cuts to ‘civic participation’ therefore causes a kind of potentiation of self-management that in many cases runs the risk of instigating self-exploitation. At the same time, it prevents the citizenry from making decisions about questions pertaining to the sustainability of those public institutions that now claim to be ‘participative.’

In the language of Spanish public administration, it is, in effect, more and more common to appeal to citizen participation, at the same time as line-item cuts in the financing of basic public services, including cultural ones, are already among the most significant in Europe. In the sphere of cultural institutions, to give a concrete example, this situation was clearly shown recently at the beginning of the city council’s process to develop a new Strategic Plan for Culture in Madrid (PECAM in Spanish). In 2012, the council offered a comprehensive document titled *Hacia el PECAM*, which offered a series of reflections and proposals on medium-term cultural policies that highlighted, as the aforementioned critics observed, concepts that articulate the model of participative, democratic institutions, whether self-managed, like the CSA La Tabacalera, to which an entire section was dedicated, or public, like Medialab-Prado itself.

In fact, in the act of introducing the deliberation process that would lead to PECAM, and which the city council proposed as a ‘participative process,’ the Delegate of the Area of Arts, its highest authority, affirmed that ‘the enormous effort of investment in cultural infrastructures and activities made by the previous government’ would ‘be unsustainable’ (he didn’t say

why). At the same time, however, he indicated that culture was entering a new paradigm, exemplified by three concepts typical of the Medialab-Prado discourse, without ever mentioning this institution: 'digitalization, the commons, and mediation.'

From these two discursive elements, the Delegate seemed to reach the following conclusion: 'culture is made and it is lived, it is not legislated. And, of course, it is not increased or cut by decree.' Which, of course—and as Rowan incisively indicated—is quite surprising as an affirmation pronounced at the beginning of a process designed for precisely that: to legislate culture. That is, to establish a series of public cultural policies, and at a time when the administration was indeed constantly issuing decrees that cut funding for institutional cultural promotion and production activities.

Stemming from these misunderstandings or conceptual contradictions present from the very start, the supposedly participative process that was expected to lead to PECAM basically consisted of the authorization of an email address on the council's webpage to which messages could be sent. Of course, no direct answers would be issued, and the messages could not be seen by other users. The process also included a series of 'regional' meetings and another of public 'round tables' with 'expert' participants. From what I have been able to glean from the documentation on this process, it doesn't seem like these scheduled events have been sufficient to dissipate those conceptual contradictions that the process has dragged with it from the start.

There have been interesting moments, however, when these contradictions have been starkly revealed. One occurred during the round table titled 'Dialogue between Public Administration, Foundations, Associations, and Companies' (Medialab-Prado 2014b) which, as its title indicated, gathered together people with very diverse allegiances and notions of 'culture': from a representative of the Telefónica Foundation to a participant in several Self-Managed Social Centers, among them La Tabacalera, and including a Director General of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, among other people.

This same heterogeneous table configuration was already revealing of a discussion framework that in itself is anything but neutral, as was noted and questioned directly by Carlos Vidania, the previously mentioned participant in several CSAs. He claimed that placing self-managing cultural projects together with corporate enterprises on the same plane, as if they were the same, was a sure way to repeat the types of error that have led to the economic, cultural, and city model crisis that defines the present situation. For him, the prevailing models responsible for the crisis are those of the great culture industry, the culture-spectacle, and city-brand. All of these are incompatible with true civic participation because they focus on the

‘attraction of capital, of initiatives of greater added value.’ In opposition to these models, the self-management experiences of ‘weak empowerment’ neither want nor need to compete, because they propose a different model of economy, culture, and city. ‘It’s not the same [process] to organize the Antiracist Alcorcón “Little World Cup” as it is the Olympic Games in Madrid,’ asserted Vidania graphically, ‘but more than that, it’s possible that they’re completely incompatible.’

Vidania also contributed another substantial criticism of the very process of creating PECAM, and in general of the dialogue models that propose public institutions with an associative fabric. He showed that as long as no instruments are created for citizen participation in effective decision-making on cultural policies, true participation will not exist. And he clearly explained that public institutions should promote relational paths that enable a true decision-making capacity for constructing and distributing resources, and for establishing priorities for the use of those resources. Contrarily, in the city-brand model a good number of the resources end up supporting those who, paradoxically, already have more of them: company foundations and big culture industries. Self-managed projects, however, are granted nothing more than a ‘folkloric’ role.

Vidania’s discourse had a certain performative function in that it made the immediate applicability of his arguments obvious. It received a rapid response from Carlota Álvarez Basso, the city council’s director of PECAM development, in an intervention that completely ignored both of Vidania’s critiques (the incompatibility of culture models and the false ‘participation’ that was offered). This, of course, demonstrated just what type of ‘dialogue’ the administration was encouraging in that round table. Instead of responding to his specific challenges, Álvarez Basso answered Vidania by brandishing a new defense of the ‘hacia el PECAM’ process in terms of just how much participation it promotes. She added that representatives of 80 associations had been invited to ‘regional tables,’ and then, bringing things down to a personal level, finished with, ‘I don’t remember why you couldn’t come or we weren’t able to contact to you.’

Álvarez Basso also reiterated her willingness to revise PECAM afterwards based on the dialogues that were being generated in the process. In other words, her willingness, effectively, to deny direct participation in the decision-making to the associative fabric that produces self-managed culture in Madrid, and ultimately to reserve this prerogative for herself and the rest of the technicians of the city council’s Arts Area designated for this purpose, exactly what Vidania had condemned.

At this point, the Telefónica Foundation’s representative spoke up. It is important to remember that this Foundation belongs to the same company

that was about to contribute to the expulsion of Medialab-Prado from its current location, and which also, by the way, appropriated the imaginary of one of the 15M assemblies in one of its publicity spots, even as it dismissed 6,000 workers. Its representative contributed to the debate to say, in reference to what she called models of ‘subsidized culture,’ that ‘lamentably, throughout history there have been deaths.’ She added that this fact ‘is part of evolution,’ and that ‘subsidized culture’ was one of those deaths.

In this sense also, there was something of the performative in Vidania’s gesture of denouncing the incompatibility between business and self-management: in effect, the business models of culture, such as the Telefónica Foundation, seemed not to be able to exist by themselves without the need to send all the other models—what they very inaccurately called ‘subsidized’—to the tomb.

6.2.4. Culture as ‘resource’: citizens evicted from the ‘public house’

Rubén Martínez, who researches cultural policies, was also present at the round table, and he took the opportunity to nuance the idea expressed by the Telefónica Foundation representative. He chose to contribute to the distinction between the conceptions of ‘culture as right’ and ‘culture as resource’ proposed by the researcher George Yúdice. This distinction is useful for moving beyond the critique of turning culture into merchandise, because it shows how another way of endangering the right to culture is by turning it into a ‘resource,’ that is, into a pretext for something else.

