

## Historein

Vol 15, No 1 (2015)

Revisiting Democratic Transitions in Times of Crisis



**They called it democracy? The aesthetic politics of the Spanish transition to democracy and some collective hijackings of history after the 15M movement**

*Germán Labrador Méndez*

doi: [10.12681/historein.297](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.297)

Copyright © 2015, Germán Labrador Méndez



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Labrador Méndez, G. (2015). They called it democracy? The aesthetic politics of the Spanish transition to democracy and some collective hijackings of history after the 15M movement. *Historein*, 15(1), 117–154. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.297>

In this article, taking the Spanish 15M movement in 2011 as its starting point, I will reflect on the relations between historical narratives and aesthetic-political experiences during the Spanish transition to democracy (1975–1982) and in connection to the present. In order to do so, I will explore the interpretative potential of minor materials (ephemera, graffiti, demonstration placards, cartoons, poems, rock lyrics, personal letters), supplemented by more traditional sources (cultural and political analysis, historical accounts, etc.) and take an approach from the perspective of cultural history, social theory and political aesthetics. I will propose a historical dialogue between the language and images created by the 15M movement and those produced in the 1970s by citizens' networks opposed to the authoritarian nature of post-Francoist representative democracy. The historical space occupied by these transitional communities, in which radical principles of participatory democracy were defended, have been systematically marginalised by the "official" narratives of the period in favour of a fetishistic idea of "consensus".

I will argue that there is a counterhegemonic way of reading the Spanish transition to democracy, one that involves aesthetic criticism, which *formalises* the collective political experience of feeling that a gap has been established between language and reality. This sensibility is potentially productive in the political context opened up by the 2011 protests in Spain as well, and it represents a way of understanding a period especially receptive to aspects that have been repeatedly ignored through a more conventional historiographical lens. These other angles relate both to expectations from political agents in a process of subjective transformation – *in front of a democracy to come* – and to the production of civic language. More than anything,

## *They called it democracy? The aesthetic politics of the Spanish transition to democracy and some collective hijackings of history after the 15M movement*

**Germán Labrador Méndez**

Princeton University

it refers to the way emerging political subjects of a period are able to see themselves in the process of *staging a change of temporality*. Their reflexivity is linked to the language with which an age names itself and its posterity, thus determining politically its historical imaginary.

In this sense, the historiography of the Spanish transition should not only be concerned with the study of the discourse of the period, but also with its imaginaries of temporality (and its *horizons of expectation*), which are associated with *political affections*, aesthetic energies and lines of desire (*spaces of experiences*). This type of alternative historical knowledge (designed not to construct, but to deconstruct) now allows for particular kinds of socialisation (it corresponds to a socialised – and activist – version of alternative historiographical frames) which redefine the role of the historian, of history and of memory, such as they are understood within *Spanish democracy*, and which thereby shift the importance of this activity to the main squares (*agorae*) and public spheres, both physical and virtual. I will provide different types of materials to prove this.

### ***‘Everyone to Sol’***

“Everyone to Sol” was the subject of an email I received from a friend on 22 May 2011. Sol referred to the square in Madrid, which at that point was occupied by a multitude of citizens who, both there and in dozens of other cities, were camped out, conversing animatedly in assemblies about their demands for the return of popular sovereignty, while rejecting the constraints of a political and economic system based on the free market and representative democracy. Three days later, a *Manifiesto Fantasma* (Ghost Manifesto) spoke of the “discredit ... of institutions that proclaim to represent us [which have] turned into mere agents ... at the service of the forces of international financial powers”.<sup>1</sup> The political will to narrow what they saw as the distance between democratic forms and their contents, between the *original* spirit of democracy and its denaturalisation as an effect of the hold of financial powers over politics, was crystallised in the call “Real Democracy Now”.

The demand for a *real democracy to come* served to characterise the existing democracy as a *false one*. With this aesthetic inflection in the language, the known “real” was refuted as the only possible “real”, and utopian visions came to be imagined as a *potential “real”*. Language was in motion: *revolution, citizen, democracy, people, representation* – the meaning of a whole set of basic political vocabulary had changed in a matter of days, if not hours. We were witnessing a transformation of the epochal vocabulary, a semantic rupture which became apparent as the first rallies led to a mass process, and this was understood collectively as *something new* in the world, as something that had the power to change the shared description of reality and to propose a new one.<sup>2</sup> *All that* was an *event*, following both Badiou and the anonymous protesters themselves, who declared that the 15M movement “is an event, and as such an occurrence capable of giving new meanings to our actions and discourses”.<sup>3</sup>

On Thursday 19 May, the Puerta del Sol and the adjacent streets were brimming (fig. 1). On that Sunday I received the email stating “Everyone to Sol” and that “*this* [the event of 15M] is 1976”. But what did this historical date, a year after Franco’s death, really mean in relation to what was being

said and played out in May 2011? Which analogous experiences warrant a comparison between the popular movement of May 2011 with the year 1976? If 15M is supposed to constitute an unprecedented political movement – for its use of new technologies and public space, or for its connection to the wider protest wave (Arab Spring, Occupy) – what could prompt a contemporary spectator, like my friend who emailed me the call, to refer back to a local historical incident, one of unclear significance, whose interpretative imports are yet to be fully defined?



Fig. 1. Puerta del Sol, 19 May 2011 (Photograph by Barcex/CC BY-SA, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Madrid\\_-\\_Acampada\\_Sol\\_-\\_110519\\_200809.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Madrid_-_Acampada_Sol_-_110519_200809.jpg))

### *What does 1976 really mean? Historiography and poetics of the democratic rupture*

For a start, one way to approach the comparison might be to question what the year 1976 meant for the historiography of the period. A first suspicion is that, from the point of view of *official history*, it hardly means anything. As a date it does not stand out even half as much as others within the epic calendar of the transition to democracy, such as, for example, 1977 (first democratic elections), 1978 (new constitution), 1981 (coup d'état), 1982 (socialist party victory). In this context, it might be considered to be a rather "boring" year, replete with meetings and ministerial crises and power struggles, in which the regime elite dithered over reform. However, classic works that focus on the study of so-

cial movements<sup>4</sup> and the more recent investigations, not to mention the bibliography dating back to the very start, depict 1976 as an eventful year, replete with people's protests, strikes, neighbourhood associations and the emergence of new forms of doing politics. These repertoires had created in recent times what we can call a *social shift* in the studies of the transition to democracy, producing a rich bibliography, the detailed inventory of which goes beyond the aim of this article.

Among the many works recently published focusing on the actions and capacities of social movements, collective actors and civil society, I will mention only some. Radcliff assumes the importance of the popular origins of the Spanish transition to democracy and the active role of civil society in the process.<sup>5</sup> Andrade discusses the collective insertion of grassroots activists in the unstable ideological framework of the epoch to explain the evolution of leftist parties after 1976 and the identity conflicts they endured.<sup>6</sup> The number and complexity of social actors involved in the period has been extended thanks to Wilhemi,<sup>7</sup> who mapped the emergence of the anarchist culture between 1975 and 1982, and by Quirosa-Cheyrouze, who integrated rarely attended (although important) phenomena such as the pacifist and ecologist movements in the classic paradigm of the Spanish transition as a successful process.<sup>8</sup> A collective volume edited by Pérez Quintana and Sánchez León analyses people's struggle for the city and the importance of neighbourhood associations in the 1970s and after.<sup>9</sup> Domenech and Molinero offer a fantastic case study on the city of Sabadell, privileging the importance of the local workers' movement, popular culture and political autonomy over the interests of national political parties.<sup>10</sup> Ballester studies the importance of popular demonstrations in demanding political amnesty for prodemocracy protesters in Barcelona in 1976.<sup>11</sup> Some personal and generational biographies have contributed to this back-to-basics understanding of the period, such as the one written by Ribas<sup>12</sup> that sheds light on Catalan libertarian culture or the recent book by Estornés on the Basque case.<sup>13</sup> Estornés and Falcón propose very interesting accounts of the feminist movement.<sup>14</sup> A recent collective volume edited by Godicheau and Sánchez León works as a last-minute inventory of recent developments in transitional research, with specific attention to the historical memory movement, ideological criticism, assembly-based trade unionism, gay movements and counterculture.<sup>15</sup>

The archive of the epoch is rich in documents supporting the thesis of the central importance of social and civic collective actors in the 1970s, and in 1976 specifically. The volume edited by the *Fundación Espai en Blanc* includes a great variety of documents related to popular mobilisations and worker autonomy at the time.<sup>16</sup> Books by Castells, R. Villasante and Carbonell, among many others, show the direct impact of neighbourhood associations in the late Francoist context.<sup>17</sup> Photography books offer a complex account of the dense ideological collective discussion around the year of 1976, such as the one published by Equipo Diorama on the production of ephemera that critically accompanied Suarez's referendum.<sup>18</sup> Fábregas and Plaza provide a first-hand impression of people power in Sabadell in 1976.<sup>19</sup> Sources referring to how strike movements achieved their highest point after 1976 are abundant as well.<sup>20</sup> Personal diaries are also very valuable, such as the one by Sola, one of the cofounders of the reconstituted CNT and a cultural activist who opened La Vaqueria social centre, both in 1976.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, 1976 was an eventful year, replete with people's protests, strikes, calls to action by neighbourhood associations and the emergence of new forms of doing politics. All these phenomena seem to

coincide with an increase in police and nonstate violence, as reflected in the Sucesos de Vitoria (Vitoria events) of 3 March 1976, when police opened fire on workers gathered in an assembly inside a church, killing five and injuring 150. The mass demonstrations that accompanied the subsequent funeral (fig. 2) increased the emotional weight of the moment, allowing it to assume a *form*, with which the *incident* would later be etched in the historical imaginary of the period (fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> This example also operates within the narrative logic of the *event*, since, after Vitoria, things would never be the same again. At the same time, the Sucesos de Vitoria functions as a threshold that can only be crossed in one direction; a line we must safeguard in order to psychologically assure ourselves that there is a historical break between our era and the previous one (fig. 4).<sup>23</sup>

The study of social movements and of the actions of noninstitutional political agents are the levers with which critical historiography has tried to open up the transition, going beyond the institutional paradigm, which explained the process of democratic change as one deliberately aimed at increasing political stability in an entropic context.<sup>24</sup> From this, we can derive two moral aspects essential to the mythography of the period: firstly, the notion of the model character of the transition; and secondly, its psychosocial influence as a process generating *national reconciliation*. However, the critical bibliography began to underscore the existence of a significant popular response, emerging from the transitional process itself and dissolved in institutions after 1982. Gallego presents a good example of this shift, approaching the issue of collective mobilisation and locating his central argument precisely in 1976.<sup>25</sup> For Gallego, the transition's limitations were already inscribed in the existing inequality between the strength of the regime powers and the opposition; an inevitable inequality that defined the whole process, despite the fact that the intense people's protests in 1976 and 1977 helped circumvent an *even worse transition than the one we have known*. That *worse transition* was the one intended by the pillars of the regime; a democracy of tighter restrictions and fewer freedoms, where everything would be, following Franco's famous phrase, tied up, and tied up tighter.



Fig. 2. Colectivo de Cine de Madrid, *Vitoria*, 1976 (colectivodecinedemadrid.com)



Fig. 3. "El fracaso de un reformismo." Front cover of *Triunfo*, 13 Mar. 1976



Fig. 4. "El misterioso agujero negro español." Sketch by Bernardo Vergara, *eldiario.es*, 7 Dec. 2012 (<http://miradescritiques.blogspot.gr/2012/12/el-misterioso-agujero-negro-espanol.html>)

According to Gallego, the opposition was playing chess with the black pieces, and in this situation, the objective measure of the people's success consisted in a forced draw. And thus, the citizens, with their turmoil and their dead, would go on to foil various reformist projects. The last of these was led by Arias Navarro, and went into crisis precisely as a consequence of the Sucesos de Vitoria. Eventually, the scale of the citizen outpouring would necessitate a more substantial reformist project, which meant that Suárez had to confer political capacities on the popular masses (*de facto* rights) in a dialectic of representation, where the streets and the state (its representation by the media) were presented as *two sequential political theatres*, inhabited by two great political imaginaries of the moment and captured in a vignette by Peridis (fig. 5): state and citizens, Suárez and the people. Only after the 1976 referendum and until the 1977 elections *representation pact* was Suárez able to turn the political parties into interlocutors, recognise them and – to my mind – divert the new forms of political expression towards a new theatre of parliamentary (tele)representation.



