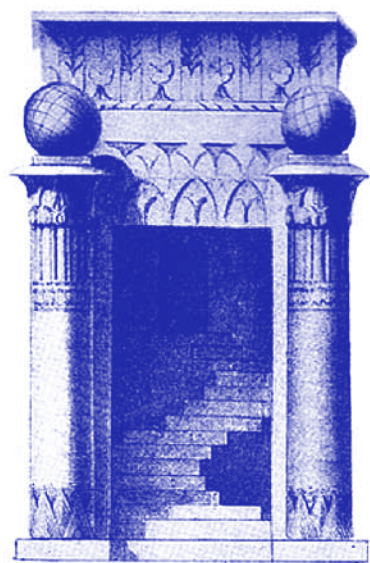


mountain-
islandglacier

Mountainislandglacier is an
ortographic error; a poor
translation of the icelandic
name *Eyja fjallajökull*.

A volume forged in the foul vapours of a decadent Europe that manages to coagulate the remaining knowledge of a solemn land; of a world that is living in borrowed time.

MM XI



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Introduction

5 · Regina de Miguel & Lorenzo Sandoval

Avrupa'ılaştıracı bildiklerimizden misiniz?

7 · Urszula Wozniak

The New Land

17 · Antonio R. Montesinos

Alfa Male and beta c@mps

23 · Maria Ptqk

Europe as Symptom

41 · Regina de Miguel

Comunities under Variable Weather Conditions

53 · Emanuele Guidi

Interview to Professor Roberto Meira

63 · Javier Fresneda

The (Im)possible Border: where is 'East' East from?

73 · Markus Miessen

A Climate Within

83 · Pavla Ascher

Nantes — Barcelona Barcelona — Nantes

95 · Nicolas Malevé & Laurence Rassel

A Storm Cloud over Europe

107 · Santiago Erasó

Unité d'organization. Cité Raieuse.

115 · Lorenzo Sandoval

¿Rebuild Europe from the Periphery?

129 · Juan Freire

Berliner Olympiastadion

141 · Eduardo Hurtado

Introduction to Djordje Bojić's "To Warmann"

