

EPILOGUE

Cultures of Anyone: A Proposal for Encounters

Now I imagine this whole book written otherwise. *Now*: now that the two anonymous reviewers have already given their approval to the manuscript, and it will be published by an academic publisher. Now that having secured this publication places me with options to get ‘tenure,’ i.e., a permanent position at the university where I work. It is, incidentally—and clarifying it for those unfamiliar with this system of academic employment—‘tenure’ or the door, no other option.

I imagine now, in any case, a book with a less traditional authorial voice. A book that would show more clearly—although there are some indications already—who writes it, from where he writes it, what experiences and what material and symbolic resources sustain it, what responsibilities and what vital dilemmas and contradictions traverse it. An authorial voice that did not hide its doubts, its shortcomings, its inconsistencies. And perhaps even more important than all that, a voice that does not pretend to be explaining reality from a position of traditional intellectual authority (individual, ‘scientific,’ sanctioned by official, supposedly ‘neutral’ educational and cultural institutions, but implicitly productivist and patriarchal), but rather proposing tools for the democratic development of a common story.

Some of the latter is there already, I’d like to think, at least in regard to the opportunity to give enough space for multiple ‘affected’ and ‘placed’ voices in the debates that I reconstruct. But beyond what I imagine or don’t imagine, I think I still have time in this epilogue to make explicit the proposal for encounters and conversations that I would like this book to be, even with all its imperfections.

A proposal that could be formulated as questions: In what ways can categories like ‘cultures of anyone’ or ‘cultures of experts’ help deepen the democratization processes described in the book? Does it make sense to develop a story that tries to connect such disparate historical processes as Francoist developmentalism and the ‘15M climate’ in the neoliberal crisis? *Cultures of Anyone* proposes possible elements for a common story that

has democratic effects, rescuing pieces here and there, voices, memories, experiences, bodies, and languages for encounters—and not necessarily harmonious ones. It is a book full of holes, edges, and unfinished pieces; it attempts to be a tool for composing with many others. It chooses, despite the consequent risks, to put together many pieces that perhaps are not commonly put together. Its intellectual and political challenge is to draw a broad historical and conceptual contextualization of the cultural democratization processes taking place in the Spanish state during the neoliberal crisis, hoping that this contextualization can empower—to use that key word again—these processes, and other similar ones that may occur in the future.

All this does not mean that the author of *Cultures of Anyone* cares little about ‘reality,’ and that he is dedicated to inventing whatever he wants. It means that, as with any human artifact, this book stems from and is presented to a community of meaning, implicit or explicit, that will actually give value to or remove value from it. This book talks about and *with* people, and to their vulnerable bodies, their living conditions, their passions, their imagination, their ideas, and their aspirations for equality; it owes responsibility.

So I now reread this book as an invitation to meet people who have been and still are. ‘Cultures of anyone’ means those cultures who have chosen to build a collective sense of their lives so that nobody remains excluded from participation in this construction. How did they do it? How can we do it now?

To address these questions—to propose them as meeting spaces—I have had to take many detours, encounter many experiences. Now I imagine this book written as a novel, using literature as the ‘philosophy of the poor’ that, says Ricardo Piglia, helps us understand the ‘pure forms of experience.’ It would begin with a TV set, in 2008, blaring in an empty room with the news, the Newscaster’s Voice, dictating the agenda of reality: every man for himself, difficult times are ahead but we will overcome with our efforts, everything is under control because we have behind us Those Who Know, the Master’s Voice, the Expert’s Voice. Centuries of modernity and advanced technology cannot be wrong. Keep buying, which is good for the economy, and rejoice if you have a job, because having a job today *is a luxury*.

The response to this kind of abrupt Orwellian beginning can only be to take some genealogical distance and to clarify things. The voice of the One Who Knows is not unidirectional, but distributed in echo chambers throughout society: neoliberalism has made us competitors, ‘subject-brands,’ ‘entrepreneurs of ourselves.’ There is, therefore, both a centralized power—a privileged authority in the production of meaning—and a dispersed power everywhere: the one we exercise when we all partake of the commercial

model of existence, which aims to convert human life into an instrument for 'making profits.'