Fig. 5. Reproduced from Peridis, *Los animalillos políticos de Peridis* (Madrid: Los Libros de El País, PRISA, 1977)

In this way, following Gallego's lines, the transition's strength lies in its weakness. This strength consisted in the people's ability to wrest concessions from the post-Francoist state that had not figured in the government's plans for the future. Irrespective of the fact that the 1976 conquests (the *constituent process*) were institutionalised, to some degree, in the 1978 constitution, and that they developed, to some degree, after 1982, the year 1976 was to be the one in which the urban political struggle would define *the base of the transition*: that is, the minimum possible offer of a pact to a society that was not on the whole represented within the political structures of the regime. In the same way, that 1978 would mark *the ceiling of the transition*, and 1981 its seal of approval.

But where are these demo-energetic experiences, with which I concern myself here, reflected? Where is their archive, beyond the vague reliefs of a collective subject whose presence is needed to make sense of a period, but which is hard to access in any direct way? Up to this point, I have made my points using a political caricaturist's vignette (fig. 5) and the images taken by a counterinformation group (fig. 2), which later became the icon for an entire era (fig. 3). When historiography calls on these kinds of fragments of discourse, it tends to do so with pedagogic enthusiasm, highlighting – and reinforcing – the arguments that originate from the *hard structure of history* (institutions, state and interests). However, the classical sources do not always pick up on the language (verbal or nonverbal) used by the historical protagonists in their efforts to confer meaning on their experiences. Moreover, even when they do, there is something about the historicity of these fragments,



about their capacity to reflect social desires – the political *eros* of a period – which means it often escapes *positive* analysis. This *something* has to do with the way in which language and images are capable of *opening up the event*. For example, the 1976 election results conveyed a certain popular hostility towards the December 1978 referendum, which Suárez used to legitimise his project of *reform without rupture*, of refashioning the Francoist state. Moreover, a work of graffiti presents us with an aesthetic for this hostile sensibility, a *mise en forme*, a *poetic*; that is, a way to *formalise* historical experiences, to connect *the forms with their own time*.

Throughout this article I use the word “form” in a specific sense, close to Benjamin’s notion of “dialectical image”, and after Didi-Huberman’s idea of the image as “the first political operator”. Following the definition he provided in *Survivance des lucioles*, “the first political operator of protest, crisis, critique or emancipation should be called *image*, in as much as it shows itself to be capable of traversing the horizons defined by totalitarian constructions”.<sup>26</sup> *Form* might be the materiality of the *image*, as an aesthetic phenomena, culturally constructed at various levels and sociopolitically articulated through a set of devices that affect its very structural configuration (shape), its composition (materials), its uniqueness; but it also refers to the ability to relate to other objects and wider cultural codes (genres, movements, a zeitgeist). What characterises *forms* are both their radical historicity (that is, the only way they have to refer to their own time) and, at the same time, their ability to be referred and returned to new contexts, producing that strange effect of *Brumarisation*, a historical mashup which Marx refers to in his essay “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon”.

The possibility of a utopic *new*, for Badiou, is constructed through a political-religious experience that constructs community. Aesthetics in this perspective relates to the capacity of the forms to build up loyalty through time, to evoke with a certain degree of transparency that moment of truth to which the political illumination belongs. That has been, at least in part, of the collective interpretation of Badiou’s ideas in the context of 15M, and Badiou’s own reading of the new political movement: “I remind you [the 15M people] that a political truth is the organised product of a massive popular event in which ... the separative names [of an identitarian object] are replaced by the real presentation of a generic potential of what is multiple.”<sup>27</sup> A fetish about the *new* hovered over activist discussions about the “object” of 15M during the first months of its existence, expressing collective fears that identities always would reduce the collective potential of *the new*. And so they hid the possibility to publicly experience that *the saying and the living of the new* is, first, a process historically re-enacted through forms and, second, that forms are historically constructed in their own materiality.

When I speak in terms of political aesthetics in this text, I am considering Rancière’s theories on aesthetics as well. An aesthetical-political order is a collective frame that organises “the distribution of the sensible”, that is, the inventory of what is possible to think, to feel, to see in a certain given moment. The aesthetical-political in Rancière alludes to the ever-collective and very material conditions of the personal experience. According to him, there is no such a thing as a “non-aesthetics”, but a permanent dialectics tensioning any possible organisation of the sensible. “The sensible” is then divided into emancipatory forces of a political nature and identificative energies of a *police order*.<sup>28</sup> Rancière shares with Badiou a sensibility for new beginnings: he focuses on the critical moment in which a new form destabilises a complex, given paradigm by redescribing what is possible and what is not thanks to the appearance of something new (from the police’s perspec-

tive). However, a form is *new* only in relation to a concrete regimen of experience, as Rancière, a cultural historian, proposes that forms become organised in repertoires historically constructed through *archives*.<sup>29</sup> The dialectics between *the police* and *the politics* becomes complicated when contemplated historically; in this regard, Rancière follows Benjamin: behind each future possibility of the emergence of *the political new* will certainly lie the complete history of the defeated, and all its discontinuities and oblivions. The official history is the police's logic of the past, based on forced continuities that fetishises experiences of the past in a pantheon. Rancière's political history of discontinuities preserves the knowledge of past defeats for future potentialities in their capacity of being *summoned against*. Political history, then, will be always antioedipal, as it proceeds from the need to save the remains of a past from its museification. And if the history of continuity through discontinuity is, for Rancière, only understandable through study, each public re-enactment of its discontinuity, each collective account of the existing distance between reality and words in a given order, activates the archives of the past as a space for sensibility. Historicity is hence a dimension of that collective experience and has to be explored in *political terms*. As a contribution to the emancipation of everyone's sensibility, historicity can be compared not to the study of dinosaur bones, but to the self-induced hallucination of standing in front of a living dinosaur that everyone had always affirmed did not exist.

### ***This is like 1976: ephemeral culture, democracy and public space***

As such, weeks before the 1976 referendum, someone wrote on a park bench: "I'm drowning. Reform my arse" (fig. 6). Behind it is a scene – at that time unprecedented – of walls covered in graffiti. Putting this image in dialogue with other documents (Equipo Diorama, Sempere), this graffiti argues in favour of the existence, in 1976, of a historical subject not only opposed to Francoism, but profoundly antitransition, such as it was designed by governmental political engineering. In the face of the reform of the Cortes Orgánicas (the parliament in Franco's era), this political voice of *rupture* vehemently rejects this reform. If, in the official story, the language of the transition might have been characterised by the search for clarity, rationality and equality – as literary qualities essential to a language of consensus<sup>30</sup> – other documents, like this photograph, depict a diametrically opposed process. By 1976, the public space was full of body language, designed with *civic negation* in mind: humoristic, parodic or obscene. It seemed that some of the subjects of social change during the transition were not offering the state their comprehension and acquiescence (*consensus and reconciliation*), but rather their *radical and insubordinate indignation*.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps this was what my friend was referring to when he said that the civic explosion in May 2011 was *like 1976*, when a section of society experienced the collapse of a "regime of the real". Forty years later, the collapse of Francoism is conveyed not in its dissolution as an *order*, but more essentially *in the failure of its schemes to keep going*; the result of an absence of possible alternatives, the dynamic favoured by the citizens in their brimming, lively actions. But once the existing powers came to terms with the regime's incapacity to outline a plan for its continuance, the discursive production of historical discontinuity would become, from 1977, the most important cultural-political task for the state.<sup>32</sup> This endeavour – a mix of ideology and propaganda – is the foundation of

the cultural logic of Spanish democracy, announcing both its birth *ex nihilo* and its constant need to produce “the new”.<sup>33</sup> From 1977, *the institutionalisation of discontinuity* turned into a paradoxical task since it has repeatedly clashed with the people’s perception that it was of a structural continuity that defined the period. Declaring the arrival of democracy was felt as an even more urgent requirement as the very organisational continuity of the regime became more present.<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 6. Reproduced from Equipo Diorama, *Pintadas del referéndum* (Madrid: Equipo Diorama, 1977)

Like 1976, May 2011 has also unlocked a new temporality with the civic rejection of an order that does not know how to manage its own reproduction. After three years of *temporality of crisis*, Zapatero’s government adopted *austerity politics* – a combination of economic and social neoliberal measures – as part of its own strategy, in the post-2008 scenario. In this context, widespread dissent (expressed politically in movements like V de Vivienda; collectives of vulnerable young people, the so-called *precarious youth*; counterculture networks; or neighbourhood organisations) produced a double collapse: firstly, a physical overflow in public spaces during protest gatherings; and secondly, a rupturist language that, like the graffiti of the transition, provokes the emergence, in *ephemeral formats*, of a polyphony of new voices.<sup>35</sup> 15M as an event cannot be understood without this explosion of voices which displace the established political language. From the outset, its language is *performative*, and openly focuses on the active production of a new temporality, with proclamations such as “The revolution has begun” or “Nobody expected the Spanish revolution” (fig. 7). It thereby forced the emergence of a political event that had not yet formed part of the democratic political imaginary. Not only did *los indignados* (The Indignant) read Badiou, but apparently Austin and Lakoff, too; in any case, they used sophisticated notions from political theory and recognised the value of *performative* articulations for mobilisation. If they were going to create “the new”, they required a new language: if *the revolution* was going to be possible, they had to start by imagining it, by naming it *revolution*.<sup>36</sup>



Fig. 7. Poster proclaiming “Ya ha empezado”, Puerta del Sol, 3 Jun. 2011  
(Photograph by author)

Just like May 2011, in the autumn of 1976, the proliferation of voices shouting from the walls and in the streets made the collective political subject, visible in the act of expressing himself and saying *no*, in the act of negating established reality in order to rename it.<sup>37</sup> In November 1976, we find a theorisation of this precise moment in the pages of *Ajoblanco* (one of the counterculture newspapers that most clearly and successfully explored the recently increased freedom of expression):<sup>38</sup> in a dossier, dedicated to the *right to the city*, in which Franco’s urban overdevelopment (*desarrollismo*) was criticised in relation to the absence of a free public sphere. The physical organisation of space established a determined social model (based on work, consumption, circulation and surveillance). Hence, the imaginary design of a democratic society included dreams of new physical spaces (main squares, *plazas*, parks, murals), which would facilitate collective discussion and in which individuals could have their say and, thus, represent themselves.

The young activists of *Ajoblanco* claimed that “a state that prohibits or steers the discussion that goes on in its *plazas* is a state that gags the people and constructs itself from the silenced words of those who have given them power”.<sup>39</sup> In another article, they continue: “if we really want democracy, we must change the very concept of wall/city. The walls ... belong to the people. To all who have something to say ... No more hiding away. Are we or are we not part of a democracy? The city centres, then, have to change.”<sup>40</sup> With these statements, they were proposing a link between collective participation on the streets and *true democracy*. Thus, in 1976 the issue of constructing the “real democracy”<sup>41</sup> was directly related to the polyphonic production of language within public spaces, and with the free circulation of that language in the *plazas* and on the walls of the *plazas*.

And so we can add articles from *underground* magazines to the collection of *minor* material that I have drawn upon up to now. These ephemeral materialities provide direct access to a specific historical experience belonging to a sector of society which, in the autumn of 1976 and by means of its own language, experienced firsthand how an insurmountable political distance had formed be-

tween reality and language; insurmountable because that chasm divides the existing politics and *the true democracy to come*. I have focused on these materials in the hope that they will illuminate historical events that occurred 35 years later. However, in doing so, I do not wish to state that the two moments (1976 and 2011) reflect each other, that second was an imitation of the first. From the perspective of *aesthetics applied to the cultural critique of history (and historiography)*, there are particular *forms* that demarcate specific modes, through which a few individuals, in a given period, aim to express themselves as protagonists of *radically new* events. Further down the line, the said *forms* are liable to shed light on the experience of other individuals who also work to express themselves as protagonists of events understood as radically new. With this – very Benjaminian – reading, I hope to *dialectise* these ephemeral *fragments of a past imperfect tense*.