151 · John Holten

Oiropa

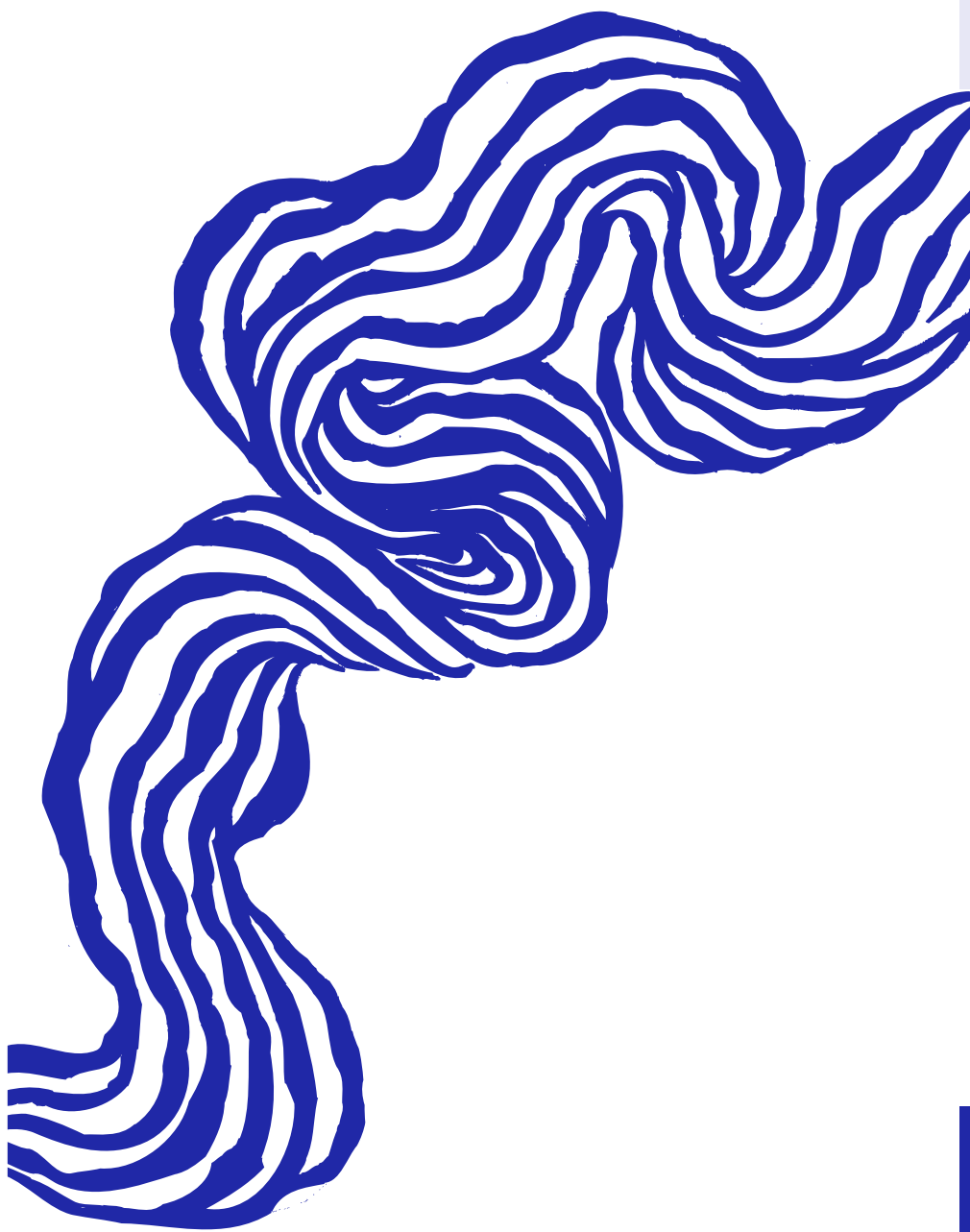
161 · Alan Pauls

An Incomplete Dictionary of the Future of Europe

177 · Markus Miessen (Appendix)

Biographies

187 · Authors and Collaborators



The project *Correspondence from Eyjafjallajökull*, which comprises part of this publication, had as its starting point the eruption of what is now known as the Icelandic volcano. The eruption of the ash cloud that paralyzed air traffic and that exploded onto the communal geographic imagination, helped us to begin an open process of reflection viewing the unease inscribed in the idea of Europe through a variety of lenses.

This temporary suspension of air travel within Europe returned us to a time in which the idea of travel in Europe was made possible only by land. The continent was discovered in a panic reaction because it seemed we were returning to another time, an unthinkable and obsolete cost within the current organization of time, a product of late capitalism. This cloud moreover appeared like an imperfect shape with undefined margins that clearly reflected the way in which European identity had been constructed: smoke, that in its beginnings left no room for transparency, while spreading invisibly.

The elusive identity of the EU has been constituted by a forced boundary. No doubt based on the tradition of cartographically placing the Old World at the centre, in opposition to *the other*, defining, among other things, the Eurocentric differentiation characteristic of coloniality, thereby shaping its profile in the face of the cultural identities at the periphery. Appealing to an intellectual tradition that does not correspond to its geopolitical borders, the EU has inherited the unresolved conflict of having to define itself from the outside and not from the inside. It has failed to synchronize either economically or culturally the countries that form or that want to

join the Union. In addition to the internal conflicts that remain, there are others to solve. The most obvious and clear example being the integration of Islam. The solution to these problems has been permanently postponed and their magnitude has not been comprehended until now, they have shown once again with extreme clarity the marked difference between the centre and the undefined periphery; essentially a real zone of economic friction.

Recent ultra-liberal policies have only served to exacerbate the unease. The measures that keep appearing day after day, taken by governments at the behest of a dictatorial market, point to a failure of a system of values that was considered inviolable, a blurring of the idea of state and a welfare project that seems consumed by the same energy that should be motivating it. However, we should not forget to consult history in order to re-think the future. Perhaps we could see that things must not be thus, simply from a glance at the alternatives they suggest.

The publication *Mountain Island Glacier* is not intended to be a general study of the current situation in Europe. This is a book in which members of the project have collaborated with a number of partners to create a polyphonic discourse. Although each of the proposals are articulated in different registers and from multiple perspectives, all share the intention of questioning the paradigm of Europeanism as it is currently offered.