From this conception, which has been predominant in recent decades, public institutions have been more worried about the ‘impact’ of culture than about culture itself, and the state has taken part to turn culture into a sector used by others: the service sector, the real estate sector, tourism, etc. Martínez therefore asserted that ‘culture as resource should become a thing of the past,’ although ‘it is at the heart of PECAM, as seen in its use of the concept of “creative industries.” This is nothing more than a state operation to favor the corporatization of freelancers, and later allow them, through self-exploitation, to take responsibility for carrying out functions that the state used to fulfill.’

Again Álvarez Basso’s answer revealed the public institution’s position: she said that culture as right, but also as resource, and as a service self-managed by communities are all legitimate, and that they have to share ‘the space.’ She added that ‘there are very healthy cultural industries,’ and that the associative network is also ‘requesting entrance,’ but that they aren’t mutually exclusive.

For her part, Begoña Torres, the Director General of the Ministry of

Education, Culture, and Sports who negotiated the transfer of the building that houses the CSA La Tabacalera to the groups that manage it, expressed her disagreement with Rubén Martínez, affirming that ‘the economic use of culture’ has been a great discovery for Spain, because it has allowed the country to move from having one museum to having hundreds.

Thus two outright refusals to confront the disastrous consequences of neoliberal policies on culture were outlined. One insisted on the perfect compatibility of the business model of cultural industries with the associative self-managed model. The other went perhaps further still, directly defending placing culture in service to financial interests, praising the proliferation of museums by the Spanish state that has been considered one of the great emblems of the excesses of the ‘bubble’ (sometimes called the ‘Guggenheim effect’).⁸

To these two refusals to accept the disastrous consequences of the neoliberal model, I would like to add still another, fundamental to the repertoire of arguments used by public administrations to avoid directly approaching and simultaneously to justify and slyly promote the precarization of culture imposed by neoliberalism. It is the already classic exhortation for ‘entrepreneurship’ to cultural agents, which is nothing more, it seems to me, than another manifestation of the omnipresent pressure of corporatization that the neoliberal way of life entails.

Martínez and Rowan both participated at another dialogue table, this time with a representative of the Catalan administration, within the framework of the 2013 Indigestio Forum. These two researchers, who have extensively criticized the type of public policies that favor ‘creative industries,’ insisted that in the context of the crisis it was increasingly clear that those policies should not be repeated. They were met with colorfully recycled versions of the same arguments:

There doesn’t seem to be anything bad about a music group playing music and making money for playing music and being able to economically exploit their creativity ... If stimulating a company means helping a music group to form, and be able to write checks and pay bills, and know how to calculate, before writing a check, if there is enough money in the account, then yes, we are promoting companies—but the goal is not to make companies.

8 See Esteban’s *El efecto Guggenheim* (2007). Regarding transformations of cultural policies in the framework of Spanish neoliberalism, the books written by Rubén Martínez in collaboration with Jaron Rowan and signed as YProductions (YProductions 2009a; 2009b) are very enlightening. Also very useful is the article ‘Las políticas culturales en el estado español (1985–2005)’ (Marzo and Badía 2006).

Rowan synthesized these policies clearly: 'I go with my grandmother and she tells me, "Give a nickel to the musicians playing in the metro, they have the right to earn a living." Sure, but that can't be a proposal from a political institution. Where's the political project in that?'

Co-opting 'participation' and 'self-management' to integrate them into the neoliberal system. Stubbornly defending the use of culture as resource to obtain economic profits or political capital. Urging everyone who wants to 'make culture' to start a business even at the cost of falling into precarization and self-exploitation. These kinds of administrative attitudes can be understood metaphorically as a kind of 'active eviction' of cultural agents protected by the umbrella of the public arena, to throw them to the mercy of the market. And this seems a useful metaphor to me, because it allows us to relate this situation to others that deal with the most obvious problems created by the neoliberal crisis, as well as relating it to the movements that have arisen as a result.

The PAH and the Mareas Verde and Blanca, which I have already discussed, can in this sense be understood as ways of reclaiming the space that the public sphere must safeguard for the common good and the satisfaction of peoples' basic needs, in the face of the intrusions of private interests. Housing, hospitals, and schools are the physical manifestation of that 'space,' which also entails many other resources, but these tend to converge around those nerve centers located in specific buildings. This is what seems to have been assumed by the citizenry. They have organized their mobilizations around the defense of, and in some cases, through experiments in the self-management of, those physical spaces to reclaim the function of protection of basic rights that must be exerted in the public sphere. But in the case of the right to culture, what would constitute the 'public house' *par excellence* that needs to be defended? Perhaps those museums and art centers that are supposedly so favorable for 'the economy,' and that have become symbols of the bubble? Or the libraries, the archives, the auditoriums so dependent on the elitist traditions that have dominated modern culture?

I want to use these questions now to give one more turn of the screw to the analysis of the emergence of a possible ecosystem of 'cultures of anyone' in self-managed or public frameworks. I turn to an interesting debate about why there has not been a Marea de la Cultura, or at least none with as much force as those for health and education. I propose that both the weight of modern elitist tradition and the usual view of culture as a 'less essential' need have produced its greater vulnerability to forms of neoliberal privatization, and have contributed to making the type of mobilization centralized in public spaces that we have seen in the Mareas very difficult.

In some sense, perhaps those cultural ‘public’ spaces have never been completely public, because of their strong affiliation with the hegemony of the modern power/knowledge complex. At the same time, it doesn’t help that their process of ‘selling’ to the highest bidder in the neoliberal market was already much more advanced than in the case of hospitals and schools, since these turn out to be much less effective for promoting spectacular urban revaluation phenomena. All this has, of course, a series of fundamental consequences in terms of the type of cultural production that could be sustained in the absence of those ‘public houses’ of culture. I will also attempt to pose questions about some of these consequences, which might bring out neoliberalism’s effects not only on ways of supporting culture, but also on the ways of expressing and constructing meaning.

6.3. Between Institution and Experimentation: Why Hasn’t There Been a Marea de la Cultura?

6.3.1. ‘Everything is culture’ but there is a ‘cultural sector’

In the face of the bankruptcy of public cultural institutions, their invasion by private interests, their inability to create programming due to ‘lack of funds,’ and their invitation to all cultural agents, beginning with themselves, ‘to become a business or die,’ has often left many people who want to dedicate their time and energy to cultural production, simply put, out on the street.

And it was on the street that the ‘We Are All Culture’ act was performed on March 9, 2014. This was part of something that was, in fact, called Marea de la Cultura or Marea Roja, but it has not yet achieved the intensity of other Mareas. In Madrid’s Paseo del Prado, nine platforms were built for this act, dedicated respectively to music, performing arts, visual arts, education, patrimony, literature, dance, cinema, and civic movements. In spite of ‘taking culture to the street,’ it seemed then that the logic of the group of professional associations that convened the event (who called themselves Platform for the Defense of Culture), perpetuated the type of sectorial divisions practiced by those same institutions whose privatization process was being condemned.