What is more, similar materials (and on occasions the same ones) used by a few individuals to try to define the specific (and *new*) identity in a historical moment, sometimes rematerialise in other times, hoping to represent them. In this characteristic *return of forms*, their new users are sometimes conscious of the way in which these fragments are built into their own aesthetic history, their own poetic and their *own history as forms*. And, even though 15M sees itself as a movement exclusive of pre-existing political symbols or of an imaginary of the history associated with these symbols, on 17 May 2011 there were a number of placards with the silhouette of a theatre mask with two lines crossed over the mouth; a protest against the media blackout that, as the placards would have it, had been imposed (fig. 8). So, while the symbol *returned*, the comprehension of the long, diverse and manifold trajectory of that mask was not necessarily retrieved. In Spain, this particular mask is intrinsically linked in its origin in the people's protests in the 1970s and, in particular, in the campaign promoting freedom of expression after members of the Catalan theatre troupe Els Joglars were imprisoned for their work *La Torna*, a military satire on the execution of anarchist Puig Antich (the last person to be garroted in Spain) (fig. 9).<sup>42</sup> The *forms* returned but not the memory of them. But what kind of collective political memory is the *memory of forms* exactly?



Fig. 8. “Protesta del Movimiento 15-M” (Photograph by Luis Sevillano. *El País*, 20 May 2011)



Fig. 9. Poster in support of El Joglars, 1977

(<http://cartelestransicion.blogspot.com/2008/07/libertad-de-expresin-1977-1978.html>)

By saying that 15M was *like* 1976, my friend was suggesting that it is possible to see one historical moment through the lens of another. It was one way of trying to grasp something about what 15M was: it is not coincidental that my friend is a historian, someone with an understanding and awareness of social movements, discourses around memory and their connection to collective identities. His eye is well trained to see the intersections between temporality, language, politics and aesthetics. This also means that what my friend was seeing was inevitably polluted by what he believed he was seeing. And nothing makes an academic happier than seeing the things she or he studies happening before their very eyes. I acknowledge it was the same in my case too: while I finished grading exams a very long way away from Madrid, I felt as happy as a palaeontologist who imagines a dinosaur coming back into existence.

***Criticism and crisis of Spanish democracy: 15M and temporality***

But cultural historians are not the only ones who want to pay *Jurassic Park* a visit from time to time. Some other people believed they were seeing dinosaurs all over the place during the May 2011 gatherings. For those who wanted to acknowledge it, the Puerta del Sol was full of poetic figures evoking imaginaries from the past, with placards that read “This is for you, Granddad” or “Madrid will be the grave of neoliberalism. They shall not pass!”, and which used allegories around the Second Spanish Republic (fig. 10). They were not quite as severe as other symbols (such as red and black flags or tricolours), which were banned at the assemblies in an attempt to safeguard the inclusive spirit of the emerging movement, despite the fact that the “Recuperation of historical memory and the founding principles of the battle for democracy in our state” figured among the approved items on the 20 May assembly agenda.<sup>43</sup>



Fig. 10. Puerta del Sol, 3 Jun. 2011 (Photograph by author)

It was as if an earthquake had shifted the surface of the world as we knew it, bringing fragments of past worlds up to the surface. And although the symbols were covered up, and the flags hidden, stuffed inside pockets,<sup>44</sup> this did not prevent people from feeling that the political age unfolding in the squares had entered into a structural dialogue with other, former political ages. The images of the squares *filled with people* ahead of the local elections on Sunday 22 May inevitably made *us* think

about another spring 80 years earlier, when huge crowds spilled out onto the streets and squares to proclaim the Second Spanish Republic on 14 April 1931 (fig. 11). It is in that *historical place* that the deceased *granddad* referred to in the banners is situated, and as such proudly recovered in memory.



Fig. 11. Poster marking the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931  
 (<http://www.españaporlarepublica.es/2013/02/blog-post.html>)

The experience of the past unravelling in the present and, as a result, the sense that the dead observe us from that past, is at the heart of the political – and aesthetic – perception of historical revolutionary change, as is the sensation that language is changing its meaning before us. However, the 1930s was not the main time frame being referred to in the squares. The *Manifiesto Fantasma* (Ghost Manifesto) said:

We must recover words, give them new meaning so that the language isn't manipulated, leaving the people defenceless ... *Real Democracy* means giving names to the infamy we're living through, ... constructing a political discourse that is capable of reconstructing the social fabric.<sup>45</sup>

The quote implicitly contains a historical account that refers to the transition to democracy as a time of linguistic establishment ("recovering *the words*"), where the "social fabric" was "constructed" and where things and their names corresponded, before getting mixed up in the neoliberal Babel. In the *Manifiesto Fantasma*, the transition is experienced as a moment of *legitimacy* where *words and things* correspond, and this correspondence would have marked the start of the his-



torical experience of being *the first generation to live in a democracy*. By insisting on the legitimacy of the founding moment, the *indignados* insist on the contemporary duty to lessen the distance between the false politics of the present and the true politics to come. By doing so, the *indignados* were conjugating their own epoch in the past tense.

Correspondingly, it is worth mentioning an action coordinated across all of the 15M camps on 21 May 2011: the “funeral of democracy”. One image shows three activists holding a vigil over “democracy’s tomb”, demonstrating their inconsolable grief (fig. 12). On top of the casket they have written: “Democracy 1978–15M. RIP”. Of course, they are not saying that the 15M movement *killed democracy*, but rather that on 15 May 2011 the Spanish democracy *died* and that, with its death, one age ended and another began. Democracy is understood here as a *chronotope* (Koselleck) and 15M as the dawn (the product of an *event*) that interrupts a way of referring to reality that began in 1978 with the constitution and which lasted for three decades. This parodic funeral shows us that within that chronotope a political system (democracy) and a moral regime (we live in a good age) entered into a description of the present, in which they were naturalised (*The Democracy*). That identification crumbles throughout the assemblies that took place that May.



Fig. 12. Puerta del Sol, 22 May 2011 (Photograph by author)

But if *The Democracy* follows Francoism, what comes after *The Democracy*? Neo-Francoism? The Third Spanish Republic? The Fourth German Reich? If it is true that historical periods struggle when it comes to imagining their posterity, in the Spanish democracy this connection has been especially problematic, as the illustrator Fontdevila understands (fig. 13). Many critics have pointed to the philosophical contradiction that *the Transition* supposes: an *inchoate period* by definition, but one that has become a solid, epoch-making temporality. This paradox highlights one of the theoretical concepts most strongly associated with 15M as an event, the notion of the *Culture of the Transition* or CT.<sup>46</sup> According to Martínez, democracy institutionalises the foundational discursive logic of the transition and, with it, the logic of consensus that requires the constant updating of the transition, its myths and fantasies. Among these fantasies is the threat of dissent and the need to *return to the spirit of the transition* and to the constitution that would guarantee unity, preserving the order between things and words. That period of linguistic security was buried with the mock coffins of 21 May. The growing gap between words and things, put into objective terms by means of aesthetic practices, destroyed the sense of living in democracy. To declare *the death of democracy* was to declare that the moral principles and historical narrative that had existed alongside democracy for decades are no longer hegemonic.

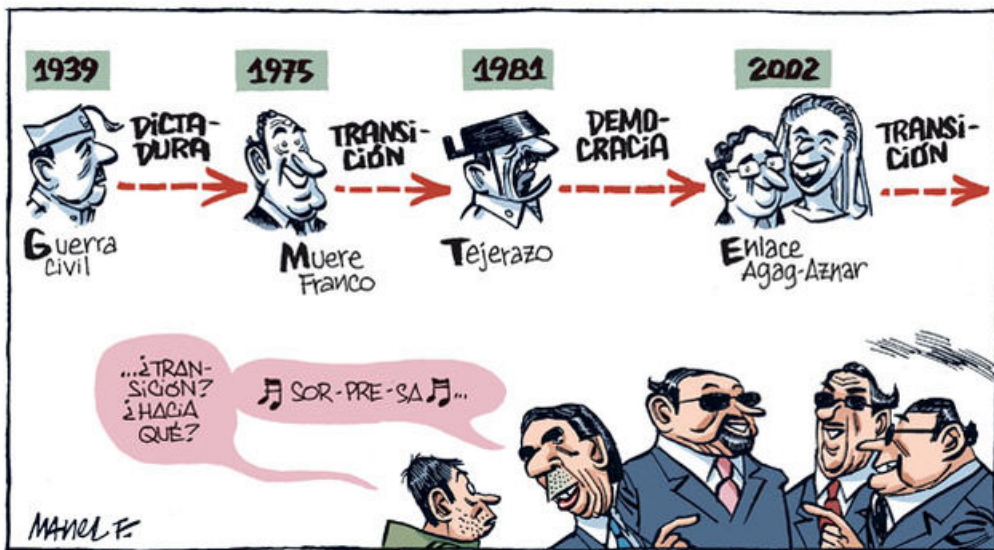


Fig. 13. “Después de la Boda.” Sketch by Manel Fontdevila, *eldiario.es*, 24 May 2013 ([http://www.eldiario.es/vinetas/Despues-boda\\_10\\_135536446.html](http://www.eldiario.es/vinetas/Despues-boda_10_135536446.html))

However, the once omnipresent heroic account of the transition as a time of accord has not disappeared altogether. Once the citizens declare the death of democracy, the official and institutional discourses try to inject transition into the social body as if it were a tranquiliser. It is worth mentioning here the government’s inclusion of “the Spanish transition” as one of the features that make up the so-called *Spanish Brand*, as part of the *solid values* of the nation.<sup>47</sup> Opposing these phantasmal echoes, other readings of the transition are socialised, circulating in plazas and as-

semblies, and in the digital sphere, suggesting that the discussion over the nature of *the transition* is relevant today in civil terms.

On every 23 February since 15M, demonstrators against the so-called austerity politics have organised spoof commemorations of Lieutenant Colonel Tejero's attempted coup d'état in 1981. If traditional historiography read 23 February 1981 as kind of antireactionary immunisation, as a result of King Juan Carlos' television appearance during the coup, in which he demanded total military support for democracy, after 2011 it became a disputed date; one used by citizen groups and in popular countermemorialisations in public spaces to give new meaning to the commemoration, which stretched beyond the state's official narrative.<sup>48</sup> This is what the young activists who appear in fig. 14 can be seen to do with their *queer* deconstruction of the myth, questioning the *hyper-masculinised* model of Tejero, the civil guard who "penetrates" the body of the young democracy, inserting himself in its chamber of representatives in what Medina calls "the libidinal pact of the transition", a sadomasochistic theatre based on the "pleasure of self-abandonment".<sup>49</sup> By literally embodying this possible *trans-Tejero*, with their costumes and phallic prosthetics for firearms, these activists challenge the masculinity of the Spanish state's ideal political subject, and with it the false connection between democracy and sovereignty, in existence since 1981.



