Cultures of Anyone

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of the PAH, or those public workers who have distanced themselves from a supposedly ‘privileged’ corporatism to meet on an equal footing with the rest of society in the Mareas, or of those retired people relegated to an alleged depoliticization or to forms of ‘old’ politics, which have become creative and solidary ‘yayoflautas.’

In any case, I think the 15M climate has been able to combine these and many other processes of precarization, through different levels of risk and exclusion. It has done so by building the legitimacy of ‘anyone’s’ experience. Being ‘affected’ has been considered something worthy of greater value and greater respect, allowing the building of equality practices to which, I think, we should apply the same ‘presumption of intelligence’ that they apply to anyone.

There are still, of course, ‘authorities’ who will not recognize that legitimacy, even if they defend very similar things to the 15M movement, such as the universality of the rights to housing, healthcare, education, etc. So it’s one thing to think that ‘anyone’ has those rights, and another to think that ‘anyone’ has the right to participate actively in the elucidation, conquest, and specific construction of those rights, with no need for anybody else to authorize him or her with their expert knowledge. From this there arises a latent—and sometimes a manifest—‘conflict of authorities,’ which seems to me to be another fundamental element for understanding the cultural climate generated by the 15M movement.

5.3. Conflict of Authorities: Intellectuals, Mass Media, and the 15M Climate

5.3.1. The ‘intellectual leader’ in his circle of impotence

On October 27, 2013, about 4.7 million people listened to the journalist and writer Arturo Pérez-Reverte say the following things on the television program Salvados (2013):

Can nothing be done? Is there nothing we can do? Well, sometimes the answer is no. At least, the answer I give myself is no … It won’t change anything, nothing will change anything. If there were a revolution today, people would go out first to see if their car had been burned

6 ‘Yayofalutas’ is a derivation of ‘perroflautas’, a pejorative expression used by some people to disqualify 15M participants. ‘Perroflautas’ alludes to the stereotypical figure of a young punk or hippie that asks for money in the street, surrounded by dogs and playing the flute. It was reclaimed by the movement, and later creatively transformed into ‘yayoflautas’ to refer to the elder participants in the movement (‘yayo’ is a familiar word for ‘grandfather’).
... Do you know why people want the crisis to be over? To go back to doing exactly what they did before: to buy a car again, a mortgage, to go to Cancún for vacation again ...

He listed with a certain nostalgia some causes of this supposed widespread selfishness: ‘Before, when things went bad, in other times, there were ideologies that supported those things, there were ideas, there were even intellectuals who made use of those ideas and disseminated them to the people … Now those leaders no longer exist, society is defenseless, orphaned.’ He concluded:

People don’t want an education, they don’t demand an education for their children … The whole problem with Spain is a problem with education, because we are who we are; politicians are only one manifestation, the symptom of a disease of who we are: the acritical stance, the lack of culture, fratricide, vileness, envy—that is who we are, we are Spaniards. The politician is nothing more than the officialization of our essence … it’s a culture problem.

From among the innumerable reflections and critiques on the Spanish economic crisis and its possible alternatives expressed by intellectuals, opinion makers, participants in talk-shows (tertulianos), and other heirs of the elitist, exclusivist conception of culture, those expressed here by Pérez-Reverte have the virtue of clearly identifying the central stereotypes of this tradition: ‘people’ are uncouth and selfish, only the intellectual leaders can change things, and without them society is ‘orphaned.’

In this sense, it seems to me that Pérez-Reverte’s position perfectly exemplifies a particular viewpoint on the phenomena I have been studying—phenomena of empowerment of ‘cultures of anyone’ and of their blending specialized kinds of knowledge. Instead of despising or attacking them, he ignores them, because, I would dare to say, they don’t fit within his framework of ‘what’s possible.’ Pérez-Reverte’s conception of politics is simultaneously and very clearly one of pessimistic essentialism and individualism that doesn’t seem to consider the possibility that collaborative, supportive forms of politics, capable of respectfully articulating human interdependence and of empowering anyone’s abilities, could exist as anything more than isolated and even ‘heroic’ acts:

What prevents someone from saying, ‘Let it rain napalm!’ is precisely the fact that there is always one just man in Sodom, there is always that little seed, that teacher, that solitary hero there waging his small, individual battle, and he’ll manage to get another kid to do it, too.
From this viewpoint, then, it’s no wonder that in the same appearance on the program Salvados, Pérez-Reverte also projects a pessimistic vision of the 15M movement:

I—the 15M when I saw it emerge, I said: ‘Look, there are still heroes. Heroes can still reach an agreement’ ... After just a few days of observing it, I began to see how it changed, how the boy disappeared, how the demagogue occupied his place, how rhetorical speech replaced rational speech, how the most populist and ignorant replaced the smartest and the most astute, and how little by little it disintegrated into the miserable human condition.

No doubt this inevitable triumph of ‘the miserable human condition’ resonates with the feeling that ‘there’s no hope for this country’ of which Javier Marías spoke, and with the view that ‘barbarism is our natural state’ asserted by Muñoz Molina. But it’s worth asking: Why is this type of reading of the 15M movement, and of political and human nature in general, still so attractive and gaining so many adherents? After all, it completely contradicts the relatively mass ‘common sense’ I mentioned before—that is, it ignores the ‘climate’ of possibility that has opened up in recent years.7

Obviously, centuries of hegemony of the modern power/knowledge complex will not vanish overnight, nor probably in decades of proliferating online collaborative cultures, or of horizontal, anti-elitist social movements. But besides all that, perhaps the greatest power of the modern belief in the cultural inequality of human beings—in the existence of a minority of heroes and intellectuals and an egotistical, stupid majority—is still that it offers a type of moral justification for the political inaction that is especially useful in a crisis.

If we contextualize Pérez-Reverte’s words in the program during which he utters them, we realize that, in fact, they exert the seductiveness of a familiar, paralyzing pessimism that, paradoxically, has been partially weakened during these years of crisis. In fact, the host of the program himself, Jordi Évole, conducts the entire interview as an attempt to move Pérez-Reverte beyond his pessimism. This wouldn’t, however, necessarily mean taking him beyond his elitism and individualism (and in that sense, Salvados often tends to feed its own optimism with the logic of ‘isolated heroic gestures’). But the show does express a certain boredom with that type of defeatist explanation, which is probably one of the main factors for this television program’s huge success.

In this regard, minutes earlier, another ‘testimony’ invited by Évole, that of philosopher Txetxu Ausín, had mentioned the Marea Blanca as an example of civic mobilization. He emphasized its ability to fight and win in the legal arena, thus suggesting, no matter how fuzzily and fleetingly, the argument for the characteristic ability of these movements to mix everyday kinds of knowledge with specialized ones.
Of course, the existence in any society of selfish, passive, or simply stupid attitudes like those noted by Pérez-Reverte is undeniable, and it is to those attitudes that commentators turn time and time again to justify their disdain for human nature and the pointlessness of all political effort. But, as Rancière might say, that type of defeatist criticism forms part of the 'circle of impotence' associated with the 'pedagogization of society': it is postulated that to 'have culture,' one must submit to the guardianship of the avant-gardes that control it. In doing so, the rest of the population is thus being turned into supposedly ignorant, dependent beings who—and this is worse—will internalize this judgment and begin to believe they really are incapable of learning on their own, and therefore of changing things. This is how the image of a society divided between the few ‘in the know’ and the majority ‘in the dark’ is consolidated, and it has a corrosive effect on everyone, sowing both elitist scorn and inferiority complexes everywhere. In the end, a structural distrust of the other develops, which leads to the same ‘selfishness’ that Pérez-Reverte criticizes. This only leaves the door open to change through ‘education,’ as Pérez-Reverte himself does. But this is often an education that, as demanded by the myth of pedagogy, must be authorized by ‘those in the know,’ thus perpetuating the existence of that group and, therefore, of cultural inequality.8