In relation to this compartmentalized and professionalized concept of culture, Carmen Lozano-Bright (2014) wrote a timely and critical article on the eve of the act in which she indicated:

They’re calling tomorrow ‘the first great mobilization of the world of culture.’ As if everything we’re living (particularly for the last three years) were not the greatest cultural demonstration and learning in decades: recuperation of unused spaces, urban community orchards,

mutual support networks, creation and articulation of *common* points of contact in the face of the Nothing left by the real estate bubble.⁹

What is here in the background, without a doubt, is the recurrent misunderstanding of, or at least the persistent tension between, the applicable ‘anthropological’ definition of culture, which considers as such all construction of human meaning, and the shortened version proposed by bourgeois liberal modernity, supported by the exclusivist conception of the production of meaning that I have been reviewing in this book. But the added complication, of course, is that this last conception, ‘sectorial,’ ‘professional,’ ‘specialized,’ is the one that has predominated in the institutions of the neoliberalist bubble, and therefore the one that has occupied its spectacular infrastructures, until these began to be drained of resources. Hence, when this type of sectorial understanding of culture ‘hits the streets,’ or reclaims part of the Mareas, there is no lack of critical voices like Lozano-Bright’s.

In fact, a polemical debate has been generated about this situation, which Víctor Lenore (2013) summarized in the title of another article: ‘Culture and 15M: A Stormy Relationship.’ In it he gathered the opinions of several cultural agents on the subject. In their opinions, mixed in with other comments, we can undoubtedly find critical reactions to the indelible marks that both the elitist tradition and neoliberalism have left on ‘the cultural sector.’

And so, for example, the musician Nacho Vegas said, intelligently relating both problems: ‘Many “creators” mistrust any collective movement as a matter of principle, considering them meek, as if following the hyperindividualistic dictates imposed by neoliberalism was not letting themselves be acritically carried away by the current.’ At the same time, as happened with Lozano-Bright, the support for the ‘transversality’ of culture was reappearing as a form of resistance against those abusive vices of the ‘authorial,’ ‘professional’ sector. In this sense, the writer Belén Gopegui stated:

Culture, it seems to me, shouldn’t be a section in a newspaper, but rather, should be imbricated in every one of the other sections. For the same reason, I don’t believe it should be a section in a movement, but an expression of it and thus be everywhere and nowhere.

9 Lozano-Bright seems to be thinking about practices that are closer to what is routinely thought of as activism, frequently linked to physical spaces. However, it would be interesting to also map the proliferation of cultural projects from or about the 15M in the sphere of written culture (something to which I contributed with the article ‘Cuando cualquiera escribe: procesos democratizadores de la cultura escrita en la crisis de la Cultura de la Transición española’ (2014)).

Of course, the danger of taking to extremes that logic of the transversality of culture—a danger that, by the way, none of the aforementioned people incurs—lies in diminishing the need to materially support certain intensive cultural practices that would not otherwise exist. In other words, although of course everybody is in fact a cultural producer (everybody thinks and speaks, everybody gives meaning to what happens to them), some people dedicate their lives to intensely cultivating one or another aspect of meaning production. And they need to be able to ‘live on that’; that is, sustaining those intensive cultural practices *is* their livelihood, and having also to do other things to be able to support themselves to have a life with dignity would interfere with that.

Jordi Oliveras (2013), organizer of the Indigestio Forum and host of interesting debates on these questions in the magazine *Nativa*, synthesized in the following terms this conception of culture as something common and everyday, but that also allows ‘specializations’: ‘We would have to understand creators as specialists who work the cultural magma in an implicit process of social delegation, and the managers and structures of management—public or private—as instruments in the service of these processes, and not the reverse.’

Guillermo Zapata (Lenore 2013), activist, audiovisual scriptwriter, and promoter of multiple cultural and political initiatives, also pointed out something essential in relation to those ‘management structures’ that are due to the ‘cultural magma.’ He reminds us that in addition to public and private, they can also be community, but for that we need communities willing to defend them:

I believe that one of the keys to the Mareas is that they understand that the defense of the public sphere is no longer only a matter for professionals, but one that requires community participation. The questions raised are: What is community for Spanish culture? Can there be community if we have spent years treating people either like clients or like thieves?

In the paragraphs above, I have tried to offer an outline of how the world of Self-Managed Social Centers and some public cultural institutions especially permeable to community involvement, like Medialab-Prado, are perhaps most similar to those communities able to defend the intense processes of cultural production that Zapata demands. In no way are these exhaustive examples. Fortunately, there exists a plurality of cultural community self-management experiences capable of empowering all types of knowledge and abilities, and often these experiences do not depend

directly on what can be properly understood as CSAs. Nor do they depend on public institutions, or at least not entirely. Often they are cultural processes that experiment with hybrid forms of self-managed support, public and private, in the physical and digital spheres, linking unpaid collective work with the use of public infrastructures or even subsidies, but also with certain uses of the commercial sphere foreign to the logics of privatization and competition.

6.3.2. ‘Epistemic experimental communities’:

Without pampering there is no experimentation

It is true, in any case—and I think it’s important to make the distinction—that in among all that magma that Lozano-Bright talks about, it is worth identifying some projects or spaces that are dedicated with greater intensity to questions of learning, to working with language, with research analysis, and, in general, with experimentation in the production of meaning.

Thus, in a trilogy of articles essential to theorizing these questions, Tomás Sánchez Criado (2013a; 2013b; 2014) indicated that, in effect, the neoliberal crisis has simultaneously brought a crisis of the ‘institutions of knowledge’ that produce a widespread desire ‘to theoretically and practically articulate “who we are,” “what is happening to us,” to discuss “what has come down on us,” and “what we can do with it.”’ As he says about those “institutions of knowledge,” [given that] it has been demonstrated that “they didn’t know” that this could happen, that “they couldn’t” do anything to avoid it, that “they didn’t predict” what would happen, or that “they didn’t want” to tell us that they profited’ from all the new forms of encounters that have appeared, some of them dedicated to somehow confronting the need to replace those fraudulent kinds of knowledge:

Splinter groups or great masses that mount their own environments for creating knowledge, that strive to create climates of debate and discussion, with a great hospitality for the unknown. An entire true ‘ecology of collective practices’ that it would require our best talent as naturalists to try to account for, to make the most of. (2013b)

Sánchez Criado builds a small catalogue and also proposes the concept of ‘epistemic experimental communities’ to theorize these collective practices. Of course wisdom and knowledge, the ‘epistemic,’ are always involved in any human activity, and in many of the political processes initiated around the neoliberal crisis this has been obvious, as I discussed in the last chapter. Sánchez Criado clearly recognizes this issue, but he also points out some lines to map, with no intention of establishing rigid categories, those

spaces or projects that have focused on that epistemic dimension of a more experimental form. In other words, those spaces, we could say, with a greater willingness to question the meaning of the reality that emerges from the neoliberal crisis, still at risk of not being fast enough about attaining specific changes in the institutionality that manages that crisis.