Fig. 14. Puerta del Sol, 23 Feb. 2012. Photograph by Juan Santiso/Facebook (<https://goo.gl/fqRHy6>)



Fig. 15. Malestar Logroño, 22 Feb. 2012  
(<http://malestarlog.blogspot.gr/2012/02/23f-contra-el-golpe-de-estado-de-los.html>)

The *trans-Tejeros* were part of wider campaign *against the Financial 23F* and “the market coup d’état”. Policies for the exclusion of public expenditure and the destruction of the welfare state (*the cuts*) were interpreted as an assault on democratic popular sovereignty, because the *private* losses of the financial crisis were socialised, by means of the *bailout* plan. By adopting the symbol of the anticuts movement (a pair of scissors in the middle of a prohibitory traffic sign), they established a connection between the *tijeretazos* (the scissor-wielders or “cutters” within government) and the 1981 *El Tejerazo* (the alternative name for 23F). In February 2013, they “returned the *punch* (*el golpe*, which also means *the coup* in Spanish)” (fig. 15). The crux of their complaint was the sudden and convenient change in the comprehension of the Spanish constitution: having defended its literalism and the impossibility of its reform for decades, in a record matter of weeks the two major political parties of the nation agreed – in the summer of 2012 – to immediately incorporate an article that sanctioned the state’s prioritisation of foreign debt ahead of any other expenses. The manifesto said:

On 23 February 1981 a few sinister characters who opposed the democratic constitutional regime carried out an armed attack on the new Spanish Democracy, raiding the Congress of Deputies of Spain. Thirty years later, ... in the same scene, the people’s “representatives” ... passed a reform of the Spanish Constitution that nobody had asked for, without accommodating even the slightest social debate and without it being approved by means of a referendum ... It is not a forced likeness. This is the incident that, in the most patent way, represents the coup d’état we are living through. Only this time it is not being carried out by ludicrous civil guards and generals, but by top executives wearing spotless suits and being flattered by politicians. We’re living through a financial coup d’état.<sup>50</sup>

Once the myth around the transition broke down, a deeper structure of interests and connections came to light, one which had been in operation before and after 1975. The state, having gradually lost its *façade* of legitimacy over the two-year-long cycle of people’s protests, was now revealing its workings, and the interrelatedness of financial capital and public-order interests. At least, this how illustrator Miguel Brieva interpreted the events in one of his political allegories (fig. 16), in which the task of symbolically demolishing the official discourse of Spanish democracy is summed up in the public’s aesthetic interruption of its imaginary of the future (Koselleck); that is to say, the *space of experience* and the *horizons of expectations* that the official discourse once guaranteed.

### ***They called it democracy? Political emancipation and democratic legitimacy***

“They called it democracy?” The title of this article alludes to one of the most recognisable slogans of the 15M movement (“They call it democracy and it’s not”), a catchphrase that signals the end of a certain identification between form and content, language and practice, citizens and state. This given identification defines the chronotope that arranges the Spanish historical experience of the last three decades, and which initiates the logic of the *Culture of the Transition*.<sup>51</sup> But for how long have they called it democracy? And who are *they*? Has *democracy*, as a metahistorical concept, been a term shared by the majority of Spaniards over the last three decades? For how long has contemporary Spain been referred to as “the democracy”, as one might talk of “Francoism” or “the

Republic”? Should we assume that the temporality begun in 1982 has been socialised, therefore, as “the democracy” or, perhaps, that this happened much before, as early the 1977 elections? Was *democracy* a performative statement (a *political fiction*) that came into being at the moment of its legislative declaration, generating historical awareness, or did it take many more years of complex processes, or perhaps was it never entirely or categorically achieved? When did we start talking about post-Francoism as “the democracy”, as an era that has its own identity, as a happy and positive development from late Francoism? To what extent is the promotion of the term as a meta-historical concept connected to the realisation of the two principal points of the sociodemocratic project: the welfare modernisation of the Francoist state and Europeanisation?

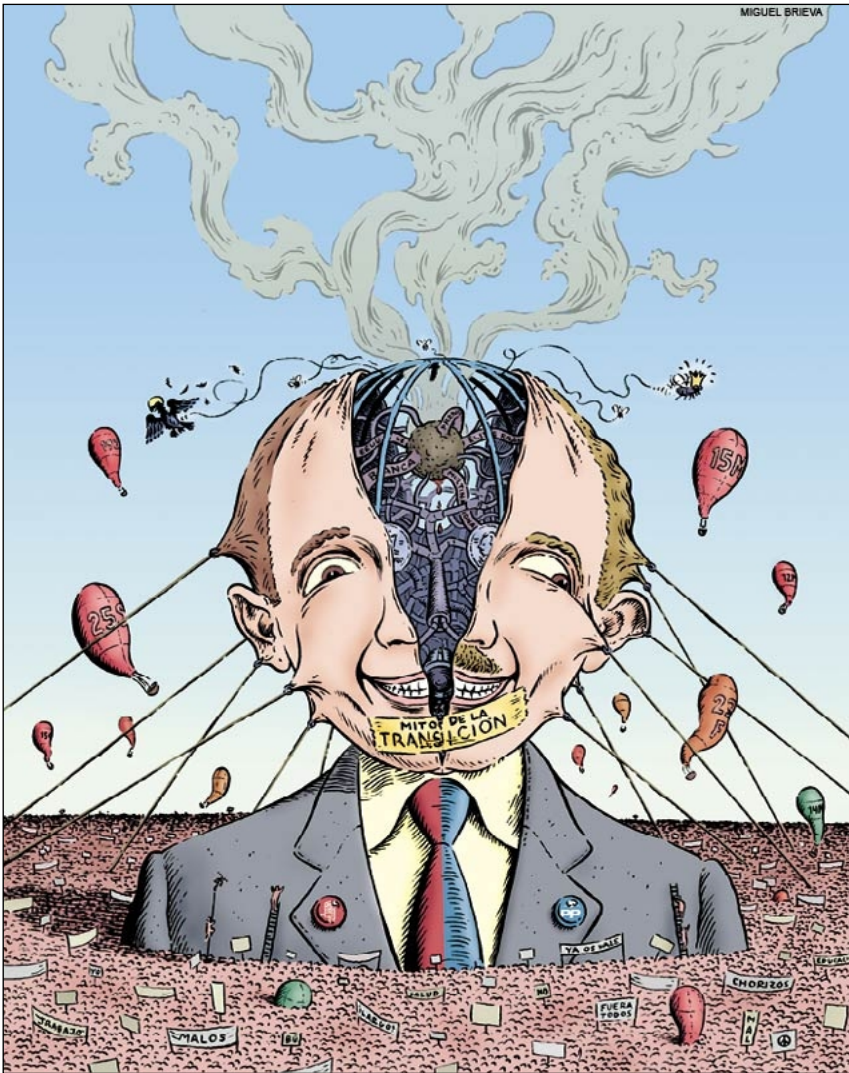


Fig. 16. “Mitos de la transición.” Sketch by Miguel Brieua, *Cuadernos de eldiario.es* 2 (2013) ([http://www.eldiario.es/sinsentidocomun/CALOR\\_6\\_152644758.html](http://www.eldiario.es/sinsentidocomun/CALOR_6_152644758.html))

An abundance of similar inquiries leads us to the question of the foundational legitimacy of democracy. This was a compulsive concern at the end of the 1970s: we ought to remember that, at that point, in the various electoral bids that went on between 1977 and 1982, the poor electoral turnout (67 percent in the constitutional referendum, which got only the backing of less than 60 percent of the entire electorate; 68 percent in the 1979 elections and 62 percent in the first local elections) was a clear threat to the legitimisation of the process, as were the electoral *black holes* in large areas across the state, particularly in Euskadi (Basque Country), where the high abstention rate and the continued existence of radical political positions complicated the reading of the electoral results in institutionalist terms. A few investigations undertaken in the social sciences have underlined the “Spaniards’ unconditional backing of the democracy”, regularly confusing the understanding of *democracy* as a *chronotope* (*what they call democracy*) and as a *political fiction* (*the true democracy which it is not*).<sup>52</sup> To put it another way, the fact that the citizens “supported *democracy*” did not mean that they considered themselves to be already living through one.

Other analysts have approached the question in moral terms, *reproaching* the people for not having enthusiastically embraced the party system and the constitution, revisiting the initial arguments that attributed the high abstention rates in the first elections to “conformism, political apathy, disorientation and gaps in information”,<sup>53</sup> or to the *narcissistic* attitude of the young.<sup>54</sup> These analyses depict either a slowly hopeful population ahead of the institutional projects as part of the democratic transition, or a considerably reticent one. In either case, though, it was a *democratically illiterate population*, with no political agency and which lacked awareness, interests, desires and political identities. In principle, this overall description would prove *naturally* compatible with an interventionist understanding of the process, under the terms of the legal-political engineering implemented from abroad,<sup>55</sup> even though, in my opinion, adopting this geopolitical reading should not necessarily lead us to postulate the nonexistence of an active citizenry.

The discourse around the *disaffected Spaniards of the new democratic system* corresponds neatly with the social penetration of *other discourses of the democracy*, which are characterised by their defence of civil society autonomy and grassroots political participation. According to the governmental Data Documentation Centre, some 77 percent of respondents in 1978 believed that “democracy is the best system for a country like ours”, a figure that in 1980 dropped to 69 percent and after the 1981 coup increased to 81 percent.<sup>56</sup> But, according to data from the Centre for Sociological Research (CSIC), in the same year of 1978, only 65 percent of respondents believed that “political parties are necessary for democracy to work” (and only 45 percent believed that they “facilitate political participation”). The figure continued to go down to as low as 61 percent in 1980 and 1981.<sup>57</sup> These statistics might suggest that 40 percent of the population believed in the viability of a democracy without political parties; be that a *citizens’ democracy* (assembly run, participatory, republican-libertarian) or an authoritarian system.<sup>58</sup> In both cases, the lack of popular enthusiasm in response to the closed lists of unfamiliar representatives, obscure acronyms and undemocratically functioning political parties was apparent throughout the transition. Moreover, it contradicted the climate of civic jubilation and excitement felt by large sectors of the population during the same period.

Such democratic energies do not show up easily in the polls, but it is worth retrieving them from the documentaries that represented the agency and voice of these *unrepresented citizens*, who,

like a looping bass line, confer unity on the period: from the grassroots mobilisation of *La ciudad es nuestra* (The City is Ours), a documentary about the neighbourhood associations in Madrid,<sup>59</sup> or the rise of anarcho-libertarianism in 1977 in Madrid, again,<sup>60</sup> as well as in Barcelona (*Video Nou*); to the massive politicisation of society as a whole, which was captured on camera in 1980 by the Bartolomé siblings. The citizens' film archive also includes the work of groups like the Colectivo de Cine de Madrid (Madrid Cinema Collective) or the *Video Nou* groups in Barcelona, as well as films by directors like Joaquim Jordà, Llorenç Soler, Gonzalo García-Pelayo, Ventura Pons or Eloy de la Iglesia. The confusion around the term *disenchantment* (*el Desencanto*) relates to the *discrepancy* between the thronging citizenry shown in these documents (very present in the streets and the alternative public sphere) and the general refusal to bestow democratic legitimacy on the post-Francoist state. The extent to which people's beliefs (and hopes) around what it was to *live in a democracy* had very little to do with the new state institutions or the notion of political participation that these institutions formalised.<sup>61</sup>

*Not everybody called it democracy.* The 1970s gave rise to a political subject, which was of sizeable proportions and difficult to stabilise from within institutional parameters. This *political subject in transition* does not appear, curiously, in the picture of the transition. The social configuration of its identity and values does not fit the profile or identity of the "middle classes" who were the target of Francoist social engineering and of the language of the socialist PSOE party in the 1980s; as well as being the main support for the libidinal political pact of the democratic chronotope, such as it was represented in the 1982 elections. I will give another example of graffiti, also related to the 1976 referendum (fig. 17). In it, a television broadcasts guidelines that drive a few cheerful citizens towards a toilet that serves as a ballot box, where they deposit their vote ("Please flush after voting"). Those people who do not vote are chased by the police (the "guardians of democracy, replete with ballot box and rifle in the crusade against the nonbelievers"). The discrediting of the representative system, the link between the process of transition and political violence, and the powerfully negative valence which, in this context, takes on the name "democracy", are all openly discredited. According to this image, for a few young people of the transition, the discourse of *the democracy* is simply the legitimising discourse of the post-Franco state.