October 2011

Alpha Male and beta c@mps

María Ptqk

I am writing this text in Berlin at the end of May 2011, while about me resound the echoes of what is happening in the Plaza del Sol. It is impossible that my thoughts do not wander in that direction; impossible not to see in these events a sign — yet another — of something that the analysts from various disciplines have been saying for years. I don't refer (only) to the breaking up of the idea of Europe as an historical, political and social project, nor to the inability to sustain the European Union as a transnational institution, but to something broader and more diffuse: the crisis of power of certain models of political thought encompassed in what we might call *The European Intellectual Tradition*.

The question that inspires this text is to what extent the experiences of 15M teach us about the decadence of this intellectual tradition. And, to answer, I propose to begin by stating the obvious: the manner in which this movement has been understood and communicated by the mass media, (that, whether we like it or not, is the place where the production of ideas is more visible and moreover, more powerful). We are aware of the theory that, with few exceptions, inspires much of the well-versed criticism from these domains of power. The “movement of the outraged” is not bad — it is colorful, friendly, enthusiastic, youthful — but half-baked: there are no spokespersons, there are no programmes, no clear proposals, no organization, and as a result, there are no serious politics.

And I wonder why not. From whose idea of politics and from which intellectual tradition is this judgement formulated? I wonder what forms of *other*-politics are at stake in these networks, assemblies and camps, and what coordinates we need to orient ourselves and move forward.

My view is that these demonstrations indicate a certain shift in the idea of what it means to be political, and a good place to think about this shift is in the critique of the *alpha male*, understood as the set of dominant paradigms that determine which models of political action and thought are valid, and which not; paradigms that, to put it simply, are derived the Eurocentric court; enlightened and rationalist, that is: civilizing and colonial. So that I am fully understood: I do not wish to say that 15M is a non-Eurocentric movement, but yes, I do believe that the modes of functioning

in play here question a *certain intellectual tradition* that, taking into account the influence of the idea of Europe on the formation of Western culture, we can consider as European; and taking into account the weight of Western culture on the history of the world, we can consider it as hegemonic.

I use the expressions 15M, camps, outraged, etc. for practical reasons, but without forgetting that the movement to which I refer does not have one, but many names, and neither was it born or will it die in the Plaza del Sol. Furthermore, I say it here; it is not important for me to know *how it will end* or *if it has served any purpose* because I understand that these criteria of finality and purpose form part precisely of the idea of politics that this movement brings into question.

The alpha male as a world project

The alpha male is not male, nor is he white, nor middle-aged, nor heterosexual (although it is true that the individuals who enjoy being recognized as such almost always meet at least three of these characteristics). The alpha male is a paradigm, i.e. that which the philosopher Thomas Kuhn defined as the set of modes of thought that prevails as valid during a certain historical period, firstly because they correspond with accepted social values, and secondly because it proves useful to explain and resolve the problems of their time. Alpha male stands, then, as a synonym for the norms that – explicitly and implicitly – govern the world.

The intellectual tradition of the alpha male is not itself defined by geographical or jurisdictional elements, but by the structures of power within which it operates, presided over mainly by the idea of modernity: “a philosophical, historiographical and sociological concept that can be defined as a project to impose reason as the transcendental norm of society”.¹ The rhetoric of modernity – and all its ramifications: the Cartesian principal of reason, the myth of progress, the incessant search for novelty, the lineal temporality projected toward an always better future, domination over technology, (of certain technologies), as a proof of moral superiority, etc – is a colonial character to the extent in which it *naturalizes and normalizes* these models of thought and exports them – or imposes them – as the Model of Reference.² It is the strategy of the neutral masculine.

Thinkers, in what in English is known as *decoloniality*, distinguish between colonialism – which is the presence of colonial administrations in a territory – and coloniality – which are the

cultural, linguistic, ethnic, epistemological, spiritual or symbolic power structures that survive when the colonial administrations have been dismantled. According to civilizing European thought, along the same lines that the male-white-Judeo-Christian-heterosexual is the model of reference for *the human*, western philosophy is *the philosophy*, western science is *the science* and western thought models, of whatever kind, are *the models of thought*. The rest are beliefs, traditions, myth or folklore.³

The idea of a paradigm appears to contain two paradoxes at its root. On one side, although it is situated in a specific historical context – hence, relative – to be formulated as a model, it aspires to a decontextualized position, that is, *universal*. On the other side, because although formally based on values both neutral and objective, in order to be effective, the paradigm must become fiction: myth, narrative, history, historiography. Its strength comes precisely from this capacity to consider itself in a way that hides its circumstantial character and to propose itself in absolute terms.