It is the culmination of a long project: the establishment of a 'productive' model of life that (since the eighteenth century) tries to monetarily quantify any social value, to the point of forgetting that the sustenance of life comes first, and is the condition for the existence of money (as explained by Amaia Orozco from a feminist economics perspective). Thus, money becomes paradoxically independent from the reproduction of life, and turns out to be the vehicle for a form of competitive social relationship between individuals who ignore their interdependence. In this way of organizing social relationships, many are doomed to be losers, of course: their lives become expendable because their skills and their value don't translate monetarily.

This book proposes a meeting with some of those people: both those who fall on the side of expendable lives and those who warrant authority and exemplify success in the money game. It is very difficult to do justice to all the archaeological layers of power, exclusion, and subalternity that converge; it is, indeed, ridiculous to expect one author do it in one book. For that reason I rely on many accounts, and propose two in particular as a framework, allowing me to focus the debate on the emergence of a 'power/knowledge syndrome' in modernity (Bauman), and a process of dispossession and devaluation of resources and reproductive capacities at the start of capitalism (Federici).

But back to people: there are the farmers of the Spanish state in the 1950s, at the time when Franco's technocratic disarticulation of rural subsistence cultures is complete, incorporating—precariously—all that population through major economic restructuring plans. The technocrat draws the line where the dam will be built: everything that falls on one side will perish under water. This includes, of course, hunger, endless days of manual labor, patriarchal violence, ecclesiastical control, and other scourges of the countryside. But it also includes traditional knowledge, and the many material and symbolic capabilities that guaranteed subsistence peasant cultures but would not be considered 'productive'—particularly knowledge and skills associated with the reproduction of life, care, and emotional and domestic work, the tasks usually assigned to women in a patriarchy.

In the villages of the Sayago region, notes writer José María Arguedas, there are no more *tertulias* or *seranos*: young people do nothing but go from work to home and from home to work, so much so that even engagements and marriages are scarce. The forms of sociability that do not conform to the new productivism are left out. 'The blessed business is getting everywhere, it's the very devil!' a woman tells Arguedas. And those words travel from

her mouth to these pages, in a conversation spanning decades that builds a possible historical experience.

These voices, their specificity, is, in my reading, what makes the book, yet inevitably what is most missed sometimes. I can't get enough of them. Of all the pieces that this book needs to compose itself, undoubtedly these, the voices placed in concrete historical processes, are the most precious. I wish there were thousands of Arguedases writing them down, and that I had thousands of hours to rewrite them. Not only the voices of peasants, of course, but also those of Francoist technocrats, which appear under-represented, and even those of their heirs, the experts and intellectual elites of democracy, who continue to legitimize the same guidelines for capitalist 'modernization,' through the incorporation of party politics and a Europeanism that leads to the neoliberal exacerbation.

If this book were a novel or an (openly) literary chronicle, it would get even further inside the private rooms of restaurants where the transition was arranged, inside the cocktail soirées that celebrated the marriage of state culture and democracy, and even—why not?—inside the brains of those who made hegemonic a depoliticized interpretation of modern aesthetics. It would share secret meetings with 'men who smoke' and high-flying gatherings with 'men who drink.' But, of course, it would also dive into the sewers of the ideal of the Spanish 'middle class,' which both Francoism and parliamentary democracy assumed as the sociological support to justify their policies as forms of 'normalization.' It would look for the traces of that lag historians point out between mesocratic images that have been used to represent the majority of society and the economic and cultural practices of those majorities. It would also investigate the persistence of collective inferiority complexes that have been so important to the guilty invisibilization of all forms of life that did not conform to that capitalist productivism which has been called 'modernity.'

But it would not do it simply out of an anecdotal nor even a micropolitical desire. It would just try to go further in giving space to the forms of self-representation that problematize sociological stereotypes and democratize the production of meaning. Nobody is normal when seen up close (and especially when you really listen). Up close, the multiplicity of experience appears, and it is never easily translatable into rigid social categories, especially when a transformative collective experience emerges, one that does not merely reproduce the prevailing forms of life, but reshapes them. I agree with Charlotte Nordmann's reading: neither Bourdieu nor Rancière is entirely right, but both have good reasons. The cycle of domination never repeats itself exactly, it is always transformed, but not every moment of this transformation is the same. In some cases, there is

a ‘redistribution of the sensible,’ which always arises from concrete social contradictions. With its limitations, *Cultures of Anyone* intends, as Nordmann says, to ‘circumscribe the historical conditions of emancipation’ (189), i.e., to give an account of how certain transformative collective experiences have emerged, circa 2011, from a series of social contradictions—notably, from the contradiction between the extreme precariousness that neoliberalism was creating and the existence of rich possibilities for empowerment of and collaboration by large sectors of the precarized population.