This bivalence between an existing *false democracy* and a *true democracy* to come reappears obsessively in many texts of the period, for example in an issue of the magazine *Ajoblanco*:

There are those who claim that this country is in a process of *normalisation* ... We [don't] think so ... because, after 40 years of dictatorship and fascist impositions, *everyday Spain doesn't have spokespeople or organisations*: they were all shot down by force ... Freedom, not a jot; the people don't have freedom, and if at some point they should gain it, they'll pay for it dearly later (deaths, fines, kidnappings, threats) ... *The real people need freedom ... to gather in assemblies all over* (factories, neighbourhoods, towns and cities); ... *in order to forge ... their own organisations and their true representatives*; ... *their true objectives and politics*. Then ... will we be able to believe in the process of *reform*, in the *process of popular self-government* and in all of these things proudly proclaimed today – without the least respect and in total confusion – by *those people who are not nor will ever be Democrats*. They might have *forgotten the true meaning of Democracy*, but we have not, just as there is no danger of us forgetting.<sup>62</sup>

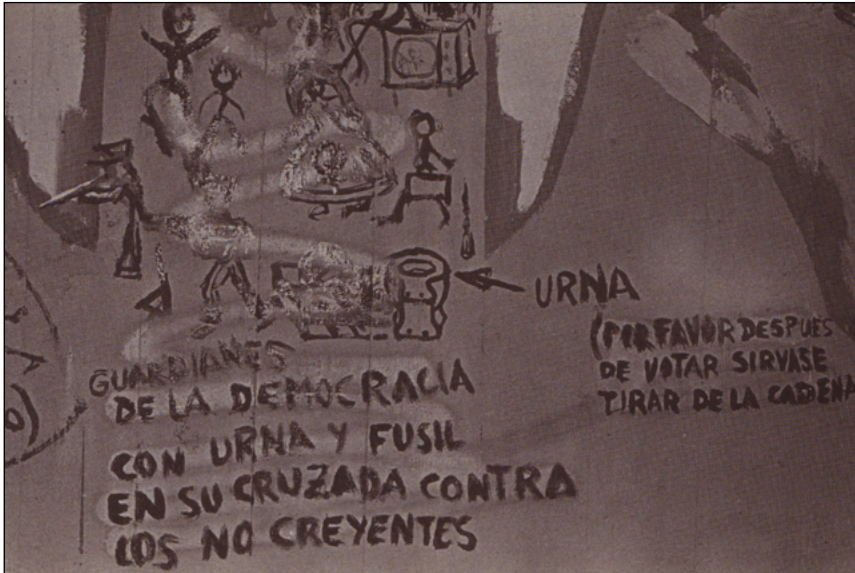


Fig. 17. Reproduced from Equipo Diorama, *Pintadas del referéndum* (Madrid: Equipo Diorama, 1977)

My emphasis points to how the official language of the transition to democracy (morality, normalisation, pact, reform, self-government, etc.) is inflected with a civic perspective. The accepted language of the 1970s is thus presented as a *discourse of the false democracy* (that of “those who are not nor will ever be democrats”), held up against the “true meaning of Democracy”. If the transitional state assumed that it was possible for creating *democracy* without any previously existing citizens, by imagining that some would appear as a result of the action of suitable political structures, the above-cited text defends the existence of *unrepresented citizens* (“the people”, “everyday Spain”) who are denied the possibility of constructing autonomous spaces in which to politically rise up. The text calls for a democracy that is based on the engagement of civil and political liberties as a precondition for the development of a legitimate political representation (“true representatives”), for which they are required to appropriate public space; an idea reiterated in the very title of the text: “When will they give us a Hyde Park? A letter to the editors.”<sup>63</sup>

There is also a poetics of history in the text, which points to the existence of an “us” that knows “the true meaning of the word Democracy” because *it has not been forgotten*. In this passage, the allusion to the historical imaginary of the 1930s seems clear. The prewar political experiences and, in particular, the civic culture of Catalan anarchism that the magazine *Ajoblanco* takes as its referent,<sup>64</sup> identify themselves with the future possibility of a *true democracy*. The sentence “there is no danger of us forgetting” constitutes an affirmation of the power of memory and a moral engagement with it, which contradicts the supposed will to forget the authoritarian past and the dominant democratic tradition that would develop through the course of the 1970s. Indeed, throughout the transition, there were subjects who were in no danger of forgetting. This pride in respect for the past does not presuppose a direct continuity between the 1930s and 1976. Rather, it speaks of



a dialogue with past democratic experiences, which appear, like *dialectical images*, on top of the present of 1976, *opening it up politically*.

Those who are most closely identified with the civic language of the political breakdown around 1976 and 1977 did not call the historical period they were living through (post-Francoism) *democracy*, nor did they give that name to the transforming political order of the following years (political transition), precisely because they had their own political imaginary, which upheld an alternative description of democracy (*true democracy*) based on particular practices (civic liberties, cultural autonomy, participatory democracy, citizen power, etc.). This space is occupied by individuals and collectives from diverse backgrounds and with different characteristics, all of them committed to alternative – unofficial – interpretations of their own epoch, although not all boasting the same level of reflection that we find in the abovementioned *Ajoblanco* letter. Over the years, there would be enough signs to suggest that these same collectives, and those that accepted their political heritage, had problems identifying *democracy* (as a *chronotope*) with a positive political imaginary in the 1980s. As such, we might propose that these discursive communities spanned the democratic decades, offering us a bridge between the transition and the now, a bridge over the decidedly troubled waters of contemporary Spanish history. Thus, offsetting the recognised culture of the *Spanish democracy*, the subaltern memory of a *democracy to come* continued to beat on.

### ***Aesthetic criticism and historical memory of the transition to democracy after 15M***

At the start of 2012, a TV documentary called *Las batallas del abuelo (Granddad's Battles)* was broadcast on national television; an interesting reportage into the protests instigated by the self-proclaimed *yayoflautas* (meaning roughly “*geriatric rabble-rousers*”, an adaptation of a common alternative term for hippies (*perroflautas*), used to refer to the groups of older people who politically organised themselves after 15M). For the crowds of young people assembled in the camps, May 2011 constituted, in many cases, their first experience of political transformation (“feeling that we were contemporaneous with something”, as one activist from Rioja would tell me in 2013). The *yayoflautas*’ attendance at the rallies, on the other hand, was linked to the baggage of their political pasts, memories of former struggles and social passions that were suddenly being relived. What stood out from their participation in the actions in the squares was their desire to express a political experience that referred back to the initial stage of the democratic transition. One said: “And I’ll come every day, as long as these young people need our support; we’ve already fought once, through Franco’s dictatorship, and this, to me at least, is a dictatorship run by the markets and big corporations and the banks.” Another remarked that “this [the 15M] is the most beautiful spectacle I’ve seen since I was 20 years old: the spectacle of freedom and democracy.”<sup>65</sup>

The development of these intergenerational revisions of *unrepresented citizens*’ memories of the transition was proportional to the growing cycle of protests. This was thanks to the involvement of people old enough to have constructed their young political identity standing on the walls, in the streets and in the squares (and also in prison) in the 1970s. In June 2012, just before the *rescue* of the savings banks, a bellicose *yayoflauta* publicly recalled how he had been detained “on Christmas day” 1975, when he

and other pacifist associates read out “a manifesto against military service and in favour of conscientious objection, inside a parish church in Catalonia”. The experience of going back out onto the streets again to protest brought back these memories: “I never thought that I would have to go back to the streets to fight for our rights in Spain. I thought that we’d risen above that time after Franco’s dictatorship”.<sup>66</sup>

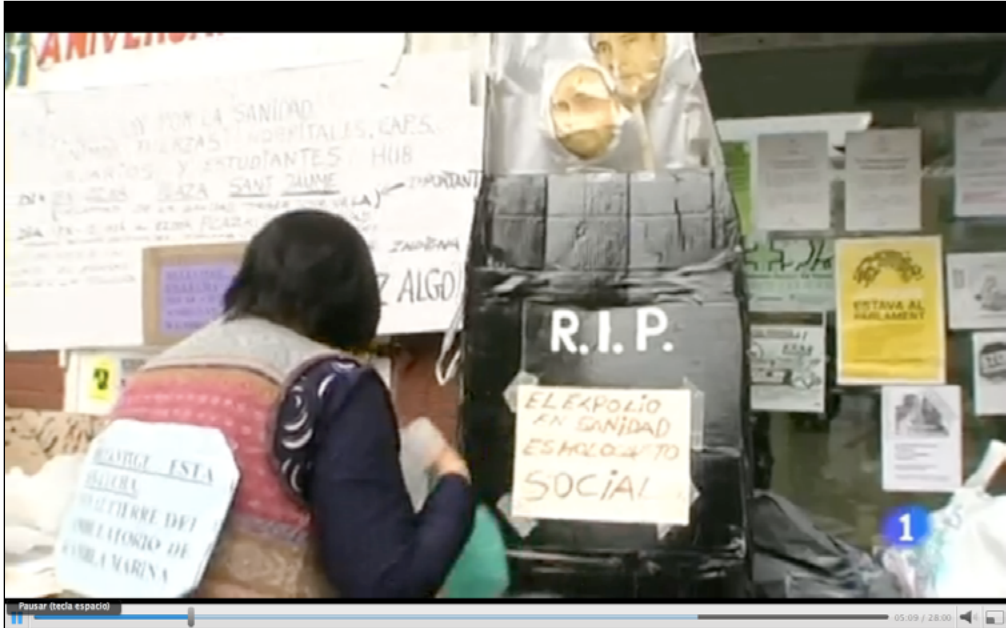


Fig. 18. Screenshot from Repor, “Las batallas del abuelo,” rtve.es, 1 Feb. 2012

These experiences form the crux of the programme *Las batallas del abuelo*. In one scene, two women from Sabadell preside over a makeshift coffin in which “the victims of the cuts” are symbolically buried. They read from placards put up by groups of neighbours in a health clinic that had closed as a result of *austerity cuts*. The transition to democracy and the present come together through the power of the posters and coffin, as political-aesthetic artefacts (fig. 18), to trigger a process of remembrance. Thirty years later, the gap between memory and history that was established as part of the identity of these citizens has closed:

“The cuts in healthcare are social genocide” [reads the sign] –people are dying! We’re hard-working people, we’ve fought hard ... [We’re locking ourselves in] to protect public healthcare, *our* clinic which *we* achieved through underground methods, in fact during Franco’s regime which now these substandard, untrustworthy democrats of ours have taken away from us.<sup>67</sup>

We are in the former workers district on the outskirts of Barcelona. This, and other comments below, allude to the cycle of strikes that began in the area after Franco’s death, as well as to the fight against the dictatorship.<sup>68</sup> One of the interviewees recalls how a group of neighbours hurled stones and boiling water at the police from a rooftop. The professional lives of these anti-Franco fighters come to an end just as the historical period of the transition tails off; once the period is over, these same people are

forced to watch as the symbols that made up their political identity as citizens and members of other groups disappear. Some feel that today's youth are not defending these gains with the same rigour that they employed to achieve them.<sup>69</sup> The health clinic is not only a public service; it is the localised, spatial symbol of the welfare state in that neighbourhood. The health clinic was a silent metonymy of *democracy* as a chronotope, and this became clear as the story of its victorious conquest was recalled in the hour of its loss. The possessive (*our* clinic) tells us a lot about the type of *political subject* speaking (us, the locals, the "hardworking people", the ones who "have fought hard"). In speaking this way, they unleash an entire alternative version of the 1970s; one based on the people's capacity to force the state to make concessions, beyond trade union organisations and political parties.