In this sense, there's poetic justice in the fact that 15M began in the old Al Andalus a few months after the uprisings in North Africa, and in tune with the demonstrations in Greece, (a country whose consecration as the official birthplace of Western civilisation was made at the expense of the influence of the Phoenicians and the Egyptians in the formation of Hellenic culture);⁴ or that the references for the assemblies in Spanish neighbourhoods are the selfsame experiences of Latin America, and in particular, of Argentina post *corralito*; or that all of this occurs at the same time that some of the countries in the Union are calling for the dismantling of the Schengen zone and a return to the old national borders, and are questioning the viability of the common currency, (borders and money that are, precisely, symbols of the European construction for the people who simply live there). It's as if suddenly in Europe, *this invention* based on a linear and *natural* evolution, was being torn apart at the seams.

Our models of political thought are also characterized by civilizational paradigms. Proof of this is in the fact that to be taken seriously, from the point of view of the alpha male, the practices that aspire to be considered as *political* must overcome something akin to the cotton test of the philosophy of western politics. This test of legitimacy is inspired by the ideal of abstract knowledge and structured with a beginning, a development and an end. It manifests itself as programmes, organizations and the accomplishments of goals. Coming from the European intellectual tradition; colonialist

and enlightened, only the political practices that are geared toward a project of progress – in the sense of a project *with purpose* – are considered political practices. The rest are funny, something other: performance, disturbance and utopia.



Camp library • Madrid, 2011

We, the ones who think

But let's return to the mass media. As we know, one of the most interesting phenomena of the 15M movement has been the reaction of writers, columnists and left-wing thinkers. They have, almost unanimously, responded as if this were a kind of generational conscription and they are intent on making the most of their VIP passes, putting all their argumentative arsenal to the service of the delegitimization of the movement.⁵ Although they are dragging their feet, treading carefully and in most cases appearing utterly confused. It is as if they did not need to explain why they are against the movement exactly, or as if they were a little ashamed in finding so much fault. In part, this can be explained by the unconscious impulse to attack when the territory which they consider their own, is threatened; an apparently rational impulse – rationalized – but at root, animal. They feel disorientated, obsolete and undermined; and they understand why. But these reactions illustrate a wider shift: the struggle between an established pattern of thought and *conforming with the norm* and a new, nameless and formless pattern, (or with

many names and many forms), that, from the perspective of the political rationale of the alpha male, is incomprehensible. Everyone rushed to the plazas, is sleeping in the streets, making improvised banners by hand, chanting slogans that we don't know where they came from, naming the revolution with messages of four or five words (with abbreviations!). Face it: it seems a bit primitive.⁷

In the opinion of Irit Rogoff, there is a difference between critical thinking — the capacity to analyze a problem from the intellectual toolbox that we learn to use in school — and what she calls criticality.⁶ While critical thinking gives to the subjects a series of signs and messages with which to interpret reality and influence it, criticality puts the subjects in the center of the problem, inviting them, not to think about it, but to *live it*. Therein lies the key to 15-M: it does not invite you to join an effectuated debate, nor just to think collectively about something, but to inhabit it and from there, make it your own. As Amador Fernández-Savater has it:

“A less abstract manifesto, a more coherent political programme, less ambitious claims, these would not have led to this successful level of participation. It was the inexact nature of the call that made it appealing to so many individuals, social groups and disparate ages. It was the absence of a superior hierarchical entity to act as convener that had encouraged so many people to join and actively participate, to feel that the protests and the occupation of Puerta del Sol was something their own.”⁸

The peculiarity of this movement, therefore, is not in what it demands, but in how the protestors shape and inhabit these physical spaces or symbols of demand. It is not a difference in respect to the *what*: it is a difference in the *how*. For this reason, when I say that what is occurring here is a challenge to the thought patterns of “conforming to the norm”, I don't refer to the actual content of the demands but the modes of thinking and action that they make possible.