In contrast to this ‘circle of impotence,’ I have shown how the 15M movement and later social processes like the Mareas or the PAH are, among other things, precisely political efforts that reject the need for ‘teachers’ or intellectual leaders as guides to bring everyone else towards ‘education,’ ‘culture,’ or social change. On the contrary, in these movements it is assumed that things are done better with everyone involved, when everyone contributes their abilities and ways of knowing. Its dynamic consists of multiplying these capacities and ways of knowing by creating collaborative networks in which anyone can participate. That doesn’t mean, once again, that these abilities

8 In an interview, César Rendueles said the following about the internalization of cultural elitism and the disdain for the masses in Spanish culture: ‘Nineteenth-century elites did not hide their panic and disgust at the possibility that the working classes might gain access to political institutions. They thought the masses would disgrace Western civilization to the point of destroying it. At the start of the twentieth century, during the colonial era, that hate became a racist fear that the populations subjugated by imperialism would become uncontrollable and would end up invading the metropolis. This discourse has been internalized and endures even today. We see ourselves the same way the rich previously viewed the dangerous classes. We have incorporated that elitism into our ideological genotype. This is why egalitarian projects have practically disappeared from the political sphere. We radically distrust our own capacity to debate together; we view democracy as a competition among private preferences’ (Arjona 2013).
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and knowledge bases can't be valued for their differences: the movements understand perfectly that specialized, technical knowledge is necessary for some things, and for others, everyday or experiential kinds of knowledge are needed. Likewise, they understand that not everything has the same value within each of these ways of knowing, and so filtering and refining mechanisms are implemented with the goal of creating 'collective intelligence.' But mainly what the practices of these movements propose is precisely that politics and culture are things in which everybody must participate actively. After all, everybody lives in society and everybody needs to give meaning to their existence, and it is not fair that others decide how it should be done.

In this sense, perhaps even more so than the technical or expert authorities, it has been the intellectual and political authorities that have been deeply questioned—even if only implicitly—by this cycle of movements and its emergent ‘cultural power.’ The responses to those challenges have not been long in coming. But as far as I can find, they have tended to appear in critiques that, like those of Pérez-Reverte, in fact do not address this central question of a cultural transformation involving the appearance of collaborative networks which reject the guardianship of any avant-garde. Rather, they are limited to wielding multiple, many-hued, and often contradictory reasons for denying that the movements—particularly the 15M—have any value.

5.3.2. Deaf ears, insults, advice, and reaffirmations of authority

The op-ed article ‘5 articles not written about the 15M,’ published by the writer and columnist Javier Cercas in El País on June 24, 2011, is especially useful as a quick review of those critiques, because it suggests a classification of some of them. Cercas begins the text by saying that he has been wanting to write about the 15M movement for weeks, but for several reasons he never got round to it. Already in that first statement we can find hidden a central characteristic of the way many intellectuals have related to the 15M: they have wanted to write about the movement. That is, they have wanted to take it as one more in the infinity of current 'subjects' or 'issues' they write about every day in the mass media from the position of authority granted to them by the tradition that guarantees the figure of the intellectual, charged with all the problems I have been analyzing.

They have frequently wanted to read the nonauthoritarian, noncompetitive culture of the 15M from the logics of an authoritarian intellectual tradition and a competitive political economy. So, perhaps inevitably, they have tended to emphasize or even invent rather partial, lesser aspects of the movement that allowed them to read it without calling into question the culture from within which they read it.
Thus, for example, the first of the five articles on 15M that Cercas says he hasn’t written—and also the one ‘he is happiest not to have written’—would have been ‘an article written on the spot,’ or rather, he says, ‘an act,’ since in it he would have announced that he was leaving his newspaper column, the novel he was writing, and his ‘father–son duties’ to go to the plaza de Cataluña in Barcelona ‘to throw in my lot with the acampados.’

Of course, Cercas uses a humorous tone here, but the type of joke he decides to use is significant. He compares joining the 15M camps during the early days of the movement—something, remember, that several million people of all the ages did all across Spain—with a kind of voluntary enlistment in a war. This understanding of the movement as a (violent) rupture of the everyday, prevents him from seeing that other fundamental dimension of collaborative support for daily life the plazas had from very early on—day-care centers, senior centers, food service, and all the other devices for a mutual care sensitive to vulnerability, were already present from the beginning, and they fit very poorly with Cercas’s warlike metaphor.