So Sánchez Criado speaks, for example, of experiences modeled around collective learning, such as those of the ‘University on the Streets,’ or the ‘People’s Summer University’ held in the self-managed urban space of Campo de Cebada. Such experiences, he says, could become related to the old traditions of popular *barrio* schools and the movements of educational renovation. He also mentions the breeding ground of the CSAs, some projects like the Observatorios Metropolitanos of Madrid and Barcelona, and the Common Notions, for which we could use the label of ‘activist research.’ Furthermore, he alludes to ‘hybrid institutional spaces,’ among which he includes both Medialab-Prado and the CSA Ateneu Candela, integrated from Terrassa into the Fundación de los Comunes. Finally, he mentions *Intermediae*, *ColaBoraBora*, and *Zemos98*, plus the ‘innumerable collectives of participatory architecture that have sprouted like mushrooms in recent years’ (2013b). An interesting addition to this list would be that of the interdisciplinary field of studies in science, technology, and society (STS), which has called attention to the ethical and political dimensions of science and technology, producing interesting encounters with activist practices, such as Sánchez Criado’s own developments around the ‘material politics of care’ (critical interventions in services and technologies related to the notion of ‘disability’).

Instead of the community/self-management/public institution axis that I have been using, Sánchez Criado here follows in particular the epistemic, experimental function of some current cultural projects. This is a function it seems essential to emphasize in order to understand the paths of the collaborative cultures emerging from the thread of the neoliberal crisis, and perhaps also to understand why they have not given rise to a mass *Marea de la Cultura*, like those for education and healthcare. So, besides the problem of the co-optation of public spaces by neoliberal competitive logics, it seems to me that we must also keep in mind the inevitable tension that always takes place between experimental forms and established processes.

Spaces that put the epistemic crisis in the forefront and confront it with an experimental spirit, without proposing preconceived solutions, also need to constantly reinvent themselves in some way. This is in no way incompatible with creating institutions, if we understand that their organizing and structuring tendencies can be flexible, but they do mark certain priorities in that sense.

In the third article of his trilogy, Sánchez Criado (2014) defends his use of the concept of experimentation analogously to the notion of the ‘experts in what happens to them’ proposed earlier by Antonio Lafuente:

I spoke, however, of experimentation not only because I like to play with words or simply to incorporate a *cool* word from the art world, but because of the proximity or vicinity of these means of knowledge production with the real practice of scientific laboratories (and not their mythical vision). Because in these spaces it becomes necessary for us to constantly explore the boundaries of our conventional ways of thinking and acting; taking charge of the changing, vibrant materiality that constitutes us, in complex worlds such as the contemporary ones, where we de/compose ourselves through our relations with microbes and very diverse somatic affections, communication infrastructures, climatic catastrophes, housing systems, intellectual property formats, etc. that enable the sociomaterial articulation of our agency. In other words, the things that allow or interfere with our particular possibilities of performance to take charge of what affects us. And I was delighting in the fact that the result of its union is a novel situation that has allowed the old guinea pigs of technocratic reason to explore and experiment with other life and existential alternatives, looking for ways to develop something like ‘self-managed guinea pigs,’ making ‘the revolution of bodies, from bodies, for bodies, in bodies ...,’ in other words, from its radical diversity.

In this same article, Sánchez Criado also recognized that the experimental practices of those ‘self-managed guinea pigs’ that emerge from the neoliberal crisis have been besieged by the aforementioned ‘technocratic reason,’ which has tried to integrate them into the world of ‘innovation’ and ‘learning,’ to fit them to the logics of neoliberal competitiveness. This is why he emphasized that it’s fundamental to attend to the vulnerability of these experimental practices, developing what he expressively called ‘*pampering*’: ‘that care and daily attention that requires experimentation with passion.’ And for this he proposed ‘new formats of institutionality,’ or ‘*mimatorios* [pampering places] where these experimental practices would be sheltered’:

[S]elf-managed spaces to be constructed where our experimental tasks could be carried out, where we would be able to control our support, keeping alive our knowledge bases of experimentation and their particular relation with materials, practices, ideas, tools, etc. But also spaces where these practices are pampered so that they result in a good deed, where they are proven and formats are experimented

with to equip them with minimum conditions of subsistence and compensation.

This need is none other than the one I have followed in previous reflections about the shelter and everyday support the ‘cultures of anyone’ can find, always with the expected difficulties, in self-managed or public spaces. But Sánchez Criado also emphasizes one of the essential characteristics of those intensive cultural practices, of that ‘specialization’ that takes place within the daily magma of the collective production of meaning: experimentation. I think this emphasis on experimentation as one of the important factors of the ‘cultures of anyone’ can add another layer to the debate on the possible *mareas de la cultura*. It shows us that perhaps it is not only neoliberal harassment and its ‘enclosure’ of the public sphere that have complicated the existence of ‘public culture houses’ capable of inspiring *mareas* in their defense. Rather, it is the especially experimental—and therefore vulnerable—condition of the production of meaning itself during the neoliberal crisis—at this moment so strong with shared ‘not-knowing’—that complicates, or at least suggests special demands for, the institutional dynamics capable of creating such ‘houses’ from participative and community networks.

6.3.3. Collecting answers or posing questions: Between institution and experimentation

Let’s think again, for example, about the Fundación de los Comunes. Would this not be one of those ‘pampering places’ that must take care of the experimental practices of the ‘self-managed guinea pigs’ during the crisis of the neoliberal institutions of knowledge? It seems to me that the Fundación de los Comunes constitutes a privileged example because it captures a common tendency to demand the right to the public arena from a position within the self-managed spaces, analogously to what Rubén Martínez and Carlos Vidania suggested as a result of PECAM. The Fundación de los Comunes was created, as explained in its blog (Fundación de los Comunes 2013a), to

construct a territory of experimentation shared between, on the one hand, cultural or political institutions with a de-institutionalizing vocation, in the sense of not capturing others and of overcoming its limits (separation gaps with respect to truly alive social production) and, on the other hand, some spaces of independent cooperation with a desire to equip their practices with greater stability, consistency and impact; that is, overcoming, in turn, the precarization to which neoliberal globalization tries to condemn us.

In this sense, the Foundation tries to systematize or formalize these movements' collective desire for intervention in public institutions to escape that 'sentence of precarization.' And significantly, in doing so, it also appears as a legal institution with statutes, and above all, with a clear and to some degree instrumental discourse about its goals.

This is what I particularly want to highlight now, because it seems to me that when the vector of experimentation is introduced into the equation of 'cultures of anyone,' it becomes particularly obvious that there are more instrumental ways of producing meaning in these cultures, which share space with that experimentation. And such sharing can't help but be a source of diversity in the models, and even of the tensions among them.

The Fundación de los Comunes proposes itself as a *think tank*. This means that it must offer not only questions, but answers. Its coordinator, Marisa Pérez-Colina (Entrevista Marisa Pérez Colina, Fundación de los Comunes (FdC), MUSAC 14 de mayo de 2014), has commented on numerous occasions that this means 'elevating the discourse to the level of the conflict in the street,' or, as explained in an article from the Foundation (2013b), listening and observing 'the movements,' because

the answer to the question 'how do we win?' will not come *a priori* from intellectual discussions nor from theoretical analyses. Only the movements have the answer, and it is inscribed on their bodies, in their practices, in their ways of doing. Today we have a myriad of interesting practices to learn from, new experiments, and it is necessary to listen to them and observe them, always from a position inside these practices. To the question 'What can we do?' we can respond with another question: 'What is already being done—from the struggles?'