‘The network experience is a bit like LSD in the ‘60s: a different, unreal but real experience that stays in your memory because you have actually experienced what you have experienced: the ability to converse with strangers, to cross borders, to self-transform, to easily create, etc.’ (Padilla 2013). In the plazas of the 15M, that experience is explored with an overwhelming passion. With much uncertainty, too, because it’s not clear where you’re going, as the filmmaker Cecilia Barriga (2014), who filmed this experience lovingly, said:

[There was a] very strong impression of being cast adrift, so many different people in the same boat. The feeling that we could drown, that it could fall at any time, not because of the police but because of ourselves. Every day in Sol was a conquest, everything depended on us. (Fernández Savater and Barriga)

The experience of the squares emerges, as Julia Ramírez Blanco (2014) said in her indispensable book *Utopías artísticas de revuelta*, not just as ‘political empowerment,’ but also as ‘expressive empowerment,’ which activates the ability to experiment with building a different society (24). Not only an explicit demand, not only a series of requests to the institutions, but rather ‘a systemic approach that speaks of the possibility of a radical self-organization, of an existence without formal hierarchies, of forms of volunteer work and non-monetary economy, and community life where care is collective’ (236). A lifestyle that directly confronts not only the neoliberal logic, but also the monopoly of the production of meaning by the mass media, intellectuals, and the ‘experts.’ And of course, the revenge of the Voice of He Who Knows was swift.

But if this ‘cultural revolution,’ or ‘process of emancipation,’ fails to materialize in strong and sustainable institutions at first, I think it’s not so much because of the counter-attack of an establishment whose cultural and intellectual legitimacy is rather worn. The danger, indeed, is perhaps not so much the ‘police’ but ‘ourselves.’ Or rather the police *in* ourselves. After the plazas, the order of those who know and those who don’t know tends to constantly resurface, and of course the precariousness of a life forced to

compete to survive remains, exerting a brutal structural violence against those who lack sufficient material and symbolic capital to be 'entrepreneurs of themselves.' Even in areas most sensitive to the 'cultural' dimensions of social movements (to the experimental construction of meaning and subjectivity), it is extremely difficult to challenge neoliberalism by building networks capable of sustainable economic solidarity while enabling spaces for 'expressive empowerment.' The self-managed community spaces and the attempts to reclaim the public for these collaborative economies and democratic cultures face the constant extraction of social wealth by the financial economy in the context of the neoliberal city. They must also negotiate the constant tension between the movements' experimental, 'expressive,' creator-of-forms-of-existence instinct and the overwhelming persistence of the neoliberal management of lives.

This raises something I have not had time to analyze directly in this book, but that inevitably overhangs it from start to finish: the longing for other kinds of institutions, not self-managed but representative, which could curb neoliberal precarization from within the system of political parties. The cycle of the 'assault on the institutions' has begun. There is little that I can contribute explicitly about this here, but at the same time, it is undeniable that if *Cultures of Anyone* can be a meeting place at the juncture of the democratization processes in the neoliberal crisis, it undoubtedly will be by offering a point of view that scarcely allows an understanding of that 'assault on the institutions' as an integrative culmination of the 'cultures of anyone.' In as much as there can be many intersections and mutual intensifications, I think this book can help to perceive them as different things, and to not give value to one by taking it away from another.

There is, however, a recurrent argument used to justify the need for taking the step from the '15M climate' to that 'assault on the institutions.' It is said (see, e.g., Alba Rico 2014) that most people cannot 'participate' in the political process because they do not have the time, resources, interest, or skills. The creation of electoral platforms would then establish a necessary political representation for those who cannot participate. But there is some misunderstanding, it seems to me, in this conception of political 'participation,' because it excludes the dimension of the construction of meaning, in which everyone is always involved: like it or not, everyone speaks, everyone thinks and gives meaning to what happens to them. Politics necessarily involves 'participation' in the construction of meaning, which in this book I have called 'the collective elucidation of a life with dignity.' During the neoliberal crisis in Spain there have been some attempts at democratizing such elucidation. Although it is certainly not obvious how to compose these democratization processes with the institutional

transformations necessary to stop the neoliberal attack, I don't think the best way of conceiving their relationship is to put them in a finalist sequence in which the first would be a mere preparatory step for the second. The dimension of construction of meaning and subjectivity can never be erased; it is a form of constant political and collective participation that cannot be dismissed.