In that sense, curiously, Cercas’s own position would perhaps not be so far removed from those other types of article he might have wanted to parody: those of the old ‘revolutionaries’ from ’68 that react critically to the Indignados, ‘first calling us,’ says Cercas—again in a humorous register—‘pansies, and the movement, queer: a serious revolution burns the Parliament or takes the Bastille or the Winter Palace with blood and fire, for fuck’s sake.’ Later, however, they would also label ‘the 15M as demagogic, populist, fanatic, antipolitical, and antisystem, and the campers as hordes or violent mobs.’ I say his position would perhaps not be so far removed from these revolutionaries turned—he says—‘extreme right-wingers as a consequence of being so modern,’ because they both focus their attention on the protest aspects of the movement, ignoring its capacity for collaborative support of democratic cultures and everyday life in the acampadas. Neither Cercas nor just about anybody else in the mass media has said anything about this last aspect, as far as I know.9

In an earlier article, I discussed the existence of some curious contradictions, similar to those Cercas presents, in contributions from intellectuals, particularly in the conversation published by El País between the publisher Mario Muchnick and the painter Eduardo Arroyo (Cavero 2011), titled ‘Sol visto desde mayo del ’68.’ In it appeared the recurring idea alluded to by Cercas: the 15M as a ‘revolution of lies,’ a simulacrum of revolution, an insufficient gesture. ‘These guys want to fix the system. We

9 Notable exceptions would be José Luis Sampedro and Manuel Castells, among others.
wanted to blow it up,' said Arroyo. In an article in *La Vanguardia*, Catalan writer Quim Monzó (2011), for his part, asserted on the one hand that it was shameful to call the 15M a ‘revolution’ because is not a true change in political and economic structures, but just a ‘camp-out.’ At the same time, venting his spleen with ‘I won’t be the one who defends the politicians in power; they give me the heaves,’ he pushed the vote as the only way of fighting against bipartisanship.10

Felix de Azúa (2014; Sainz Borgo 2014) also stood on shaky, ambiguous ground when he said, ‘The inability to understand violence, the absolute forgetfulness that war implies, functional illiteracy, all lead to schoolyard revolts.’ Feeling the need to clarify, he added, ‘I’m not insinuating that the 15M must move into terrorism ... I am saying that if a movement wants to fight this war successfully it needs leaders, study, planning, and a program.’ In the end, for Azúa, as for Pérez-Reverte, it all comes down to a problem of education: ‘They have not been educated in how to study, in discipline, in effort, in sacrifice.’ Although, in fact, with or without education, ‘the human way of life’ consists of ‘huge catastrophes generated by our own stupidity.’

It seems to me that perhaps this type of criticism, along with Cercas’s article, would also fit into another category of participation, which has perhaps actually been the most frequent kind among intellectuals regarding the 15M: that which consists of telling the movement what it should do. Thus, completely ignoring the possibility of working to construct the 15M movement from within so that their ideas would add to its collective intelligence—the same possibility that so many millions of other people had assumed—intellectuals like Cercas simply prefer to recommend from outside that, for example, they put ‘more emphasis on Europe,’ because Europe, he says, is ‘our only reasonable utopia.’ Which, by the way, confirms Cercas’s allegiance to that intellectual tradition that, voluntarily or not, has helped so much to justify the construction of neoliberalism through its Europeanism.