The think tank model means these questions must be considered valid to be able to formulate answers. Thus, more than asking what are 'the struggles' or what do they mean—or even what does it mean 'to win,' or perhaps even more importantly, in what kind of language do those struggles and movements speak and what would be the most appropriate way to translate their 'bodies, their practices, their ways of being' into 'discourse'—a certain legibility is presumed, a certain access that will allow us to offer answers. Or at least, the experimentation, the not knowing, and the uncertainty entailed in that necessary 'translation' is not the focal point.

Ultimately, what I want to point out here, hand in hand with the concept of vulnerable experimentation proposed by Sánchez Criado, is that the 'movements,' if we include those 'experimental epistemic communities,' are not only going to provide answers, but also more questions. And thus the

‘translation’ the Fundación de los Comunes proposes will not always be an easy exercise. This, it seems to me, does not at all mean that institutions able to defend those cultures are not necessary; rather, just the opposite. But yes, perhaps these institutions will always have to reserve an important space for the not-knowing and experimentation, for things that can’t be immediately translated into the language of politics or institutional culture, which is not always easy.

Perhaps this difficulty of linking cultural experimentation with establishing practices capable of providing long-term support is more appreciated in the area of projects that have a vocation more oriented towards aesthetic questions, towards reflection on the forms of plastic, linguistic, audiovisual representations, etc.

In this sense, it seems significant to me that often when ‘the 15M culture’ is spoken of—and I myself have done it in previous texts—the projects that have been summarized have mostly been projects that can be more or less associated with traditional artistic or cultural forms, like cinema (15M.cc, Cine sin Autor), music (Fundación Robo), literature (Asalto), or even ‘the library,’ in the case of #Bookcamping. And then their relationship to the ‘spaces of life’ or ‘institutions’ have been theorized more or less indirectly, given that none of these cultural initiatives, unlike projects like TdS, are tied directly to permanent institutional structures such as CSAs, although some have occasionally been supported by them, and also by some public ‘cultural centers.’

Perhaps, I suggest now, beyond the traditional tendency to separate ‘culture’ and, even more, ‘art’ from the ‘social channels of production’ that nourish them, it is necessary to recognize that an inevitable tendency also exists in the most experimental aspects of meaning production, those usually associated with aesthetic or philosophical exploration, to work with a high degree of uncertainty. And this does not always fit well with the need for consensus and positive affirmations that occur in the construction of institutions.

In this regard, I am not trying to establish any kind of artificial ‘suture’; nor is it my intent to reduce to a single unit the multiple differences between these aesthetic projects, those more ‘epistemic’ ones, and the diverse experiences that ground them. What I want to do in what follows is to add a final reflection around the plural tensions and drifts that occur not only between the self-organized and the public spheres—both always subjected to the pressures of ‘extraction’ and neoliberal ‘enclosure’—but also between the experimental and establishing dynamics that run through both fields.

For this, I now want to explore briefly and as an open ending to my

journey, some examples of experimental cultural processes that arose around the types of questions with difficult answers that don't always allow progress towards the creation of institutional proposals. Even so, they are crucial with respect to the possibility of not reproducing the languages and forms of legitimation that neoliberalism co-opts with greater facility. Thus, they are also crucial for democratizing the 'cultures of anyone' at the level of the most immediate materials—linguistic, formal, conceptual—with which these cultures are granted existence and self-representation.

6.4. 'Making Us Be': The Question of Forms of (Self-)Representation

6.4.1. 'Occupying language' to exist: The Euraca Seminar

How did we get to this point? Let's return now to those young people introduced by *El País* as 'Nimileuristas,' about whom I talked at the beginning of this book. If we pay close attention, if we look a little more closely or, simply, another way, we'll see that the photos in the news article show fairly 'normal'-looking figures (makeup, hair, clothes) against a supposedly 'neutral' background: white.

This was the way the Euraca Seminar (EURACA 2012)—which initially appeared to be a seminar on contemporary poetry and poetics—looked at the 'Nimileuristas' in its initial interventions, in October 2012. The opening group of this collective investigation wanted to exemplify with these images on a neutral background an operation of meaning that is fundamental to understanding what is in play in what I have been calling 'cultures of anyone.' It's a specific way of exerting the 'establishment of reality' Michel de Certeau speaks of. He reflected on the preconception of accepting as real only what can be shown to be visible, but in this modality, as Euraca asserts, what passes as real is not only visible, but 'transparent.' That is, it is passed off as something perfectly legible, whose meaning should be abundantly clear, ready-made, ready for consumption.

The poets María Salgado and Patricia Esteban, founders of the Euraca Seminar, proposed as one of the premises of their 'research on language and languages in the final days of the Euro' the need to question this type of operation. Taking inspiration from a text by the historic Oulipo poet Jacques Roubaud (1998), they have connected this 'transparent' language to the existence of something like a 'muesli language' of global capitalism, well mixed so that it can flow everywhere. The epitome of this language would come to be that type of completely instrumentalized, rapid, 'standardized' 'airport English' that is occupying more and more terrain in the construction of the collective experience under neoliberalism.

Euraca is opposed to this 'transparent' language, and to operations of 'soft representation' in general, like those of the newspaper *El País* and its 'Nimileurista generation.' Instead, what Euraca proposes is to recover the materiality of languages, their capacity to be located in bodies and geographical spaces that give them a concrete existence and a multiplicity of meanings which is exactly the opposite of that supposed 'transparency.'

As an example of forms of resistance to the 'muesli language' that are supported by the materiality of languages, Euraca took as its point of departure the work of some Argentine poets from the nineties who built a poetics based on the appropriation of colloquial, lower-class, teen slang, or 'street' languages. Their point was not to attempt to represent those who spoke them, but to produce an unfamiliarity in which the rhetorical operations typical of literary language were still present. It was therefore not about 'imitating' the language of others, but rather using the materiality of located languages, strongly marked, to destabilize the standardized and supposedly 'transparent' language that is invading everything.

Salgado and Esteban summarized the value of this type of operation with the help of a phrase from the critics Selci and Kesselman (2008), who analyzed one of the key Argentine poetry collections, *La zanjita* by Juan Desiderio: 'The characters of *La zanjita* barely have names, they're only vaguely described, and the story that frames them is barely intelligible. Nevertheless, they speak in such a unique way, so oddly but authentically, that the reader immediately believes in their existence.'

It is precisely that 'belief of existence,' that verisimilitude based on their material uniqueness, of which speech and language are sometimes undeniable proofs, that *El País* denied to the generation of young Spanish people suffering from the neoliberal crisis. It turned them into a kind of photogenic stereotype floating in a dehistoricized, decontextualized emptiness (the blank white background). In order to question that attempted neutrality, Euraca embarked on an intense trip in which questions were posed about the normalizing effects of the mesocratic ideal and consumerist society on language and the production of meaning in the Spanish state. These questions will be familiar to readers, as they are similar to some of those raised in the first part of this book, and also in dialogue with the historians Germán Labrador and Pablo Sánchez León.