An example: we could say that to defend the immediate and unconditional dismantling of global capitalism is an idea that doesn't conform to the norm. But to do so from a stage presided over by just one banner or under one slogan, is to do so with a language that conforms to the norm. What a named individual does, and through this gesture becomes a referent to the masses coated in a glorious identity, is also a model of subjective conforming. A norm that, I repeat, is linked to a determined political tradition: white, masculine, rationalist and heroic. Another example: Respondents in the Puerta del Sol to the journalist Daniel Mermet,⁸ two repre-

sentatives of Attac Spain recall that the demands made from the camps are the same that their organization have been demanding for years, centred on criticism of financial deregulation. “We are happy that at last the message has arrived.” Yes, but then, why did Attac never achieve such mobilization? Perhaps because their proposals, like those of many other groups of the traditional left, are taken, are rejected or debated, but never invite the citizen to inhabit them.

15M modernizes political mobilization tactics that, as endlessly repeated across the networks, did not appear out of nowhere. This is the history of digital activism, with its conception of the free circulation of knowledge and its experience of the network’s powers of distribution. This is the heritage of the cyberfeminists and queer theorists, with their defence of disidentification – or the play of fluid identities – as a tactic of the subversion of the language and resistance against power codes. And these are the philosophies of the south, that insist upon wresting the position that the global economy is the axis of the power relations – as if only within the global economy are manifest the structures of power, regardless of the multiple dimensions of power relations: gender, race, sexuality, epistemological paradigms, the symbolic realm, spirituality – from a typically eurocentric point of view. From all these fronts – and many others, found on the margins of hegemonic culture – have sprung different means of thinking about politics and of being political: forms that exceed the level of rational argument, collective identities and structured organizations, and that reclaim and inhabit the political as a space in which there are *possibilities (or impossibilities) of agency*.

With 15M, these possibilities of agency have appeared precisely in the two points toward which the authorized thinkers have directed the major part of their criticism: on the one hand, the predominant role of distributed communication; and on the other hand, the experience of the camps and the assemblies. Across the networks and in the plazas, we debate propositions, of course, but above all we share practices of *how to be political*. And I say how to *be* in the most humble and artisan sense of the word.

Online and from below

The European intellectual tradition, as we have said, presents itself as knowledge without body and without conditions, that observes the world from a zenith position, typically Renaissance, (the eye of God). Against this, the Chicano and black feminists, but also

Cyborg theorists like Dona Hathaway say: no, knowledge is always a knowledge that is situated. It is not that ideas are the children of their time; it is that the ideas *are* the time[s], the space, subject, the community, the language and the bodies that formulate them. Everything is always thought from some place. Walter de Mignolo, referring to scientific knowledge, affirms:

“The decolonial project begins precisely there (...). He wonders in which distribution networks of scientific work and knowledge classification he will find who is the observer and who the announcer. He asks himself what body does the announcing body inhabit.”¹⁰

Decolonial feminism uses the concept of intersectionality to analyze the power relations that traverse the classifications of power in the world designed by the alpha male. There are the factors of gender, race, class and sexuality, but also others such as pedagogical models – how is what one knows acquired and transmitted – and the epistemological paradigms – “the historical, psychological and



Camp library • Madrid, 2011

sociological circumstances that lead to the obtaining of knowledge and the criteria by which such is justified or validated”.¹¹

Another example. I am not a writer, I'm a blogger. It is a manner of writing, yes, but it is a lesser form: marginal, incomplete, fragmentary and conversational. It is a form of writing that requires a handle to distinguish yourself from the *normal* writer, identified by the essay or literature as major genres: central, unilateral, complete and with a vocation for totality. If the essay or literature are the masculine neutral, the blogger would be the female, what is assumed to be there, but by default is not considered. A week after the camps began, I wrote in my blog:

“Everyone has their story. Mine, with regards to 15M, is directly connected to the years of social life spent via the internet. For *social life*, I understand making friends, falling in love, sharing, reading, impressions, songs and pictures, creating a public space and experimenting with its limits and its potentials, making networks of affection, opening up niches of trust, starting distribution families and real solidarities. For *via the internet*, I want to say with the digital networks as channels of communication and as territory that always – and I say always – has its impact on the tangible. They call it devirtualized, but it is something more: it is growing together, it is inventing a possibility of life together, it is, in the words of another generation, *we have read the same books*, that has nothing to do with books, clearly. It has to do with language: with the shared language that constitutes a shared point of view on reality.”¹²