This is just one local example of a much bigger transformation in process, in which multiple alternative versions of the transition emerge, linked to the growing awareness that *democracy*, as a *historical regime*, would today be collapsing. Sabadell's experience is repeated in other neighbourhoods, like Otxarcoaga in Bilbao, where they recall how neighbourhoods fought a constant battle "from the 1960s to 1985, the toughest years" ("people almost killed themselves to work an eight-hour day", "every day we were on strike"), and how "they managed to achieve many things ... that have since been lost".<sup>70</sup> These activists thus offer an account of the 1970s that glorifies communitarian political participation, linking it to today's demands to return to similar strategies. This feeling, shared by many professionals across the wide range of fields that form part of the welfare state, is at the heart of the intersecting mobilisations referred to as *citizen waves* or *tides*.<sup>71</sup> It's worth citing here the following retirement letter written by a secondary school teacher, in which the feeling of crossing historic thresholds is once again expressed through a shift in the meaning of words:

And I haven't *forgotten* that I began teaching at baccalaureate level in 1975 in Vigo, in an especially tumultuous *historic moment*, alongside many other young colleagues, conscious of the ending of one era and the beginning of a new one in which we wanted to play an *active part*. On 23FI I was surprised by my own worry – felt more for my two-year-old child than for me – that the democratic future that we longed for had already come to an end ... One day in class, a student asked me the meaning of the world "honrado" [honourable], and at that point, yes, I thought it could get bad, and that we were going to have to hold up this building so that it wouldn't fall, and prevent the brutalisation of society and the politics of privatisation from putting an end to that very best of Spanish institutions: public learning, the guarantee of equal opportunities, a space of social coexistence and tolerance.<sup>72</sup>

There are other points we could pull out from these accounts, but I only want to highlight a semantic shift in the process that is exemplified when a local from Sabadell states: "I always go to the protests and to everything that sticks it to this bastard regime!"<sup>73</sup> By assessing the current political situation from a recaptured activist memory that looks critically at the transition, the chronotope which up to now we have referred to as *the democracy* suddenly, and as a result of the revitalisation of memory, starts to be known as *the regime*. This term was used by *the democrats* in reference to Francoism just at the moment in which they started to call post-Francoism *democracy*. But, at the end of the 1970s, *the regime* was also the name given to post-Francoism by those individuals who did not call it *democracy* and who, in many cases, did not call themselves *democrats* either. We saw this same term emerging during the 15M movement.

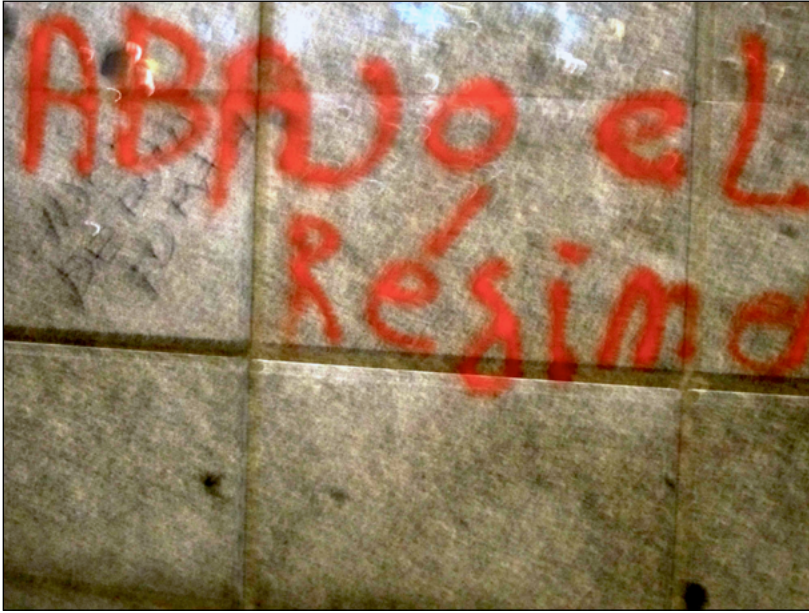


Fig. 19. Graffiti in Madrid's central district, 13 Nov. 2012 (Photograph by author)

"DOWN WITH THE RÈGIME. VIVA THE FEARLESS PEOPLE'S FIGHT!" read the gigantic placard displayed by the activists from the *Youth Without a Future* movement in the Plaza del Sol in May 2011. In social media hashtags, in the 23F parodies in recent years and in the criticisms of the international debt-paying mechanisms (*deudocracia*, or "debtocracy"), the references to *the regime* have multiplied. An image taken on the eve of the general strike on 14 November 2012 in central Madrid (fig. 19) gives us a sense of this. A month earlier, Xosé Manuel Beiras – a significant political leader from the transition to democracy – openly used the expression during the Galician electoral campaign, in which, echoing the Greek party Syriza, he headed a broad-based political coalition revolving around the rejection of austerity politics and debt payment. He stated: "We're in the final throes of a rotting regime."<sup>74</sup> Beiras, who fell back to speaking about a "democratic breakdown", also sensed a return to the transition:

The most striking thing about this [campaign] is how analogous it is to the first elections [from 1977], that late-Francoist drive towards democracy, lacking resources and methods, like now, with the supporters assuming all the work ... What I'm seeing now is a recovery of political faith ... It's not the reaction of broken people, but of people ready to do battle.<sup>75</sup>

The specific *forms* that crystallised the rupturist political experience of the 1970s *have returned*. We are not used to understanding the transition to democracy like this, as a process of popular struggle against a *false democracy* imposed from above. This, though, is the narrative that has been spreading in public and digital spaces over the last few years, supported by a poetic, civil memory, sketchy as it might be, of the 1970s. Returning to one of the original points in this article, with every month that passes there seems to be an increase in the depreciation of the legitimacy of democracy. Simul-

taneously, the citizens mobilise themselves exploring the distance between legitimacy and authority. Some of their more utopian actions (“25S. Take Over the Congress” and the “Constituent Process in Catalonia”) revolve around performatively occupying this distance between language and practice.<sup>76</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that these actions have been branded “antidemocratic”: a government spokesperson stated in reference to the *taking of congress* – a nonviolent protest – that “the last time congress was surrounded was for the attempted coup d’état.”<sup>77</sup> This “institutionalist” reduction of the meanings of the word *democracy* is consistent with the closure and immobilisation of its institutions.

There is another way of understanding the resurgence of historical narratives of the transition that also produces its *forms*. According to this way of understanding, episodes supposedly contained within the walls of the transition return to make themselves seen and heard in the present (fig. 4). While the three pillars of the social-democratic state are dismantled (pensions, education and public healthcare), a few government initiatives discuss the clampdown of basic political rights (to strike, demonstrate, unionise and release information), which the people won during the transition.<sup>78</sup> Representatives from big Spanish corporations demand the modification of the 1979 strike law and the government talks about “modifying protest rights” and restricting the distribution of images of the authorities in an attempt to avoid accusations of police violence from protesters, while the Catalan government proposes curbing the right to rally.

The citizens’ growing awareness is related to a new kind of *remembrance* practice (*recuperación de memoria*), which specifically recognises victims of state violence during the transition to democracy, and not only during the war. Two examples prove significant: firstly, the massive attendance at the protest convened to remember the dead workers of the Vitoria Events of March 2013 (fig. 20), and, secondly, the presence of stencils on the columns of the Faculty of Political Science of Complutense University of Madrid depicting the faces, names and stories of the students who were killed during the transition (fig. 21). The relationship of these two examples to the actions of the remembrance movements in recent years seems fairly clear.<sup>79</sup>



Fig. 20. Commemoration held in March 2013 for the dead workers of the Vitoria Events. *El País*, 3 Mar. 2013 (Photograph by Adán Ruiz de Hierro, EFE, [http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2013/03/03/paisvasco/1362324992\\_759623.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2013/03/03/paisvasco/1362324992_759623.html))



Fig. 21. Stencil commemorating María (or “Mari”) Luz Nájera, Complutense University of Madrid, June 2013. Luz Nájera (20) was killed in 1977 after being struck by a smoke grenade fired by police (Photograph by author)



Fig. 22. Graffiti by Alberto de Pedro, Plaza de San Nicolás, Madrid, 2011 (<http://www.ekosystem.org/photo/929362>)

This other experience of the unlocking of stories from the past is lived as *a return to the past*, before a *return to the pasts*. Some perturbing graffiti by Alberto de Pedro (fig. 22) reflects on the nonlinear way in which *the great hand of historical time* would test us: on the clock of Spanish history, time moves backwards and the hours of democracy's existence disappear. According to this timeframe – to this backward movement – today we would have already crossed the threshold into 1977, the *historical hour* represented by an image that nods to Juan Genovés' monument in honour of the lawyers killed in Atocha. We're already outside the democratic chronotope. Now, inside "*Francoism returned*", time regresses at lightning speed: we have only got four hours until the clock hands turn back to strike midnight on the sombre eve of 1936. If the experience of the *transition returning* served to actively unlock the present from the past, this other experience of *us returning to the transition* is more closely associated with the opposite sensation: the blurring of the lines (*events*) with which the experience of historical discontinuity between the past and present was constructed. As these lines disintegrate, so too does the political belief that "things (certain things) would never be the same after *that*" fall apart.



Fig. 23. Graffiti at the Tabacalera, Madrid, 2013 (Photograph by Marcos López)

It feels like the *epochal door* of 1975 is threatening to open. This would symbolically allow for *the resurrection of the dead*. In this sense, it is impressive to see the number of references to the *return of Franco* in the protests of recent years, most typically on cardboard signs stating: "Spaniards, Franco's back." They also appeared on the day of the general strike on 14 November 2012 on the Falangist signs, which read "Come back, General" (*Vuelva, General*). A mural in Madrid, photographed in the summer of 2013, informs us of the loss of the psychosocial entity of the transition as a historic cut-off, and formalises the aesthetic experience of semantic change (fig. 23). In this *graffito*, the giant but hazy silhouette of Arias Navarro, with the same downcast expression with

which he made the televised announcement of the dictator's death ("ha muerto"), offers an unexpected message: "Spaniards, Franco's back" ("ha vuelto"). The blurred outline is *formed* out of letters and words: the political language *defines it* at the same time as this language is being redefined. Old political slogans ("PP is fascism") return, triumphant, written in shades of pink, while in bluish tones the language that made up the democratic period dissolves: the letters of "this democracy" are lost against the figure's relief (*democracia* jumbled up as "E D M C R C I A"). At the foot of the image, a child draws the scene and one of the people's slogans declares: "One feels so small."

### ***They called it democracy and it's not: the poetic history of a slogan***

The aesthetic-political experiences that I have analysed in this article move away from the shared perception that there is a discrepancy between what we have been calling *forms*, and the experiences to which they refer. This dislocation can be expressed poetically under the sign of an emptying, a dissolution, or a *return*. The relationship between temporality and aesthetics in modernity is a complex affair. Suffice to say here, in line with Marx, that even if history does not repeat itself, the aesthetic forms that make up our historical understanding through memory can certainly be repeated, producing that strange sensation, like a hint of familiarity, between ages and the ways people live within them. Following Marxist ideas about the unstable correspondence between *forms* and *meanings* in times of changes ("The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon"), the *Brumairean* risk that this aesthetic reading implies for political action – the (inevitable) *return* of these *forms* – allows us to rise above a notion of historiography, understood as the radical discontinuity of events and identities. It also allows us to think about the existence of historically discontinuous subjects enlightened by the same aesthetic practices, opening up the possibility that these *forms* enable the inheritance of traditions beyond their original communities of reference.

It is often the case that the formalising of political processes arises in the aesthetic domain, which, as well as opening up the possibility of thinking about the processes, also generates their limits and determines their historical return. A good example of this can be found in the slogan from which I drew the title and topic of this article: "They called it democracy and it's not." As with all mottos inscribed in the identity code of a social movement, its origins are unclear, and probably manifold. The first mention of it that I could find was in the song "Call it democracy", by the American singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn, which comes from his album *World of Wonders* (1986), an antiglobalisation lyrical invective, written from the aesthetic and political coordinates of the US civil rights movement. "And they call it democracy," goes the refrain of Cockburn's song.

In 1990, the radical Basque rock group La Polla Records included a homonymous theme in their album *Ellos dicen mierda, nosotros amén* (*They say shit, we say amen*), which begins by repeating the famous line: "They call it democracy and it's not." As we have seen, this *call* in Spain appeals to the distance between two eras. In the La Polla Records song, an alternative memory of the transition based on the utopian critique of the democracy to come intensifies. It is the aesthetic return of the call that guarantees the historical continuation of a way of thinking and feeling politically, starting with the graffiti of the transition, and moving right through to the assemblies of May 2011.