10  Kiko Amat and Manolo Martínez answered him in an open letter. They asserted that Monzó preferred to focus on superficial aspects of the movement rather than try to understand it and take it seriously. They recommended he read several of the first documents of political proposals produced in the plazas. Furthermore, they waxed ironic about his criticisms of the 15M for not being ‘sufficiently revolutionary’: ‘In a last pirouette, Monzó also suggests that the reason for his lack of interest in the *Indignants* movement is that it is insufficiently revolutionary, and that what they are doing is not revolution, but ‘camping out’; perhaps insinuating that, if they were armed and wore ski masks, he would cast aside his laptop and hit the streets with fists at the ready to combat those ‘powerful politicians’ that he so firmly swears he detests, like a *crazy sans culotte*’ (2011, 43).
In the intellectual world, everyone has their own recommendation for the *Indignados*, regardless of their ideological allegiance. Thus, Ignacio Ramonet (2011), in a conference in Heidelberg, wished that there were more concern with the power of the mass media in the movement, because he had seen very little of it reflected in its slogans. Meanwhile, Francisco R. Adrados responded to a survey of ‘intellectuals’ in *La Razón* (2012) saying, ‘information, still scarce, indicates decay,’ and recommends that the 15M movement ‘should not live for a date, for an obligation, that is self-imposed.’ In a manifesto titled ‘Una ilusión compartida’ (Público.es 2011) names such as García Montero, Almudena Grandes, and Joaquín Sabina, for their part, spoke of ‘taking advantage of the civic energy of the 15M’ to mobilize the left. Another of the *La Razón* survey respondents, however, the university professor Ángel Alonso Cortés, said, ‘its strength is low because its persuasive ability is weak, and to have a future it would need ideological discipline.’

There are many more examples, and if there is anything surprising about them, at least if you know the least little bit about the 15M, it is how colossally capable they all are of ignoring the possibility of using channels opened up by the movement to incorporate any proposal. These intellectuals toss out their own proposals as if they were unavoidably—through some kind of magical, existential quality that would make them different from millions of their fellow citizens—prevented from taking their ideas to the street just like anyone else.

Finally, there is one more type of contribution to talk about, which, even if these contributors don’t put a positive value on the 15M, or even explore in depth those cultural dimensions of it that clash directly with the tradition of modern intellectual authority, at least ‘sniff’ around them, that is, they notice some of their aspects. Perhaps the article ‘Empobrecimiento’ by writer Enrique Vila-Matas (2011) could be included here. In it, he drew a connection between the 15M movement and the use of digital social networks, in particular Twitter. His idea was that the brief format (140 characters) of the messages or tweets sent by the *Indignados* was one more indicator of the widespread impoverishment of the language in current times. This assertion, as I have noted elsewhere, comes across as quite odd coming from a writer who is heir to the avant-garde, defender of ‘portable literature,’ a style of writing that practices self-restriction and plays with self-imposed formats.

Sánchez Dragó (2011) would do something similar. He seemed to understand the 15M movement’s dimension of opening up politics to anyone, but he did so only to criticize it and defend just the opposite: a type of politics that would function as a professional job done by a series of salaried technicians. In other words, a ‘technocracy’:
Like everyone, I pay some men to manage public affairs, not so that they can allow me or force me to butt in on something that bores me. If a businessman hires an accountant, it’s so he doesn’t have to bother with the boring accounting, not so he can go poking around in it. Wouldn’t that be something! Out of the frying pan, into the fire ... Let the politicians manage politics honestly and effectively, and not bother those of us who have other jobs, vocations, and interests.

In a similar vein, albeit using less expressive terms, the responses of many of those ‘professional’ politicians, such as those Sánchez Dragó likes, have flown past. Mostly they have reminded the citizenry that politics is done at the ballot box, and that’s it. In some cases, they even urged the 15M movement to form a political party or, better still, join theirs. I will not take up time or space reporting these types of response, which are much more monotonous than those of the intellectuals. What I would like to do is examine the intersections of both types of response with representations of the 15M movement and its ‘climate,’ from some of the prevailing logics of the big mass media outlets. These media representations—and in general all those coming from the cultural establishment—have provoked direct and indirect responses from the movements that allow a better understanding of the conflict between diverse forms of authority that is put into play in these dialogues.

5.3.3. When ‘anyone’ responds to the cultural authority
Much has been said about the increasing distance between the politicians and the citizenry of Spain. Somewhat less has been said about the latter’s possible emancipation from the establishment of reality performed by the mass media, and perhaps still less about the increasing distance between intellectuals and average citizens. Nevertheless, they are strongly related phenomena, and thus became obvious at many times during the 15M movement.