Enrique Vila-Matas said in an article published in the throes of passion that: “tweets are an attack on the complexity of a world that is trying to read”.¹³ The complexity – I replied from the blog – is not in the tweet but in the conversation that weaves in real time between millions of users. We write short sentences, but they are short sentences that answer one to the other and that are forwarded to much longer sentences, to blogs, to videos, radio programmes, playlists, films and documentaries, press articles and digital multimedia. And if this happens on the streets as well, as said in another tweet, it is because we are potentially a permanent assembly. Days later, Kamen Nedev published, also online, the following:

“In reality, what we have around us is something very distinct from the political demonstrations of the past. We are witnessing the moment in which the Network-Society is realizing its ability to articulate political will. With the result that, nothing, neither the declarations, nor the agency, nor the demands reflect anything we have seen before. Thus, the organizational

structure of this leaderless movement is heir to the culture of free software: maximum access, multiple channels of participation and dialogue, and a pragmatic and efficient organization. Hence the shock, and hence, in part, the fascination it provokes.”¹⁴

The artist and critic Fito Rodriguez notes two other aspects, typically complex, that in his opinion demonstrate to a high degree the self-consciousness of these movements:

“One is its capacity to generate maps, to create outlines of their own evolution, and to be able to visualize themselves as a living and fighting organism. Another is its capacity to generate an archive. If anything differentiates this revolution from others, is its incorporation from the first moment as a central mechanism. The movement is not only broadcaster, but also archivist, as it is understood in a more creative, more generative sense. The pregnancy of the image of the camps, of the banners and the assemblies, is of such a force that all of its power can begin to freeze or melt at any moment. Working with living images in order not to fall into monumentality is also to create the conditions to generate resilient thought.”¹⁵

In short: we also think, but we do it together, online, as we go along and from below. And from this common ground that is online — physical and virtual, physical although virtual, physical because virtual — we defend the value of our labyrinthine vision and our right to *think politically* as autonomous and liberated subjects, outside the norms of preeminent intellectualism characterized by the alpha male.

Take the Streets. Create the Plazas

The emotional, the vitality, the artistic dimension, the performativity, the immediacy...All of these that the serious thinkers consider to be elements of weakness are, conversely, the source of our power. They reproach us for not proposing an “alternative of social transformation or emancipation”,¹⁶ without understanding that the alternative is, precisely, in this *other* means of being political.

“The key is in Sol,” they said on twitter. Indeed. Because to take the global economy as an exclusive domain is reductionist, it is also to forget the experience of the bodies: the bodies that camp, that give away fruit, that share sun block so they don’t get burned during the assemblies; the bodies that in place of applauding, twirl their hands with their arms raised so as not to drown out the voice

of the speaker. Ariane Berthoin Antal warns about the lack of attention paid to bodies in the process of acquiring knowledge. She calls it *bodily knowing*:

“Antonio Strati has repeatedly warned that researchers continue making ‘the cognitive and rational error of ignoring the bodies of the people involved in the decision process and only considering their minds’. Throughout the literature on organizational learning, knowing is usually reduced to what takes place in and is retained by the brain. But organizational learning occurs throughout the individuals who participate in experiences and these individuals have bodies: undeniable but overlooked.”¹⁷

Some of this is captured in the anonymous phrase that spread like wildfire through the social networks: “this is not about taking the streets, but about creating the plazas”.¹⁸ Continuing with the metaphor, taking the streets, (this *central and rectilinear* element of urban planning that is so phallic), is like taking the power: from one delegation, it would pass to the next. The idea of taking the plazas is more spectacular, because more people fit – like the womb, the plazas are containers – and because they contain a more totalitarian impulse, to capture the collective identity, (the plazas have always been the place of the multitude). But to *create the plazas* is another thing altogether. It is not to change one authority for another and it is not to make a spectacle of the masses. To create the



“Liberated” billboard • Madrid, 2011

plazas is to re-found the space for the community: it is laying the foundation so that this diversity can express itself, mature, pollinate and mutate. It is to construct multiple territories, overlapping and, if necessary, contradictory, in which there is speaking, listening, touching, smelling, seeing, sleeping, eating and sharing sun block, and where they can evolve as individuals and as a collective.

Rogoff, once more, developing the concept of criticality, stresses that in human groups those that are most important, do not produce in isolation, but within intricate networks of connections in which the physical presence — the sharing of certain determined factual conditions of time and place: *we are together, here, now* — is fundamental. From her point of view, the people who participate in a given situation make more sense because in this situation, they project their respective subjectivities, but above all because they share some common conditions of space and time. These situations are meaningless in and of themselves but make sense as means through which they function as *realms of possibility* for the participants to develop their own meanings.