At the same time, on its journey Euraca approached multiple Creole, hybrid, and resistant border areas in other latitudes, from the Caribbean to the *banlieus* of the great European metropolises, on the way moving through racially mixed Tijuana and other afro and native Latin American conclaves. In among all that plurality, they also emphasized two places that were, perhaps, more of arrival, or at least nearer that poetic and political 'Euraca'

position they were attempting to interrogate. The first was the poetry of Luz Pichel in the Castrapo dialect, a mixture of Castilian and Gallego associated with the popular classes; the second was Luis Melgarejo's poetry in 'Andalusian.' Both problematize 'muesli languages' as much as national frameworks and their venerated representative 'high' literatures.

Another way to explain what Euraca proposes and investigates, and which is also close to central themes of these reflections on 'cultures of anyone,' would be to say that in all its work with 'marked,' located, semi-opaque languages, there is a discovery of the language of 'ordinary people,' of those people who don't belong, in each case, in each context, to the tacit group of 'those in the know.'

The elites that try to monopolize meaning production would have moved, in Euraca's analysis, from preferring 'official or high languages'—*wooden languages*, as Roubaud says, basically referring to rigidly normative languages—to also using the fluidity of the 'muesli' approach. But their purpose is always as a strategy to exert a policing control on the overflowing materiality of ordinary language, of the language of 'those in the dark.' Before, the uncouth barbarian was unable to rise to the sophistication of 'cultured' languages, and remained unable to understand its exclusive codes. Now he is the one who remains too attached to his 'lects,' his own particular speech varieties, to the local specificity of his territory, his accent or his body, too slow to be incorporated into the speed of the global commerce of meaning. The barbarian is now the one who soils and infects that international, immaculate language of airports and nonplaces with his irremediable belonging to material, located, imperfect, ordinary ways of producing meaning.¹⁰

But when neoliberalism enters as deep a crisis as that happening in the Spanish state, its muesli language does, too. And then all those 'barbaric,

10 Ricardo Piglia's reflections on the place of literature in the face of these tensions seems particularly relevant here: 'There is a schism between public language, the language of politicians in the first place, and the other uses of language that get scattered and twinkle, like faraway voices, on the social surface. An average style tends to be imposed—a style that functions as a register of legitimacy and comprehension—that is used by everyone who speaks in public. Literature is directly confronted with those official uses of the word, and of course its place and its function in society are increasingly invisible and limited. Any critical word suffers the consequences of this tension; it is forced to reproduce that crystallized language, with the argument that that will make it accessible. Hence the idea of whatever works being comprehensible. That is, anything is comprehensible as long as it repeats what everyone can understand, and what everyone can understand is what reproduces the language that defines reality as it is' (Piglia and Rozitchner 2001, 40).

ordinary' languages proliferate, filling the common space with improper noises, dissonances, and meanings. When the authorities that try to control language by making it transparent confront such an intense crisis of cultural legitimacy as what is spreading through Spanish institutionality, we are often left with the strangeness of the everyday.

'The ordinary always has something of the extraordinary,' said Salgado when she introduced Euraca. You go out in the street of any *barrio* in Madrid and you'll find a street vendor saying, 'fantastic red garlic, I sell for one euro what others'll give you for four.' You go on the Internet and you get a plurilingual flood of text, mostly English, but it's an English 'bastardized' by 1,000 accents, slangs, and ignorance, as the poet Kenneth Goldsmith says. You listen to the voice of your great-grandmother on cassette recordings and you discover that without realizing it, you have been using the word 'shirt' in the same, now archaic sense that was completely ordinary for her: as a metonym for 'dressy clothes.'

In the face of the supposed transparency of the dominant languages, ordinary language appears today, perhaps more than ever, as that 'ship of fools' on which we all are hopelessly stuck, and of which Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and de Certeau spoke:

We are subject to, although not identified with, ordinary language. As on the ship of fools, we have embarked without any chance of an aerial view or any means of totalizing. It is the 'prose of the world' that Merleau-Ponty dealt with. This includes all discourse, even if human experiences aren't reduced to what can be said about them. In order to constitute themselves, scientific methods are allowed to *forget* this fact, and philosophers *think to master it*, and thus to be authorized to talk about it. (de Certeau 11)

Perhaps it is the Euraca Seminar's ability to focus on this overflowing dimension acquired by ordinary language when the permitted forgetfulness of the Expert and the attempted mastery of the Philosopher no longer work, that has turned it into an 'experimental epistemic community' capable of generating an intense desire and learning all around it. Certainly, the seminar quickly transcended the possible identity or 'sectorial' limits that its special link with poetry could have imposed upon it. As explained by one of its participants, Rafael SMP, Euraca 'posed a problem that affected many of us who aren't poets. It has to do with a battle of words, a crisis of language. It has to do with how we name ourselves, with what we say about ourselves.'

Indeed, it seems to me that of the communities of living experimentation to arise from Spain's neoliberal crisis, Euraca more directly and deliberately

proposes the need to equip the emerging ‘cultures of anyone’ with languages that allow the self-management of their meaning production. And perhaps for that reason, it has attracted and strengthened, as can be confirmed in its activities archive and its frenetic mailing list, an impressive plurality of abilities, themes, and points of view that range from poetry and poetics itself, to activism, passing on the way through discourse analysis, work with urban spaces, cultural historiography, chronicles, music, film, architecture, and an impressively long list of *et ceteras*.

Instead of assuming that existing languages or forms of meaning production are good, and therefore always being ‘borrowed’ to a certain extent by emergent cultures from other traditions and communities—such as, notably, those of social movements, free culture, countercultures, or the long tradition of the ‘political left’—Euraca has raised the question of how these present-day emergent cultures can represent themselves in trying to respond to the unique situation brought about by neoliberalism’s cultural and institutional crisis. Perhaps the value of its eminently experimental vocation resides in this question. In order to think the unique situation of the cultural crisis of neoliberalism, Euraca has used the confrontation between the ‘muesli’ language and the ‘marked’ languages. Euraca has put forward the need to look for these ‘marked’ languages that could also become, in some always problematic way, ‘common languages’ that are not transparent.

6.4.2. How do we tell of ourselves and sing of ourselves?

Bookcamping, Asalto, and Fundación Robo

This move of laying out self-representation more as a problem or a question to be investigated experimentally than as a technical problem to be solved with ‘think tank’ methods has been repeated in various ways in the political and cultural processes that 15M unleashed. Soon after the beginning of the *acampadas*, for example, the writer Silvia Nanclares sent a tweet asking, ‘And you, what book would you take to your *acampada*?’ As a result of this question, a kind of collective genealogy began to develop in the social networks that would help 15M participants explain to themselves along the way what was happening.