Let’s recall, for example, the airing of the Spanish National Radio program ‘En días como hoy’ on Tuesday, May 17, 2011. Two days after the demonstration on May 15, and in the face of the incipient encampment at Puerta del Sol, the ‘tertulianos’ (a hybrid species between the figures of the intellectual and the journalist, these are participants on television and radio political programs, mostly journalists, sometime politicians, or ‘experts’) present on this morning public radio show, Miguel Larrea and Javier García Vila, spoke frankly about the subject, expressing opinions like the following: ‘It’s an embryo of something, but confusing’; ‘There’s a mix of antisystem forces and all kinds of other forces there’; ‘The slogan is taken from Stéphane Hessel’s book, Indignez-vous!, a worthless book, it’s
nothing': “‘Real democracy’: as Churchill said, democracy is the worst of all possible systems except all the others, and that’s the reality, there is no other alternative to democracy’; ‘Everything about assemblies is so passé since the French Revolution, it doesn’t make much sense’; ‘I think it’s great they’ve been kicked out, because they were turning Madrid’s Puerta del Sol into a camp where all kinds of strange people were showing up ...’

To all of this, which was contributed by Larrea, García Vila indicated his agreement, adding that in Sol they were expressing ‘a feeling of orphanhood relative to the political class,’ but that it was a mass of ‘confusing assemblies that led nowhere,’ and furthermore, ‘they are used by violent antisystem groups to do their little things.’ From there, both tertulianos began a spiral of mutual reaffirmation that led them to build the following series of stereotypes: ‘Can the world be changed? It’s very hard, we’re seeing a world dominated by money, by consumerism ...’ ‘Esperanza Aguirre said what they have to do is go and vote, but that’s exactly what they won’t do, the kind of young people we have today.’ ‘It’s necessary to be organized, to have spokesmen, it’s necessary to establish structures, which is exactly what they’re criticizing.’ ‘One of the leaders is a lawyer who’s running for office, I say it with the greatest affection, but there is nothing more bourgeois,’ and to top it off: ‘Young people today have it so much better than 40 years ago.’

Up until then, everything was rolling along like something we could call ‘any given day in the CT,’ any given day in the world of the tertulianos, daily defenders of the limits of the possible from their position of semi-intellectual, semi-mediatized authority. But something was changing. A few minutes later, the program was opened to callers, and the telephone call of one listener—Cristina from Burgos—would soon go viral: ‘I’m speaking on public radio, right? The one that represents us all, the one we pay for with our taxes?’ This was how Cristina’s contribution began, but she then went on to say the following clearly and confidently:

I’m 46 years old, I was at the demonstration in Madrid this Sunday, and I have something to say: there were a lot of young people, but there were people of all ages and conditions. Antisystem? Yes, obviously: politicians and bankers and those who really support these measures that are cutting all the rights it cost our parents and grandparents blood, sweat, and tears to earn; our politicians, who we voted for, who are evidently managed by the same hands of capital that are also managing the mass media, are the ones who are making our young people, our sons and daughters, antisystem. Because they are leaving them out of the system.
After continuing to develop these ideas, Cristina alluded directly to the *tertulianos*: ‘One of you said, “the kind of young people we have” ... This kind of young person is the one who’s going to give us a big surprise.’ She concluded with these words:

You’ve thrown them out of Puerta del Sol, but we’re all there, supporting them. And we don’t need political parties or economic parties, we don’t need any of that. We’re more than capable of getting things done: our parents and grandparents raised us with the dignity to always move forward, following our dreams. There we all are. No, there are no *antisystems*, there are not four lamebrains, no. We are all of us defending a better world. That’s all I wanted to say.

Moments like these exemplify very literally the ‘rebellions of the publics’ about which the texts of Amador Fernández-Savater and Ángel Luis Lara (among others) talk. This type of situation almost always tends to be explained in terms of responses to the ‘media’s manipulation of information,’ but I think it’s important to also put them into the wider context of the proliferation of participative cultures to which I referred, along with Henry Jenkins, in the previous chapter. In this sense, not only would there be straight answers to the distortions or twisted views of reality from the big media outlets, but also, in a very important way, these would occur within a pervasive climate of circulation of ‘post-media’ voices in the digital sphere, capable of recounting their own versions as well.