From the Argentina experience, the Colectivo Situaciones (Gago, Sztulwark, and Picotto 2014) has provided very valuable reflections on what happens when the dimension of 'subjective excess' that is part of the movements is marginalized. I think that participating in what they call 'the aspects not subject to demands' of the movements is not necessarily to become an 'activist,' but transforming the framework of sense in which one organizes its reality. And the question is, how many people did this, to whatever extent, when 15M questioned the—until then untouchable—quality of the Spanish democratic system, when it showed that the alleged passivity and egoism of 'people' could become solidarity, that one need not belong to the group of 'those who know' to have dignity? Why do we have to assume that some 'could not' or 'didn't have the abilities to' participate in that new construction of meaning?

Colectivo Situaciones raises another fundamental idea: the conception of politics that tends to ignore the value of those subjective transformations is the one that understands it as a 'conflict of interest' and 'construction of hegemony,' on a reading of Ernesto Laclau's thinking, which has influenced what they call 'progressive governmentality' in Latin America. The importance of Laclau and the experience of Latin American progressivism for members of Podemos's executive board is well known, so Situaciones raises the call for a South-South dialogue in this key moment, and also provides the suggestion to think of politics, with Deleuze, not as a conflict of interest, but as a 'line of flight' or, more specifically, as a 'subtraction from structures and hierarchies that assign values to life.' Societies are not only transformed by conflicts between opposing parties, but also because sometimes they flee the established order, paving the way for other forms of life. The *piqueteros* and the practice of *escraches* (activist demonstrations outside the target's home or workplace) in Argentina, for example, rose up not only a demand to institutions for jobs and justice, but also for an 'escape from a society of labor and justice already impossible in the terms known,' which in turn 'led—in the case of following the line of flight—to the need to invent new ways of understanding the collective praxis.'

Besides the argument about the impossibility of participation by all, there has appeared another, perhaps even more widespread, justification for a departure, or at least a change of direction from the practices of social

movements such as the 15M to the ‘assault on the institutions.’ It is the famous idea of the ‘glass ceiling’: movements have reached the limit of their processing capacity, and it is necessary to conquer political institutions to go further and stop the march of the neoliberal attack. To that argument, again one could reply that it is based on a reductionist reading of what the movements do, that it underestimates their abilities to change ways of life with their ‘lines of flight.’

However, it also opens another, perhaps even more disturbing, uncertainty because the truth is that almost no one denies the need for change in the political institutions in order to stop neoliberal policies (surveys show that there is, as they say in Podemos, a ‘social majority’ hoping for this change). But what the Latin American experience also shows is that, in reality, it is unclear whether it is possible for the state to depart from neoliberalism. What appears in Argentina’s progressive governmentality, according to *Situaciones*, is a version of neoliberalism which, together with significant tactical advances, maintains a strong financialization of the economy, with such problematic issues as the ‘pattern of accumulation and acquisition of currencies (the financial system, agribusiness, mega-mining, concentration, and foreign ownership of the economy, etc.)’ Laval and Dardot have been even more emphatic on this subject: ‘The populism that says it rules “on behalf of the masses” is not an alternative to neoliberal rationality, but instead merely reinforces it’ (Fernández-Savater, Malo, and Ávila 2014). Raquel Gutiérrez has exemplified this in the cases of Ecuador and Bolivia:

Mr. Correa and Mr. Morales, and the governments they lead, seem to have conceded too much in terms of reconstruction of formats and laws, an institutional and legal scaffolding absolutely consistent with the order of accumulation of capital. With a rather different order of capital accumulation that, for example, in the case of Bolivia, limits and tries to cut ties with the most powerful transnational corporations in the world that previously had a hold there; but then that capital accumulation becomes linked again to other interests, such as those of the Brazilian oligarchy. (2014)

The comparison between Latin America and Spain has all kinds of limitations, of course, and I think some of them may speak of interesting prospects for Spaniards to deal with these problems more successfully. The issue is very complex, but let me just ask here if it’s not true that in some of the institutional platforms that have emerged in the Spanish state to curb neoliberalism there is a very important sensitivity towards ‘politics from below.’ This seems certainly true in Barcelona en Comú, which has worked hard to articulate itself with neighborhood movements—making its own the

Zapatista motto of ‘caminar preguntando’, to walk asking questions—but also in Ahora Madrid and other municipalist platforms. Even with respect to Podemos, despite its drift towards a seemingly more statist populism and its flirtations with a technocratic discourse, I do not think one can say that the experience of collective intelligence and empowering of the 15M cycle is no longer relevant at all.

