2013 | *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (2): 119–39

The atmospheric person

Value, experiment, and "making neighbors" in Madrid's popular assemblies

Alberto CORSÍN JIMÉNEZ, *CSIC*
Adolfo ESTALELLA, *University of Manchester*

The Occupy movement in Spain, locally known as the May 15 movement (15M), singularly developed throughout 2011 into a network of local neighborhood "popular assemblies." Over one hundred assemblies cropped up in Madrid alone. This article explores the conceptual and infrastructural work invested by the assemblies in the production of a particular experience of *neighborhood* (*barrio*). The barrio has become the centerpiece of the assemblies' political and geographical imagination. We offer here an ethnographic account of how the work of assembling is constitutive of a new experience of relationality, which assembly-goers refer to as "making neighbors." One makes neighbors through processes of deambulation and through an investment in the rhythmic and atmospheric production of space. The neighbor fares thus as an *atmospheric person*. Further, in this guise it has become both a model of and a model for political citizenship expressive of a *right to the city*. People's exploration of the question, "What is a neighbor?" offers an ethnographic case study on the invention of novel forms of social relations and political values in an urban commons—on the rise of the urban persona of the neighbor as a social-cum-political experimenter. Value, then, as an *experimental* form.

Keywords: Value, Occupy, neighbors, urban, experimentation, atmospherics

---

> My house. It looks like the assembly's logistical headquarters. I have made room for a number of boxes from Alejandra, including for instance one where she keeps her snorkelling suit, for which she has no spare room in her own place. I am keeping another box from Nuria, and only a few days back she took away a table that I had also been storing for her. I am keeping of course all kinds of paraphernalia from the Assembly: pens, copies of Madrid15M newspaper, brushes (which I need to hand over to Elena tonight, for a poster campaign). And as of yesterday I am also storing María's vacuum cleaner. It was meant to be given to her by Nuria at our latest assembly, but they missed each other and I ended up with the cleaner in my living room. María should be around any minute now to pick it up. As if it weren't enough, Isabel is

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons
© Alberto Corsín Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella.
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported. ISSN 2049-1115 (Online)

> staying over at home this weekend. (Extract from Adolfo Estalella's fieldwork diary, June 8, 2012)

This article reports on ethnographic fieldwork carried out at local neighborhood "popular assemblies" that sprung up in the wake of the May 15 movement (15M) in Spain, and Madrid in particular, in 2011. Along with the Arab Spring, these revolts inspired the birth of the global #Occupy movement, a new wave of alter-globalization protests that took commentators and analysts by surprise and has generated considerable debate over the purchase of social media and direct action mobilizations, on the organization of new forms of political agency.

Our concern in this article, however, is with the form of the popular assemblies as urban political objects. Although part of the description will touch on the uses and valences of social media—or indeed on the evolving nature of social movements—we follow the ethnography instead into emerging configurations of the urban condition, in particular the way in which the practice of sustaining the assembly as an infrastructural, collective, and atmospheric object in time has shaped and given novel meanings and qualities to neighborhood life.

The fieldwork diary extract with which we have opened illustrates part of our argument. Although assemblies meet publicly in open air in local plazas or streets, the work of assembling stretches beyond their periodic location. This stretching is spatial, but it is also temporal, social, and infrastructural. Thus in the vignette above, Adolfo's house has been integrated into the assembly's logistical architecture: it has become a storehouse and repository for stationery and multifarious equipment; it has also become a social meeting point, as well as a guesthouse. It performs the work of a hospitable architecture, aimed at lubricating the wider conditions of urban relationality for the assembly. We shall argue such conditions are "rhythmed" out into the city in a variety of ways, including assembly meetings, but also demonstrations, casual encounters, friendly visits, logistical preparations, and more. The assembly is a rhythmic object as much as it is a collective.

Assemblies have all taken seat in local *barrios* (neighborhoods). Indeed, back in May 2011, when the decision was made to replicate the form of protest incarnated in the central encampment at Madrid's Puerta del Sol, the slogans that were adopted said it clearly: "*Madrid toma los barrios*" and "*Madrid toma la plaza*": by occupying the local plazas the movement was to occupy the neighborhoods.