Cristina’s call can be seen in the YouTube video ‘Cristina, la oyente que exigió a RNE respeto para los manifestantes del 15M’ (2011). It belongs to a tacit subgenre of what we could call ‘straight answers to media powers on their own turf,’ and when this happens, always with an aura of exceptionality and challenge, they are widely disseminated through social networks. They are moments when the word of ‘anyone’ (of someone who doesn’t try to give value to what he or she says from a supposedly exceptional knowledge base, but from an everyday, experiential position) directly confronts the authorized discourse of the media, *tertulianos*, or intellectuals, and which the post-media sphere later celebrates and spreads. They couldn’t exist as such, or at least, they couldn’t achieve massive dissemination, without that post-media sphere that is in charge of selecting them, extracting them from the media ocean—which sometimes even censors them—and distributing them virally.

A pair of good, more recent examples of this genre took place as a result of another of the important victories of these social movements: that of the inhabitants of Gamonal, a *barrio* in Burgos, who in January 2014 managed to stop an urban planning project suspected of political corruption in
their region. Thus, the video ‘Un vecino corrige a un periodista de Radio Nacional que estaba mintiendo’ (2014) (with almost 1.5 million hits on YouTube) shows an even more direct irruption of ‘anyone’s’ voice into the media discourse. In fact, it is literally an interruption, and thus different from Cristina’s call, which was part of the segment of the program called ‘Listeners’ Conversation.’ In this case, what we have is a radio reporter in the street, covering the protests live, and saying, ‘Groups of citizens have become violent, they’re burning containers and they’ve broken the windows of some businesses.’ But as he speaks, we hear some voices trying to talk back to him, until finally one of them interrupts him outright—we understand that somebody has probably snatched the microphone from him—and protests: ‘Don’t lie: not a single business, they’re banks. Banks, which we understand are guilty, too. But not a single business.’

Another video related to the Gamonal protests (‘Manipulación y acoso en TVE. El portavoz de Gamonal calla la boca a Mariló Montero’ 2014) also gained considerable dissemination on the networks. This one showed a verbal confrontation between Manuel Alonso, a spokesperson for the inhabitants of Gamonal, and a group of tertulianos from TVE. In the face of presenter Mariló Montero’s insistence on asking about the throwing of liquids and eggs by the Gamonal demonstrators, Alonso answered: ‘And of all the problems the people face, this is what’s important? Whether an egg or a bottle of beer is thrown, that’s what’s important? Or is what’s important the problems that the people, the vecinos, the citizens in general have?’ Montero responded with the myth of journalistic objectivity: ‘My opinion isn’t what matters here, I have to stay focused too, on the information about what we’re seeing.’

Given that answer maybe ten years earlier—if I might be permitted this small flight of fancy—before social networks had turned the public sphere into a much more plural and accessible space for many citizens, perhaps then the neighbors’ spokesperson would have been left speechless. But on this occasion, what Manuel Alonso’s reaction shows is that the myth of journalistic objectivity has lost much of its force in the last decade. Also, although not many people use the term ‘agenda-setting,’ that doesn’t mean they don’t know very well that the veracity of information depends as much on an accurate representation of the facts as on which facts are chosen for representation, and with what degree of priority some are chosen over others.

‘Look, I’m going to give you top priority information, eh?’ says Manuel Alonso, pulling out a document that certified, he explains, that the business developers who had time and time again denied any involvement in the Gamonal project, resigned from the business that was to supply all the
cement for the works, and would therefore profit from the project, just a few days after the protests started.

The TVE reporter responds rather disconcertedly and decides to turn things over to another reporter, but not without first dropping a veiled question regarding the authority of that paper—in her words, not a ‘document’—which Alonso has already clearly identified as an official document from the Certificate of Incorporation: ‘María, do me a favor,’ she says. ‘We’re going to take a closer look at that paper, while I go to the plenary, I want to look that paper over closely, the seal of that paper, the heading on that paper, who’s sealed that paper, what kind of documentation it is …’ She pronounces this list emphasizing its monotone rhythm, as if explaining that there are many requirements ‘that paper’ is going to have to fulfill to earn some credibility as a ‘document’ in her eyes.