The mass media tried to explain the irruption of the most important political movement in Spain since the transition to democracy by arbitrarily referring to Stéphane Hessel’s essay *Indignez-vous!*, published in Spain as *¡Indignados!* (the source of the label *Indignados*). Nanclares, in contrast, fostered a collective process of self-investigation in which participants would propose many other books as tools to explain and contextualize the 15M. From that moment began a parallel evolution of the movement itself

and of the digital library #Bookcamping ('#Bookcamping' 20), in which various 'bookcases' are opened that group references (and in some cases the text files themselves) thematically, under suggestive titles like 'History: Mothers of the Lamb', 'Action Manuals: Micropolitics, Local Analysis, Free Culture,' 'Liberated Technologies,' and 'Political Economy of the Crisis,' among others.

With the identity of the 15M movement still present but now already more blurred, #Bookcamping acquired a new autonomy and a focus more oriented towards the present and the future than the past. Continuing to make lists of books, continuing to extend that reference space, is already now just one way to recognize what has happened to that diffuse community. But it is also more and more a way to encourage the continued sharing of things, to keep that community growing and enriching its common space. What was initially a gesture of genealogical contextualization that hoped to face the labels imposed on the 15M movement from outside by the mass media has now generated a certain capacity for the collective creation of knowledge that goes beyond the desire to know 'who we are' to enter the territory of 'what we could be.' One of the most active lists on #Bookcamping carries the name 'Telling Us' and is introduced through a series of questions that synthesize what is in play in cultural projects like these:

Can we escape from the megamutant neoliberal story that absorbs everything? Do we have words and places to produce another story that contains what we want to tell? Can fiction open spaces and imaginaries that in turn affect or contribute or open political spaces? How are we going to do it? With what myths? With what stories? Where do we speak from? What paths do our ideas and words follow? What ways of producing meaning and formats do we have?

In the case of another of the better known cultural projects to emerge with direct ties to the 15M *acampadas*, the musical platform Fundación Robo could also be said to have emerged from a question: 'What can today's protest song be?' Or perhaps, 'What can today's politicized song be?' (Herrerros 2011). Fundación Robo ('Fundación Robo' 2013) is a project that works in a very clear way with the construction of the imaginary for emergent cultures—we might almost say of 'hymns': songs that have the capacity to make people who are unsatisfied by the neoliberal crisis and eager for more democracy feel represented by them. And one of the ways it does this is by creating lyrics in which an everyday, nonexpert politics of anyone is constructed.

To do this they have made use of important sources of popular music culture, like protest folk songs. Some well-known ones are the versions

using Chicho Sánchez Ferlosio's themes, which in their time went from being anonymous popular songs to anti-Francoist hymns. But in Fundación Robo a range of musical styles have also appeared: hip hop, techno, multimodal pop, punk, cumbia, and even country. And, furthermore, they have often produced music in more interesting ways, using unusual combinations, creating situations in which the identities of those traditions, their performers, their poetry, and their tics are displaced, overlapping and opening up to experimentation. Take, for example, the country version of legendary punk group Eskorbuto's song, 'It's a Crime'; or the song 'Fire' by the techno-pop group Diplo, using lines from Camarón de la Isla; or the collective Spanish version of the Woody Guthrie classic 'This Land Is Your Land,' adapted for current circumstances.

Fundación Robo's experimentation with popular musical traditions also has a dimension of institutional creation. According to Daniel Granados, one of its founders, the platform is claimed not only as a way 'to generate language,' but also as 'an alternative business model to that of capitalism and the record industry.' Along these lines, when DJ and techno producer Oscar Mulero introduced the song 'Poder en la sombra' (Power in the Shade), Fundación Robo proposed to move beyond the classic notion of 'committed' music like songs with explicitly political lyrics:

The load, or rather, the political potentiality of the new music resides in what the music 'does' and not so much in what it 'says.' A self-managed techno party that recuperates dead spaces in the city and injects them with life and communication, even if it's only temporary, is in itself an event that can have a political charge. ... Creating independent distribution networks that offer an outlet for the material of small producers who contribute to the construction of a common musical heritage with an intensive use of samples, remixes and copies is the same thing. ('Poder en la sombra' 2012)

But it is perhaps another type of politicization of music that has had more resonance in Fundación Robo, especially those songs performed by the singer-songwriter Nacho Vegas, like 'Runrún' and 'How to Do Crack.' His songs are supported by a creative mixture of the personal and the collective in the lyrics, about which the musician Robert Herreros said, 'I can't think of a more honest way to explain personal problems than to write about collective conflicts.'

So Vegas's 'How to Do Crack,' which in the post-15M has come to have the feel of a 'hymn,' is an ambiguous song in which personal malaise is confused with public malaise, and is told in everyday language. Not for nothing does

the song begin with the expression ‘every morning ...,’ and the story is about a day in the life of an anonymous someone, of just anybody at all who shops at the supermarket, who goes to a bar, who watches television and sees how his country, or perhaps he himself, or perhaps, simply, everyone ‘does crack.’

‘Asalto, the literary arm of Fundación Robo’ (‘Asalto’ 2013) emerges with a similar intention: to politicize literature, just as music is politicized. Up to now, there have been five ‘assaults’ (*asaltos*) published. Each one consists of the publication of a series of short texts on a website, without signatures, but with the names of the authors at the end of the page, such that it is not known who wrote what. The first assault proposed playing with ‘the semantic field of the everyday, those words that designate objects, set phrases, or structures of life with which we coexist and that can be found in the title of the text.’ The second was proposed as ‘an adjustment, a revision or almost complete disassembling of certain linguistic expressions,’ a work with ‘semantic structures that are used thoughtlessly, or worse, with deliberate forethought, that confuse and can cause damage.’ Because, as the introduction stated, ‘Every day we have to read misleading phrases. Whoever claims to know the language uses them. Or are the semantic structures using them?’ In any case, continued the introduction, ‘It shouldn’t be as if nothing happened when somebody takes advantage of the social position given to them to say trite, hackneyed things, and not say what’s necessary.’

It is not difficult to hear in those words the echo of the fatigue with expert speeches and their empty rhetoric, the displeasure in the face of that constant fallacy according to which the expert paradigm passes off as knowledge what is in fact ‘social position’ or, as de Certeau says, it legitimizes as science what is in fact ‘no more than the ordinary language of tactical games between economic powers and symbolic authorities’ (8).

Asalto thus proposed a certain ethnography of the everyday that becomes necessary when false legitimacies are unveiled that try to control the flow of plural meanings constructed by anyone. It is an ethnography that, in the words of de Certeau, arises when one is conscious of ‘being a foreigner in your own home, a “savage” in the middle of ordinary culture, lost in the complexity of common sense and of what is given as understood’ (11).

6.4.3. *Al final de la asamblea* and the ‘language of the 99%’

These words by de Certeau could well also be a description of the position from which are written the entries of the blog *Al final de la asamblea*, which began to publish anonymous texts related to the 15M and other similar international movements in September 2011. The uniqueness of this blog’s texts lies precisely in not resorting to any source of authority supposedly external to ordinary language to face the complexity of reality. Rather, it

relies simply on narration, anecdote, and chronicle as close to ‘ground level’ as possible.