The triangulation between assemblies, neighbors, and urban space is central to the story we want to tell here. The circuitry or relational tension of this triangulation is what our article is about. We want to suggest that this tension produces an urban experimental form. And like most experimental forms the assembly shares in the problem of duration: the elucidation and struggle over how and when an experiment ends.[1] We shall see how this is so in detail shortly. For the time being, let us say that the peculiar relational subject mobilized by the assembly—the sociological figure of the neighbor—comes into life as a subject tensed and continuously undermined by a threat of dissidence and dissolution. The neighbor is she who inhabits a proximal space of disappearance, she whose condition of

1. On the problem of duration in science and art see for example Peter Galison (1987) and Howard Saul Becker, Robert R. Faulkner, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2006).

possible disappearance defines the terms of our relational engagement. Crucially, these conditions shape the figure of the neighbor as an experimenter in the production of ambience. The neighbor is not a stranger, nor a friend, nor kin but a form of sociality whose value is an effect of ambience-experimentation. The neighbor is an atmospheric person.

The notion of an atmospheric person places the figure of the neighbor in dialogue with a recent spate of literature on the "atmospheres" of social life (notably inspired by the work of Peter Sloterdijk 1998, 1999, 2004; see for example Thrift 2009, 2012). Nigel Thrift has put it succinctly in noting how an emerging "stance to the world, an environmental stance" requires an "atmospheric means of understanding what is in the world and how to control it" (Thrift 2012: 4). We offer here a concrete ethnographic elucidation of what an anthropological atmosphere may look like, and in particular how its *value* as a social form may help recast our traditional concern with relations, exchange, or hierarchy with a complementary attention to questions of rhythm and ambience. Our analysis echoes in some respects Nancy Munn's well-known study of the generation of value among Gawa kula traders in terms of the circulation of "fame" or "inter-subjective spacetime," as she also puts it (Munn 1986: 9). We may say that in our ethnography the neighbor is rhythmed out of the assembling of atmospheric interventions in and with the urban fabric, not unlike how fame is worked out as the effect of space-time expansions by Gawan exchanges and value-transformations. In terms of an anthropology of value, then, our interest lies less in noting what systems of hierarchical and encompassing values the neighbor and the assembly antagonize or mediate with (see Otto and Willerslev's [2013] introduction to part one of this special issue), than in describing how its emergence mobilizes tentative cultural registers for the experimental, the atmospheric, even sociality itself in the figure of neighborliness.[2] In a sense, we follow our ethnography in opening up a space for value not as an index of ethical or economic actions but as a regime of *experimentation*.

The neighbor, then, emerges as a figure for—and provocative alter-identity to—the conditions of contemporary urban life. To the urban personas of the stranger, the cosmopolitan, or the consumer, the popular assemblies have contributed the figure of the neighbor. Said differently, the neighbor is what the #occupation of the anthropological figure of "the relation" looks like in the Spanish urban context.[3] A neighbor is an #occupied urban relation.

A note on translation: The word *neighborhood* is a poor rendition for the Spanish voice, *barrio*, although it is now well established as an equivalent in Latino urban studies (e.g., Moore and Pinderhughes 1993; Small 2004). In the Spanish

2. That the 15M movement is an oppositional and antagonistic movement (to the state, to political parties, to political corruption, to the banking and financial systems) is hardly worthy of commentary. In their social and political awakening, the *indignados* clearly reacted to a system of hierarchical and value-encompassments they felt pressed and constrained by. But this is not the ethnographic regime of valuation we seek to elucidate here. Our interest is not what assembly-goers are *reacting to* but what are they *acting on*.

3. We follow the now established convention of using the Twitter hashtag sign (#) to refer to the #Occupy or #15M movements. Twitter hashtags have also in this sense become indices of novel conceptual productions.

context the barrio has connotations of provinciality, even familiarity. It echoes some of the romantic undertones with which Jane Jacobs (1972) described certain New York neighborhoods—but it is of course a very different kind of construct. At the conference were this article was first presented, some participants felt uneasy with the invocation of the *neighbor* as an expression of political vanguard in shifting urban contexts. They felt the term sounded antiquated, inappropriate for describing the political innovations of twenty-first-century democratic urbanism. But this is in fact one of the issues we want to problematize here. The terms *barrio* and *vecino* (neighbor) have an old-fashioned ring in Spanish, too. And yet these are the terms that people deliberately employ to signal an emerging repertoire of urban values and practices of conviviality. The project of reclaiming an urban commons is voiced today in the name of the neighborhood.