This exchange seems particularly revealing because it shows how the myth of objective reporting is ultimately supported by the expert, technocratic power at the core of cultural authority in the modern West. What Manuel Alonso does here, and what the conjunction between the climate of widespread illegitimacy causing the economic crisis and the informative plurality opened up by digital cultures has done, is break the cycle of belief in mass media discussed in the first chapter. Manuel Alonso and his Gamonal vecinos have stopped believing that reality is what becomes visible through the media, they have stopped believing something is reality just because it’s what everybody believes. The myth of media objectivity is laid bare: the inhabitants can produce their own versions of reality, which they well know are much less biased, and they do it by contributing documents if necessary.

Faced with this gesture, the media discourse has no other choice but to step back, turning to a supposedly higher authority than their own, an authority that would have the power to ‘certify’ with their seal what is truly real, from among the different versions. That authority, even if it is not named straight out, can be none other than that which emanates from the modern power/knowledge complex in its many and varied sources of legitimacy, from the technoscientific to the intellectual, by way of its bureaucratic and institutional derivatives. It is the same tradition to which Manuel Alonso also turns when showing his legal document—but he doesn’t wield it from public television’s position of power, nor by hiding behind that supposed informative objectivity. He acts from the power of a local movement which also values another type of authority: the authority of anyone to participate in the necessarily collective debate over what constitutes a life with dignity—the debate about ‘what is really important’ that Manuel Alonso proposes to the reporter, and which she is unwilling to join unless she has an official seal.
So, in essence, the demands of those ‘voices of anyone’ from the new movements arising in the wake of the 15M, when they break out in the media or other public forums, are no more and no less than demands to be allowed to talk about what’s really important, even if they are not voices gifted with hegemonic cultural authority (technoscientific, intellectual, media, etc.). In that sense, it seems to me that what they do is somewhat more complex than ‘denying’ or ‘correcting’ wrong information, although that may often be the immediate intention. It also has to do, at least tacitly, with the public arenas—which are neither ‘neutral’ nor ‘objective’—where what will pass for reality is established, and where, therefore, expectations are also constructed about what a life with dignity should be. The movements protest that these arenas should not be monopolized by voices that wield expert authorities (such as those of the tertulianos, journalists, intellectuals, politicians, and others belonging to the group of ‘those in the know’). Such a monopoly would imply that they were the only ones to elucidate something that nobody should delegate to others: the meaning and dignity of their lives.

This ‘conflict of authorities’ is often expressed as a confrontation, a clash, like those indignant responses in the media, interruptions, and exchanges of proofs and counterproofs. Recent years have seen more public challenges to authority in the Spanish state. We have seen students who, when receiving their National Award for Excellence in Academic Performance, ignore Minister Wert, the person responsible for cuts to education. We have seen former spokesperson for the PAH, Ada Colau (now mayor of Barcelona), stand up in the Congress of Deputies and call ‘supposed financial experts’ criminals for praising the Spanish legislation on evictions ‘while there are people who are taking their own lives over this problem’ (an event that gave rise to another viral video); we have seen Spaniards who have emigrated to Paris and belong to the Marea Granate (the *marea* for exiles of the economic crisis) publicly confronting the PSOE candidate to the European elections to remind her that her party is responsible for the ‘austerity’ her campaign is now aimed against. We have seen a woman approach Philip of Bourbon in the middle of the street to demand a referendum on the permanence of the monarchy. And we have also seen innumerable recordings circulating online that show actions and events that contradict official and media versions, such as, notably, the active role of the secret police in provoking violent confrontations in the street. This includes a video where one of these secret police, disguised as an ‘antisystem,’ was beaten by the riot police themselves while he yelled at them, ‘I’m one of you, for fuck’s sake!’

But there have also been other types of manifestation, more indirect and elusive, of that conflict between the authority of the established cultural