In its ability to poetically enlighten, the call *produces political experience itself*. But when associated with La Polla Records singer Evaristo's song, this cry also offers an entirely alternative story of the transition to democracy, one that puts the political experiences of the defeats of those *who refused to call it democracy* at the centre:

A thousand brothers stranded, thrown out along the way  
How many more will be left stranded?  
How long have we got left? How long before we die,  
in this mad, unending defeat?  
Two weeks? Three weeks? Or 500,000 tomorrows?  
Let Mary get her hands dirty!  
How much horror will we have to see? How many blows will we have to receive?  
How many people will have to die?  
Head well screwed on or well screwed over  
and nothing ... nothing to be grateful for!  
In our emptiness, the only thing left is pride,  
so ... we'll keep standing!  
Shit loads of people living unhappily  
and they're going to die democratically  
and I, and I, and I don't wanna keep quiet!  
Morals keep us from protesting,  
They say shit and we say amen!  
Amen, amen, amen, it rains on and on!

The present opens up when we understand, poetically, the historical dialectic that it constitutes. Articulating, initiating this call – which opens up and structures the thresholds of the people's struggle after 1970 in contemporary Spain – is the political experience of the first generation of young people of the democracy.<sup>80</sup> La Polla Records' lyrics offer an entire alternative story of the transition, summed up by its opening shout. Behind the rage lies the experience of the truncated lives of a damned generation made up of the young people who refused to accept that *democratically* (*democráticamente*) could rhyme with *living unhappily* (*vive tristemente*) and who tried to prove as much in their lifetime. The deaths, not in the least metaphorical, of these "mates", among them one of the members of the band (Fernando "Fernandito" Murua), are linked to the political conditions that enabled it to be *called democracy without being one* at the start of the 1980s. For the surviving members of this generation, the start of the democratic chronotope was a "mad, unending defeat", behind which lies the historical memory of the repression and the state (*blows* and *horror* and *death*) and the promise that this violence will repeat itself in the future. The lying, forgetting and "morals" of mainstream democratic life meant that these subjects, who never called it democracy, experienced the political pact of subjection at the start of the 1980s as an act of violence and imposition, and not as an act of complicity.

By not experiencing the entrance into *democracy* as either an agreement or a compromise, they did not experience it as a pact of forgetting. *They accept marginalisation in exchange for the triumph of memory*, as demonstrated through the reference to *pride*: "In our emptiness, the only thing left is pride, so ... we'll keep standing! ... and I don't wanna keep quiet!" When defeats are not inherited,

because the political communities that experienced them no longer exist (as is the case with the youth of the transition), their experience articulates, not without difficulty, the conscious political action of subsequent generations. But, in those cases, the *calls*, that is, the aesthetic forms with the ability to *call out*, to open up *another language* with their language, and on top of another language, are indeed inherited.

If memory is an ethical imperative for “the community of the dead”,<sup>81</sup> this is because it is understood that this community can go on speaking only by means of these *calls*. A subaltern, indistinct memory travels with them (like voices speaking from far away) from one side of the *Spanish democracy* to the other, speaking of another transition.

From another transition to another democracy.  
A democracy to come.

## NOTES

- \* This paper is a product of François Godicheau’s kind invitation in Dec. 2012 to take part in a conference in Bordeaux. I am grateful to those present in that session for their questions and comments, which I have tried to incorporate in this work. At the behest of Ulrich Winter, a second version of the paper was presented in the Institute for Romance Philology of the University of Marburg on 10 Jul. 2013, which was followed by a stimulating discussion. A third version of the text circulated among those present at the panel “Cultural Responses to the Iberian Crisis” in the Shattering Iberia conference, which took place on 6 Mar. 2013 at the University of California, Berkeley. Previous versions of this article have been published in Spanish, as “¿Lo llamaban democracia? La crítica estética de la política en la transición española y el imaginario de la historia en el 15-M,” *Revista Kamchatka* 4 (2014): 11-61, and “¿Lo llamaban democracia? La crítica estética de la política en la transición y el imaginario de la historia en el 15-M,” in *Democracia inocua: lo que el posfranquismo ha hecho de nosotros*, ed. François Godicheau, 85-162 (Madrid: Ediciones Contratiempo, 2014), accessed 23 Aug. 2015, <http://www.contratiempohistoria.org/ed/T005.pdf>. I am indebted to the University Committee on Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Princeton University, which generously supported the translation of this paper, as well as to my dedicated translator Sophie Hughes, who considerably improved the text. Also the editor Kostis Kometis, author of a smart text on a connected topic (2014), and the external reviewers of *Historein*, provided extraordinary feedback. I would never have been able to write this text had I not read my mother’s retirement letter, written after 37 years of work in a public high school. For this reason, I dedicate it to her.
- 1 “Puntos de acuerdo del manifiesto plural redactado durante la madrugada del 18 de mayo en la Puerta del Sol,” 18 May 2011, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, <http://manifiestoplural.blogspot.gr/2011/05/puntos-de-acuerdo-del-manifiesto-plural.html>.
  - 2 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 50.
  - 3 “Puntos de acuerdo.”
  - 4 Ramón Adell, *La transición política en la calle* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1989); Sebastián Balfour, *El movimiento obrero desde 1939* (Barcelona: ICPS, 1990) and *idem*, *La dictadura, los trabajadores y la ciudad* (Valencia: Alfons el Magnànim, 1994).

- 5 Pamela Beth Radcliff, *Making Democratic Citizens in Spain: Civil Society and the Popular Origins of the Transition, 1960–78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- 6 Juan Andrade Blanco, *El PCE y el PSOE en (la) transición* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2012).
- 7 Gonzalo Wilhemi, *El movimiento libertario en la transición* (Madrid: FSS Ediciones, 2012).
- 8 Rafael Quirosa-Cheyrouze y Muñoz, *La sociedad española en la transición* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2011).
- 9 Vicente Pérez Quintana and Pablo Sánchez León, eds., *Memoria ciudadana y movimiento vicinal: Madrid 1968–2008* (Madrid: La Catarata, 2008).
- 10 Xavier Domènech Sampere and Carme Molinero, *Quan el carrer va deixar de ser seu: moviment obrer, societat civil i canvi polític. Sabadell (1966–1976)* (Barcelona: Montserrat, 2002).
- 11 David Ballester, *Temps d'amnistia* (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 2001).
- 12 José Ribas, *Los 70 a destajo. Ajoblanco y libertad* (Barcelona: RBA, 2007).
- 13 Idoia Estornés Zubizarreta, *Cómo pudo pasarnos esto* (Donostia: Erein, 2013).
- 14 Ibid.; Lidia Falcón, *Ejecución sumaria* (Barcelona: El Viejo Topo, 2013).
- 15 François Godicheau and Pablo Sánchez León, *Democracia inocua* (Madrid: Ed. Contratiempo, 2015).
- 16 Fundación Espai en Blanc, *Luchas autónomas en los años setenta* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2008).
- 17 Manuel Castells, *Ciudad, democracia y socialismo* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1977); Tomas R. Villasante, *Los vecinos en la calle. Por una alternativa democrática a la ciudad de los monopolios* (Madrid: Ed. de la Torre, 1976) and Jaume Carbonell, *La lucha de barrios en Barcelona* (Madrid: Elías Querejeta, 1976).
- 18 Equipo Diorama, *Pintadas del referéndum* (Madrid: Equipo Diorama, 1977).
- 19 Diego Fábregas and Giménez Plaza, *La huelga y la reforma* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1977).
- 20 See books such as Víctor Díaz Cardiel, *Madrid en Huelga. Enero de 1976* (Madrid: Ayuso, 1977); Equipo de Estudios Teatrales, *El espectáculo de la huelga y la huelga del espectáculo* (Madrid: Ayuso, 1976) and panoramic reports such as Ederle, *Los conflictos laborales en 1976* (Madrid: Ed. la Torre, 1977), that sometimes include vivid accounts of political repression, such as Mariano Guindal and Juan H. Giménez, eds., *El libro negro de Vitoria* (Madrid: Ed. 99, 1976).
- 21 Emilio Sola, *La Vaquería de la calle Libertad, 1975–1976* (Alcalá: Archivo de la Frontera, 2006), accessed 18 Jul. 2015, [http://sola.archivodelafrontera.com/pdf/vakeria\\_1976.pdf](http://sola.archivodelafrontera.com/pdf/vakeria_1976.pdf).
- 22 Following the death of five members of the assembly, the scale of the previous protest and the collective occupation of public space, at the subsequent funeral these events reached a *new* level. This is expressed in the testimony of the Madrid Cinema Collective: "We had the nerve to surround the funeral of the dead protesters in Vitoria under police gunfire. It is a dark episode in Spanish politics that many have preferred to forget ... The image, impressive today, but *at that time inconceivable*, of thousands of citizens attending the funeral, deeply moved those who saw it" (Colectivo de Cine de Madrid, *Vitoria, 1976*, [colectivodecinedemadrid.com](http://colectivodecinedemadrid.com), accessed 18 Jul. 2015. <http://colectivodecinedemadrid.com>). For a detailed account on the event, I refer to Lluís Danés documentary *La revolta permanent* (2006).
- 23 Like the 1977 Massacre of Atocha, where a paramilitary group murdered five leftist lawyers, which accelerated the legalisation of the Spanish Communist Party. See Mariano Sánchez Soler, *La transición sangrienta. Una historia violenta del proceso democrático en España* (Barcelona: Península, 2010), 65–

- 82; Francisco Albadalejo, *La matanza de Atocha* (Madrid: Akal, 1980).
- 24 Pablo Sánchez León, "Estigma y memoria de los jóvenes de la transición," in *La memoria de los olvidados*, eds. Asunción Álvarez and Emilio Silva (Valladolid: Ámbito, ARMH, 2003), 163-179.
- 25 Ferrán Gallego Margaleff, *El mito de la transición* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2008).
- 26 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2009), 3.
- 27 Amador Fernández Savater, ed., "Alain Badiou y el 15-M: una modificación brutal de la relación entre lo posible y lo imposible." *Público*, 24 Jun. 2011, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, <http://blogs.publico.es/fueradelugar/636/alain-badiou-y-el-15-m-una-modificacion-brutal-de-la-relacion-entre-lo-posible-y-lo-imposible>.
- 28 "The politics of works of art plays itself out to a larger extent – in a global and diffuse manner – in the reconfiguration of worlds of experience based on which police consensus or political dissensus are defined. It plays itself out in the way in which modes of narration or new forms of visibility established by artistic practices enter into politics' own field of aesthetic possibilities." Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 65. I would like to underline the popular, diffuse, *minor* nature of these (everyday anonymous) "artistic practices", as I have shown with examples in my text.
- 29 Jacques Rancière, *Proletarian Nights: The Worker's Dream in Nineteenth-century France* (New York: Verso, 2012).
- 30 Gérard Imbert, *Elena Francis, un consultorio para la transición* (Barcelona: Península, 1982) and *Los discursos del cambio* (Madrid: Akal, 1990); Cecilia Bartolomé and José Juan Bartolomé, directors, *Después de ... primera parte: No se os puede dejar solos* (Madrid, 1981); Guillem Martínez, *CT. Cultura de Transición* (Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2012).
- 31 Documentary samples supporting this strong affirmation can be found in some of the bibliographic sources already quoted (Gonzalo Wilhemi, *El movimiento libertario en la transición* (Madrid: FSS Ediciones, 2012); Fundación Espai en Blanc, *Luchas autónomas en los años setenta*; Equipo Diorama, *Pintadas del referendun*; Emilio Sola, *La Vaquería de la calle Libertad. 1975-1976* (Alcalá: Archivo de la Frontera, 2006); Díaz Cardiel, *Madrid en Huelga*, and in others (Bartolomé and Bartolomé, *Después de ... primera parte*; Pedro Sempere, *Los muros del posfranquismo* (Madrid: Castellote Editor, 1977)). My own research provides extensive examples (Germán Labrador Méndez, *Letras arrebatadas. Poesía y química en la transición española* (Madrid: Devenir, 2009) and "Cultura crematística y cultura crematoria. La lógica cultural normalizadora de la democracia española frente a la temporalidad de crisis," *Revista Hispanica Moderna* (forthcoming), coming from all types of sources (underground poems, visual artefacts, collective performances, interviews, memory accounts, etc.). It is easy to find strong opinions against post-Francoist institutionality in these materials: "among the old pages of a book bitten by rats/you bore me, Spain, Spain/your fake democracy of lies/your wormed sad parliament/your serious-talking-head leaders" (Xaime Noguero, *Irrevocablemente inadaptados* (Madrid: La Banda de Moebius, 1978), 79). The epoch's indignation was crystalised in many documents (and often with plenty of humour). To give an example from Joaquim Jordà's 1979 documentary *Numax presenta* (21:17-23:50): sitting on a toilet, a young worker explains to the spectators the repressive nature of the political reform in his factory. The contemporary analyses provided by the collective *Los Incontrolados* (The Uncontrolled) under the title *Crónicas de la España salvaje* (Chronicles from wild Spain) prove my general thesis in favour of the existence of a heterogeneous political subject that never called *it* democracy (although there is undeniable evidence that many other subjects did).
- 32 Imbert, *Los discursos del cambio*.
- 33 Labrador Méndez, "Cultura crematística y cultura crematoria."