The rest of the article is in three parts. First, we introduce our ethnographic subject: the Popular Assembly of Lavapiés. We provide a brief account of the history of the assembly and the 15M movement at large and situate our Madrid material within the emerging literature on the global #Occupy movements.

The second part of the article introduces the ethnography. We describe the assembly as an installation or artifact that travels beyond its circumscribed and periodic location in urban space. Assembling occurs in various places at different paces and rhythms: it is a political ambulatory. The distributed work of assembling produces the neighborhood, in the sense in which Henri Lefebvre famously spoke of social relations "producing space" (Lefebvre 1991). We offer here an ethnographic account that describes the work of sustaining such a spatial assemblage in time—of investing in its duration. We identify at least two epistemic domains of duration: the assembly as a rhythmic arrangement and as an atmospheric installation. We further suggest that a practice that is common to and stretches across both domains (tenuously and not without effort) is the practice of care. The assembly is an urban object of care—and an object of urban care.

Last, the article concludes with a provocative statement on how the theoretical complex of the neighbor and the problem of anthropological atmospheres may challenge our understanding of what is a social relationship.

Occupy

Lavapiés is one of Madrid's old historic quarters. For instance, the neighborhood is home to La Corrala, one of the neighborhood associations studied by Manuel Castells in his groundbreaking study of grassroots urbanism, *The city and the grassroots*. Lavapiés retains today some of the cultural and sociological qualities that Castells identified in the late 1970s:

> One of the oldest sectors of Madrid, a labyrinth of seventeenth century streets populated by the elderly, craftsmen, small merchants, grocers, bars and cafés, petty bureaucrats, manual service workers, and, more recently, a handful of students and young professionals. It constituted a neighbourhood with its own community life built around its physical charm and folk culture, as well as its poverty and dilapidation. (Castells 1983: 251)

Today Lavapiés remains the charming and run-down quarter that Castells described. The early 1990s witnessed the arrival of successive waves of immigrant communities, North African and Bangladeshi for the most part, which have turned

the neighborhood into one of Madrid's most vibrant multicultural wards (Pérez-Agote, Tejerina, and Barañano 2010).

Like all May 15 neighborhood assemblies, the Popular Assembly of Lavapiés was first convoked on May 28, 2011. Scarcely a few hours after the occupation of the Puerta del Sol on May 15, the web domains www.tomalosbarrios.net and www.tomalaplaza.net had already been purchased, which signaled an early recognition on the part of some of the first campers that the protest's long-term strategy hinged on its devolution to local neighborhoods. The decision to call for the constitution of popular neighborhood assemblies on May 28 radiated out from Sol's encampment and echoed across Madrid, with over one hundred assemblies organized (for a genealogical account of the rise of the 15M movement, see Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2011).

Figure 1: Lavapiés Popular Assembly's first meeting, May 28, 2011. Photograph by Daniel Bobadilla

Lavapiés' Popular Assembly meets on a weekly basis on Saturdays. Over the past year its location has been migrating between various local plazas, sometimes in response to weather conditions (some plazas being more sun exposed than others), sometimes in the hope to attract a wider audience. Although the turnout has oscillated, meetings have rarely been attended by fewer than thirty people, with the average number of attendants approximating some seventy people. The assembly is organized into a variety of working groups, on topics such as housing, immigration, public water, finance, or culture and education. There are also two commissions—Communications and *Dinamización*—in charge of housekeeping the assembly's logistical and organizational affairs. The assembly keeps a public

website where they publish the minutes of all their meetings, as well as forthcoming actions and events: http://lavapies.tomalosbarrios.net/.[4]

Figure 2: Lavapiés Popular Assembly, June 16, 2012. Watercolor by Enrique Flores, http://www.4ojos.com/blog/

Over the past year there has been a spate of literature that has attempted to make sense of the wave of protests emerging in the wake of the so-called Arab Spring and the global #Occupy movement. Although this is not the place to offer a review of such literature, a cursory overview will help us delineate our own subject matter, namely, the distinctiveness of Madrid's popular assemblies as urban political artifacts.