It has to do with naming what’s there, so much in plain sight that sometimes it isn’t seen. This was an observation made in the post ‘23-F or the Commonness of the Extraordinary,’ (#23F o la vulgaridad de lo extraordinario’ 2013) as a result of the surprisingly well-attended and diverse demonstration of Tides/Mareas that took place on the thirty-first anniversary of the attempted 1981 coup: ‘Unless it’s to avoid telling us the obvious, the lived, what is seen, something escapes us. Let’s see if we’ll get used to the commonness of the extraordinary.’

So in effect, the underlying thesis of *Al final de la asamblea* seems to be, similar to what Euraca proposes, that a great change is taking place at the subjective level in the Spanish state, but that it lacks ‘authorized’ languages to narrate it and represent it. Perhaps this is precisely because this change contains within it a certain opposition to the very loss of prestige of the ordinary and the everyday that is at the base of modern culture, and particularly at the base of the Culture of the Spanish Transition. Another post (15mas1 2012) asserted:

While we watched Parliament like a cat at a mouse hole and said nothing’s going on here; while we declared that the day of the revolution, when everything changes, hasn’t come yet; while many keep watching the sky anxiously to see if somebody arrives who can take charge of the situation and the suffering, a savior, a just and democratic liberator, a party, or something. While many get depressed between the anxiety caused by the emergency and the absence of solutions on the horizon.

Meanwhile, looking away, looking at the less spectacular, perhaps, the ground keeps splitting. While we wait for the revolution and the solutions that will change everything, perhaps, around us everything is changing.

The ‘nongroup’ that anonymously publishes in *Al final de la asamblea* has appropriated the mission of watching in that other way, of narrating less spectacularly, and has produced striking contributions in the chronicle form. For example, there have been posts that showed the ins and outs of the White Tide/Marea Blanca in Madrid, the unexpected convergences of the 15M movement with the security forces (which I have already discussed), and many other moments of an ordinariness that, surprisingly, is much more difficult to find in writing than one might perhaps believe. And the thing is, all those events are being narrated, of course, but by a type of mechanism that is not, perhaps, democratic enough to constitute something that could be ‘a language of the 99%’—and is therefore incapable of seeing the change of

subjectivity at the level of the everyday. Asked by Amador Fernández-Savater about this formula, Pepe of *Al final de la asamblea* responded by talking about those mechanisms that introduce inequality in the production of meaning:

I don't know what a language of the 99% would be, but I do know what it's not. The activist communique, journalistic stereotypes, the self-referential codes of the different intellectual or political strata, etc. A language of the 99% is not a language where the 99% already is, but where it *could* be. Not a lowest common denominator, but a (nonleveling) aggregate of voices. (Fernández-Savater 2014a)

In this sense, as happened in Euraca, it is not simply a matter of copying, of imitating or 'translating' a kind of 'popular wisdom' that is already there, hidden in principle, but at heart as accessible—once it is unveiled—as that 'transparent' language that tries to dominate reality.

The position of the 99%, the position of those excluded from true participation in neoliberal policies and their mechanisms of meaning production, is not given in advance, but rather must be built. Neoliberalism is, first of all, a machine for producing inequality through competition. And one of the vehicles for that inequality is the use of stereotypical languages, 'muesli,' which in spite of their apparent inclusivity, create spaces of indifference, arenas where the rules of the game of meaning production are already in advance, and the only thing that remains is to compete for value. Contrary to that, a language of the 99% tries to construct common spaces based on differences that are not arranged competitively.

In that sense, the chronicle work of *Al final de la asamblea* is not at all 'natural,' 'immediate,' or 'objective,' no matter how it tries to always use everyday, colloquial, or ordinary forms of discourse. The everyday is besieged by the stereotypes that divide reality into competing identities that inscribe inequality with fire in words and in bodies. Constructing a language capable of undoing those inequalities is no easy task, nor does it have to do with a kind of 'realism' that should be limited to representing what is already there. Drawing once again on the echoes of the political, epistemic, and aesthetic theory of Jacques Rancière, we can recall that equality is never given in advance. Rather, it is a hypothesis that must be affirmed to be able to verify it. 'We can be equal in this world of inequality,' 'we can speak the language of the 99% in this world of neolanguages that justify hierarchies and make us compete against each other': they are not affirmations that describe a pre-existing reality, but support for the construction of something that is not yet given.

Álvaro of *Al final de la asamblea* is very aware that although there are

no strong expressions in his blog of what reality should be, there *are* fundamental choices about how to tell it:

The blog is characterized by not having speeches, for being as bland as reality, but also for being happy. The tone comes from its strengths and positivities. It's an important choice: to come up with a description of what we can do and not what we can't do; in life, the opposite can be chosen and it is very easy: choosing impotence. There is no discourse, and therefore, there is no criticism of reality. So where do you get off saying what's missing from reality? In fact, when there is criticism in an entry, the interlocutor is usually not reality, but the other voices that tell it what it should be, the voices that make us anxious by repeating, 'the government should fall already, everybody should hit the streets already,' should, should.

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Again, I am not trying to cover anything exhaustively when I talk about these specific cultural projects, which are just a few examples in a sea of experiments with ways of producing meaning during the crisis of the expert and intellectual tradition that has given neoliberalism its legitimacy. I only want to call attention to the way the emergent 'cultures of anyone' are being given not only strategies of composition and empowerment of human capacities in general, not only of 'spaces of life' in which those capacities can attend to community needs in a sustained, everyday way, but also of languages and ways of (self-)representation capable of naming and giving value to those ways of life based more on collaboration than on competition.

As I write this, the Spanish state is going through an exceptional institutional crisis, which is also accompanied by an effervescent creativity. This creative impulse has come not only to state cultural institutions, but also to politics, with the irruption of Podemos and the formation of civic platforms that are preparing for the next municipal, regional, and general elections. In the field of elections, of representatives, of government mechanisms implemented by the party system that up to now has served a neoliberal model, the clashes between experimentation and institution are destined to be, obviously, much more wild and complex even than those that take place in the spaces assigned for 'the cultural,' as much from self-management as from the public.

But, perhaps, if this book can be good for anything, it will be for remembering that those institutional spheres of the political are also 'cultural,' that is, that in them too is resolved the constant implicit and

explicit debate about what can be a life with dignity. An essential part of that debate, it seems to me, has to do with the forms, the languages, and the traditions of meaning that can construct that dignity today.

‘If we don’t tell ourselves, they tell us.’ If those forms, languages, and traditions of meaning with which people try to construct a truly democratic politics are not able to save us from that ‘megamutant neoliberal story that absorbs everything,’ as #Bookcamping proposed, many of the undemocratic logics that have led to the crisis will probably repeat themselves.

‘A world can only be stopped by another world,’ wrote the poet María Salgado (2014). A couple of years before, with respect to her reading of the book *El Sur* by Silvia Nanclares (2009), she had also said these words, which will serve me well as the final statement of this investigation, and perhaps the first of others:

Then I thought that perhaps I would like somebody to write all this all this all this that’s happening or that has happened, to narrate it, heck, not as a substitute chronicle, but so that those of us who are living it can perceive it. It seems simple, but it is incredibly difficult. To make us exist, I mean.’ (2012)