- 34 The Bartolomé siblings' documentary highlights this distance between citizen perceptions and the democratic language of the state: "Democracy has arrived and nobody knows what it's like." The film shows how various interviewees spoke explicitly about the relationship between democracy and time, and the tensions between the democratic forms and their authoritarian crypto-Francoist content.
- 35 Germán Labrador Méndez, "A democracia na praça," *Revista Píau!* 83 (2013): 44-51.
- 36 The notion of political *revolution* was strong in the first days of the 2011 protests, inspired by the success of the Arab Spring civic movements. On 18 May a crowd chanted "The revolution has begun". This was something new, since for a long time the term *revolution* had been absent from the collective political vocabulary, at least since the transition to democracy. *Ibid.*
- 37 I have researched into how, in the run up to the 1976 referendum, there was an unprecedented eruption of political graffiti. However, by the 1977 elections, the PSOE already declared their "clean wall" policy. See Sempere, *Los muros del posfranquismo*.
- 38 José Ribas, "Editorial," *Ajoblanco. Especial La Ciudad*, 16 Nov. 1976, 5.
- 39 T.P., "¿Cuándo nos regalarán un hyde park? Carta a la redaccion," *Ajoblanco. Especial La Ciudad*, 16 Nov. 1976, 10.
- 40 T.P., "Nos encantan las ciudades pintarrajeadas." *Ajoblanco. Especial La Ciudad*, 16 Nov. 1976, 12.
- 41 T.P., "¿Cuándo nos regalarán un hyde park?"
- 42 Salvador Puig Antich was a member of the anarchist group MIL. Accused of the death of an officer, his execution in 1974 generated strong international protest. The silent opposition of the majority of the population against this crime inscribed it in the collective imagination as a point of no return on the way towards democracy and created consensus on the abolition of dead penalty in Spain. See Lidia Falcón, *Ejecución sumaria* (Barcelona: El Viejo Topo, 2013) and Gutmaro Gomez Bravo, *Puig Antich. La transición inacabada* (Madrid: Taurus, 2014).
- 43 "Propuestas aprobadas en la Asamblea de hoy día 20 de mayo de 2011 en Acampada Sol," 20 May 2011, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, <http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/2011/05/20/propuestas-20-mayo/>.
- 44 Amador Fernández Savater, "Política literal y política literaria (sobre ficciones políticas y 15-M)," *El diario.es*, 30 Nov. 2012, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, [http://www.eldiario.es/interferencias/ficcion-politica-15-M\\_6\\_71452864.html](http://www.eldiario.es/interferencias/ficcion-politica-15-M_6_71452864.html).
- 45 "Puntos de acuerdo."
- 46 The term CT (Culture of the Transition) can be misleading if understood as the culture generated *during* the process of transition to democracy, which I prefer to refer to as "transitional culture". Guillem Martínez suggests that it refers to *the culture that emerges out of the Spanish transition after the demobilisation of transitional culture*. See *CT. Cultura de Transición* (Barcelona: Debolsillo, 2012, 15-16). CT would thus be the hegemonic culture of the Spanish democracy *after* 1982. Germán Labrador Méndez, *Culpables por la literatura. Imaginación política y contracultura en la transición española* (Madrid: Siglo XXI/Akal, forthcoming).
- 47 Germán Labrador Méndez, "Quimera Esférica. La experiencia estética de la crisis española y su simbolización quijotista en la Eurocopa de 2012," *Journal of Contemporary Spanish Literature and Film* 1 (2014): 255-317.
- 48 The (failed) coup of 1981 works in the collective imaginary as the foundational moment in which post-Francoist institutions – including the monarchy – operated autonomously in relation to dictatorial logic. Thousands of plot theories have been built around the confused circumstances of that day. Alber-

to Medina, "Placeres de la auto-renuncia," *El Viejo Topo* 257 (2009): 74–83 and Joan Garcés, *Soberanos e intervenidos* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2012) 185–188, provide complex analyses of the event.

- 49 Medina, "Placeres de la auto-renuncia," 74.
- 50 "Manifiesto contra el golpe de estado financiero," 21 Feb. 2012, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, <http://madrid.tomalaplaza.net/2012/02/21/23financiero-contra-el-golpe-de-estado-de-los-mercados/>.
- 51 Martínez, *CT*.
- 52 Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, "Political Crafting of Democratic Consolidation or Destruction: European and South American Comparisons," in *Democracy in the Americas: Stopping the Pendulum*, ed. Robert A. Pastor (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1989), 41–61.
- 53 Antonio de Blas Guerrero, "El referendun constitucional en el País Vasco," *Revista de estudios políticos* 6 (1978): 205–216.
- 54 Amando de Miguel, *Los narcisos: el radicalismo cultural de los jóvenes* (Barcelona: Kairós, 1979).
- 55 Gregorio Morán, *El Precio de la Transición* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1991) and Garcés, *Soberanos*.
- 56 Centro de documentación de DATA or DATA SA Group. See José Ramón Montero, Richard Gunther and Mariano Torcal, "Legitimidad, descontento y desafección. El caso español," *Estudios Públicos* 74 (1999): 112.
- 57 José Ramón Montero, "Sobre la democracia en España: legitimidad, apoyos institucionales y significados." Estudio/Working Paper 1992/39, Instituto Juan March de Estudios e Investigaciones, Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, <http://digital.march.es/ceacs-ir/en/fedora/repository/ir%3A3954>.
- 58 The archive of the era is rich in documents supporting my thesis. The collective volume edited by Fundación Espai en Blanc, *Luchas autónomas en los años setenta*, includes a great variety of documents related to popular mobilisation and worker's autonomy in the 1970s, many corresponding to 1976. Books by Castells (*Ciudad, democracia y socialismo*), R. Villasante (*Los vecinos en la calle*) and Carbonell (*La lucha*), among many others, show the impact of neighbourhood associations in real time as the natural avant-garde for political mobilisation in the post-Francoist context. Some books of photography offer a complex account of the dense ideological collective discussion around 1976, such as the research by Equipo Diorama (*Pintadas del referéndum*) on the graffiti that accompanied Suarez's referendum. In Fábregas and Plaza, *La huelga*, we get a first impression of the time in Sabadell, with many materials. For the strike movement, that reached a highpoint in 1976, the sources are abundant as well (see note 21) as are personal diaries, as I have already stated with reference to Emilio Sola. As the data from the Centre for Sociological Research (CSIC) shows (and all the bibliographical documents I refer to), there may be powerful political ideas behind the invisible wall of electoral abstention.
- 59 Tino Calabuig and Miguel Cándor, directors, *La ciudad es nuestra* (Madrid, 1975).
- 60 Antonio Artero and Pablo Nacarino, directors, *Furia Libertaria: Mitin CNT San Sebastian de los Reyes, 1977*. See <http://noografo.org/documental-furia-libertaria-de-antonio-artero-y-pablo-nacarino-prim-er-mitin-confederal-tras%EF%BB%BF-la-clandestinidad-marzo-1977/>.
- 61 Labrador Méndez, *Culpables por la literatura*.
- 62 Ribas, "Editorial."
- 63 T.P., "¿Cuándo nos regalarán un hyde park?"
- 64 Ribas, *Los 70 a destajo*.

- 65 Natalia Junquera, "Jóvenes y no tan jóvenes indignados," *El País.com*, 19 May 2011, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/05/19/actualidad/1305817490\\_432066.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2011/05/19/actualidad/1305817490_432066.html).
- 66 Ángeles Lucas, "Los abuelos indignados toman las calles en España," *BBC*, 16 Jun. 2012, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, [http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/06/120618\\_espana\\_yayoflautas\\_abuelos\\_indignados.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/06/120618_espana_yayoflautas_abuelos_indignados.shtml).
- 67 Repor, "Las batallas del abuelo," *rtve.es*, 1 Feb. 2012, 2:14-2:20, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, <http://www.rtve.es/alacarta/videos/repor/repor-batallas-del-abuelo/1309208/>, emphasis added.
- 68 Fábregas and Plaza, *La huelga*; Domènech and Molinero, *Quan el carrer va deixar de ser seu*.
- 69 Repor, "Las batallas del abuelo," 2:30-3:00.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 15:10.
- 71 Juan Luis Sánchez, *Las diez mareas del cambio* (Barcelona: Roca Ed., 2013).
- 72 M.M. L.G., my emphasis.
- 73 Repor. "Las batallas del abuelo," 26:00.
- 74 Eva Vázquez Lima, "Xosé Manuel Beiras: Estamos al final de un régimen en putrefacción," *Antena3.com*, 7 Nov. 2012, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, [http://www.antena3.com/noticias/espana/xose-manuel-beiras-estamos-final-regimen-putrefaccion\\_2012110600105.html](http://www.antena3.com/noticias/espana/xose-manuel-beiras-estamos-final-regimen-putrefaccion_2012110600105.html).
- 75 Quoted in Primitivo Carbajo, "Beiras: La gente que nos apoya no está derrotada," *El País*, 16 Oct. 2012, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, [http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/10/15/galicia/1350329853\\_208597.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2012/10/15/galicia/1350329853_208597.html).
- 76 From Dec. 2012, when I wrote this article, to Jun. 2015, when I last worked on it, there have been many developments. Beyond the framework of this article are the historical discussions that went on around the citizens' platform that has since emerged as Podemos, which, since spring 2014 has transferred all of these debates to the spheres of institutional politics and reality TV. Podemos has made the phrase "the 1978 regime" its own, in the sense that we have analysed here. It would be interesting to observe the electoral processes of the 2015 local elections from this historical perspective as they activated a whole imaginary from the Spanish transition. See Rafael Sánchez-Mateos Paniagua, "Uno se divide en dos," *Agencia Marienbad*, 23 May 2015, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, <https://agenciamarienbad.wordpress.com/2015/05/22/uno-se-divide-en-dos/>.
- 77 "Cospedal compara el 25-S con el golpe de Estado del 23-F," *Eldiario.es*, 24 Sept. 2012, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, [http://www.eldiario.es/politica/Cospedal-compara-golpe\\_0\\_51095068.html](http://www.eldiario.es/politica/Cospedal-compara-golpe_0_51095068.html).
- 78 Rafael Chacón and David Pardo, "La represión del derecho de reunión," *Diagonal*, 9 Dec. 2012, accessed 18 Jul. 2015, <https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/andalucia/la-represion-del-derecho-reunion.html>.
- 79 Germán Labrador Méndez, "Cultura y Mnemocracia. Sobre la historia cultural de la memoria histórica en España (2000-2014)," in *Memoria histórica y políticas de la memoria*, ed. Gabriela Nouzeilles (under review).
- 80 Labrador Méndez, *Letras arrebatadas*.
- 81 Pedro Piedras Monroy, *La siega del olvido. Memoria y presencia de la represión* (Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2012).