We can roughly identify two types of analyses about the #Occupy protests. On the one hand, considerable ink has been spilled on the political epidemiology of protest in the age of social media (Postill 2011; Mason 2012). Authors have debated at length on the role of new social media (Twitter, Facebook) as technological facilitators of political action and change. As Jeffrey Juris has recently noted (2012), such debates over the role of technology in the organization of protest are far from recent in the historiography of social movements, and his own work on the movements for global justice of the late 1990s and early 2000s has indeed shown that digital networks have played a central role in the coordination of decentralized operations among activists for quite some time (Juris 2005, 2008). Notwithstanding, there are some noteworthy transformations that one can ascribe to the congregational and curatorial qualities—the "digital culture"—of certain social media platforms (Hands 2011). Juris himself has distinguished between the "logics of networking" mediated by earlier digital tools such as listservers or blogs and the emerging "logics of aggregation" enabled by social media (Juris 2012). Thus, whereas listservers were used to disseminate news and coordinate actions between otherwise decentralized activist networks and operations, social media seems better designed to mobilize and bring people together at specific physical locales. If the

4. On the assembly's organizational and logistical methods and infrastructure, see Alberto Corsín Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella (2014).

sociological design of the former is to affect the lubrication of networking as political praxis, the latter accomplishes instead the trick of *crowd sourcing* the protest—a politics of aggregation.

A second strand of analysis and commentary on the #Occupy movement has focused on the realpolitik of direct action, often striving to situate such forms of mobilization within specific cultural histories of protest, including traditions of anarchism (Graeber 2011), the larger context of "right to the city" demonstrations (Harvey 2012), or national traditions of minority rights advocacy (Razsa and Kurnik 2012).

In this article we follow the ethnographic trail of Jeffrey Juris or Maple Razsa and Andrej Kurnik in their recent analyses of Occupy Boston and Occupy Slovenia, respectively (Juris 2012; Razsa and Kurnik 2012). Their texts offer ethnographic and descriptive richness to an evanescent and rapidly changing political scene, the analytical tempo of which is often carried away by a sense of urgency rather than questioning. Our own analysis builds on similar concerns to theirs, although we follow a somewhat alternative theoretical route. We have found particularly useful a recent spate of literature taking inspiration in actor-network and social studies of science approaches to the formatting and materiality of democratic processes (e.g., Braun and Whatmore 2010; Latour 2005; Marres and Lezaun 2011). In this light, what follows is an account of how popular assemblies may be described as *political ambulatories*: how the practice of #occupying public space, and the larger project of endowing social duration to the types of neighborly relations emerging thereof, modulates the experience of city life for participants as an experiment in relationality—a form of #occupation of the urban relation and the ensuing production of neighbors as atmospheric persons.

Jane's Walk

On May 5, 2012 some of the members of Lavapiés' Popular Assembly hosted a Jane Jacobs Walk in Madrid. Jane Jacobs Walks are free neighborhood walking (or bicycling, wheelchair, or simple transit) tours self-organized by members of a local community in celebration of Jane Jacobs's commitment to grassroots urbanism. Walks take place in the first weekend of May and are organized annually in cities worldwide.

Adolfo first saw news of this year's walk on Facebook. He identified the volunteers who are behind the initiative as two persons heavily involved in La Tabacalera, an abandoned tobacco factory that is today Madrid's most famous squatted social center. The walk starts at 11:00 a.m. Some twenty-five people have shown up and upon arriving Adolfo recognizes familiar faces from the assembly and La Tabacalera.

This year's walk has been planned around the history of squatter centers in Lavapiés. The walk starts in Cambalache, a peculiar type of local Madrid housing project known as *corrala*. Corralas were first built in the sixteenth century and were distinguished by the spatial organization of housing around a central patio. They theatricalized community life in this interior plaza. Corralas were the baroque's architectural response to massive rural-urban migration and have since become a symbol for immigrant housing in Madrid.