It is not so hard to imagine, I think, a ‘multilevel politics’ as Situaciones says, or a network in which Podemos and the municipal electoral platforms like Barcelona en Comú and Ahora Madrid are just another node, and have to work with many other nodes of social movements and citizens, as Margarita Padilla proposes: a distribution of roles in which the takeover of the institutions would not involve an interruption of the lines of flight and the creative possibilities opened by the movements to other ways of life, but rather its intensification. A non-‘state-centric’ politics, as has been proposed by Raquel Gutiérrez and Amador Fernández-Savater. Because, as Débora Ávila and Marta Malo wrote:

to break through the glass ceiling against which we often stumble, and to build the foundation for a good life, there are more ways than the electoral. Roads we travel and others that we must dare to make. Small realities, palpable, inhabited, to build an independent voice that can dialogue with institutions and demand that they ‘govern by obeying,’ but from a radical difference. (2014)

Finally, without further speculation about the future, *Cultures of Anyone* would also like to be, here and now, a meeting place for those who try to ‘caminar preguntando’ inside institutions of knowledge, which often suggest, conversely, that we ‘make our way hastily without talking to anybody.’ As I say, I imagine a version of this book based much more on conversations with people affected by what is told in it, but for this I must also imagine some institutional conditions that would allow it: how to not just talk about but to *do* ‘cultures of anyone’ from within the American Academy?

I pose this question as an invitation to collaborate. The task is immense, but there are abundant opportunities for more or less immediate action. Perhaps the first and most accessible step is that of simply improving communication between the world of Hispanic studies in the United States (and in general, but I focus on the area that I know firsthand) and different spaces and projects of the ‘cultures of anyone’ in the Spanish state. The relations between these two worlds can build interesting alliances as long as, I think, they involve a ‘contagion’ of democratic practices for academia, which can lead to institutional transformations. In the field of publishing,

for example, it does not seem very risky to expect in the coming years an important extension of free culture practices to university spaces (and the publication of this book in free access is, in this sense, a small symptom about which I am obviously pleased).

But taking seriously the possibility of supporting from within academic institutions a democratization that stands up to centuries of cultural and social stratification aggravated by the wild emergence of neoliberal inequality will certainly require much more than the publication of our texts in *open access* format. Transforming research in Hispanic ('peninsular,' 'Iberian') studies into a truly democratic conversation with people who have the right to self-representation would, today, mean having to redo countless practices, theoretical assumptions, forms of distribution of epistemic and material resources. Significant difficulties persist in even developing collective research, which substantially reduces the quality of the work. The eternal tendency to self-referentiality in academic practices renders the 'objects of study' pretexts to fulfill researchers' professional demands, reducing their ability to participate in true transformations of collective knowledge. However, the explosion of collaborative practices developed by the 'experts in what happens to them' during the Spanish neoliberal crisis seems particularly conducive to altering these dynamics. The infrastructure and resources of US 'Hispanism' could help a lot and benefit greatly from contact with these processes that are already under way, often—if not always—in very precarious conditions.

There are, of course, productivist dynamics and crucial job insecurity issues hampering the development of projects of real collaboration between the university and self-organized sectors of society. In very general terms, this collaboration would require exponentially increasing recognition of 'social responsibility' across the professional activity of researchers and teachers, incorporating this recognition as a criterion of value at all levels, including job recruitment. This, of course, would clash with the individualistic, competitive dynamics that underlie the material functioning of most institutions of knowledge. Like any other institution strongly integrated into the logic of the global financialized economy, the university is structurally part of the logic of competition and the corporatization of oneself that characterizes neoliberalism.

That does not mean that concrete steps cannot be taken to adopt protocols for local action to counter these logics, and to open spaces for other ways of building collective value. Today, here and now, the studies of Iberian contemporary cultures seem, I insist, to be a particularly favorable field in which to do this.