This, says Rogoff, ultimately assumes the acceptance that there doesn't exist inherent meanings that must be unraveled from analysis or intellectual knowledge, but that the meanings *are* in what is *occurring*.¹⁹ Silvia Nanclares voices a similar opinion, in her own words: "Yes, the assemblies are mind-numbingly boring, but they are constructive. I did not say productive. They don't necessarily produce fruits, they produce meaning and they produce experience".²⁰

The plazas that we want, then, are those symbolic places; joyous, uninhibited, non-hierarchical, temporarily autonomous and constructive — although not necessarily nor immediately productive — in which many singularities join together with their bodies and their histories, without anyone giving an order, to tackle the territory that is fundamentally the politic of the community. And I repeat, there is the potentially transformative pulse of this movement: the side of what in Europe they would call wild.

Conclusiones en Beta

The viral banner "The revolution will be feminist or it will not be" was found torn up across many of the camps, probably because it was understood that included in the common agenda are the claims of single groups. Mistake. What this banner says is that to make revolution is always and inevitably to reinvent politics, and to reinvent politics assumes demasculinizing it and decolonizing it from the

constructed territory of the conqueror. As noted by Isabel Galcerán:

“One of the first requirements of the new politics will have to be to care for and protect the communal character and the shared power, understood now not as power to govern the rest, but as relations of mutual dependency in a shared space.”²¹

This is to displace the alpha male: to place at the forefront the diversity of the subjects that speak without hiding the place from where they speak, to prioritize the care of this common territory ahead of predetermined goals, and develop “categories and practices that achieve a non-standardized agency, not some absolute truth or infallible actions”.²² What Rogoff calls: access to another mode of *habitation*.

Notes

1. See entry “modernity” in Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernity>. All links for this text were last consulted in June, 2011.
2. The following ideas about decolonial theory come from notes taken at a seminar given by Ramón Grosfoguel in May, 2011, in the Institut für Europäische Ethnologie / Humboldt-Universität, Berlin.
3. Mignolo, Walter, “Regeneración y reciclaje: descolonizar la ciencia y la biotecnología para liberar la vida” in Mendiola, Ignacio (Ed.), “Rostos y rostros de la biopolítica”, Anthropos, Barcelona 2009.
4. For more on Hellenic culture, see Martin Bernal, “Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985” Rutgers University Press, 1987.
5. For example: Delgado, Manuel “15m: el peligro ciudadano”, published in his blog <http://manueldelgadoruiz.blogspot.com/2011/05/el-peligro-ciudadano-intervencion-en.html>; Serra, Màrius, “Campiña electoral”, published in the newspaper La Vanguardia: <http://www.lavanguardia.com/opinion/articulos/20110520/54156975205/campina-electoral.html>; Monzó, Quim, “He aquí la Spanish Revolution” published in the newspaper La Vanguardia: <http://www.lavanguardia.com/opinion/articulos/20110519/54156645763/he-aqui-la-spanish-revolution.html>; Vila-Matas, Enrique, “Empobrecimiento”, published in El País: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/Empobrecimiento/elpepicul/20110524elpepicul_4/Tes
6. Translator’s note: I have chosen here not to translate the word ‘plaza’ to its literal equivalent ‘square,’ as the Mediterranean, Southern French and South American plaza is so much more than the Anglophone ‘square.’ It is, as the author points out, a public space that is used for informal assembly on a daily basis by the inhabitants. The Anglo equivalent of this, might perhaps be the park, but that’s only weather permitting. Every Spanish settlement, from the large urban centres to villages of less than 100 inhabitants, has a plaza that is used regularly as a public space.
7. Rogoff, Irit, “Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality” in <http://transform.eipcp.net> 2006.
8. Nedeve, Kamen, in “La voz del bosque. A partir de Acampada sol, los efectos del 15M y el deseo de un cambio institucional” published in A*Magazine n° 80: <http://www.a-desk.org/spip/spip.php?article968> 2011
9. “Là-bas si j’y suis”, radio transmission by FranceInter, 26 May, 2011 http://www.la-bas.org/article.php?id_article=2190
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