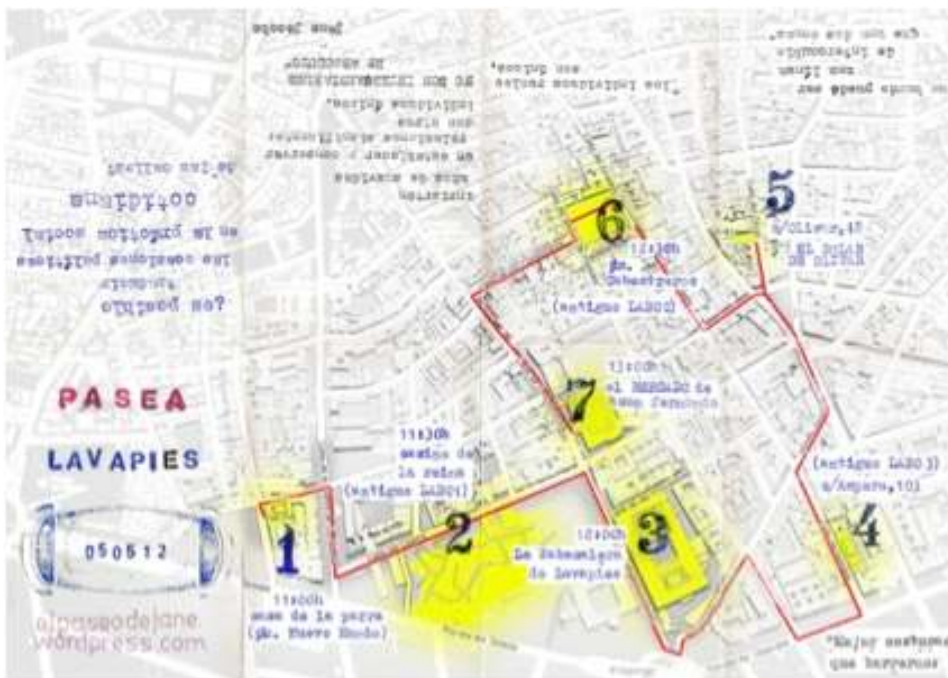

Figure 3: Jane's Walk in Lavapiés, May 2012

Among Madrid's corralas, Cambalache is known today for being a squatted social center. Upon arriving at Cambalache the walking tour is invited inside the corrala. The history of the building is told to them while standing in the patio. The corrala was built in the nineteenth century. It was partially bombarded during the Spanish Civil War. Anarchist booksellers used to take refuge in the patio when running away from far-right radicals. The name Cambalache is very recent and was given to the building in memory for a porn films shop that used to occupy part of the premises. One can still see the shop's sign hanging on one of the walls. Squatters moved in only eight months ago. One of the squatters says that upon moving in, he found tens of letters lying on the floor of one of the apartments. They turned out to have been written by someone who had likely been a burglar and corresponded with a collaborator now in prison. The men talked about stings they should have carried out but in the end failed to do.

The group leaves Cambalache and makes its way to the Parque del Casino de la Reina, one of Lavapiés largest squares and a meeting point for the assembly. However, it is not assembly affairs that brings the group here but the history of Labo1. Labo1, short for Laboratory1, is a landmark in the history of squatting in Madrid. (In time, this first laboratory in squatting was succeeded by three more experiments, Labos 2 to 4.) The history of Labo1 harks back to 1996. The fall of that year was a particularly ruinous time for Madrid's squatters, with the eviction of some three occupied buildings in scarcely a few weeks. Some of these squatters made a decision early in 1997 to come together in one singular occupation: an abandoned veterinary school that stretched over three buildings and circled around a large patio. The buildings housed a number of laboratories that thence provided

the name for the squatting project, and that rang true, moreover, to the experimental nature that some ascribed to this particular occupation.

Our tour guides insistently singled out the idea of *experimentation*. Unlike previous occupations, they note, the move to occupy the veterinary school took place in daylight. The squatters even called for a press conference where they came forward and drew attention to their urban personas as, indeed, squatters. The occupation was therefore explicitly conceptualized as an "opening toward the territory." As one of the original Labo1 squatters put it to the group: "We wanted to leave behind the typical enclosure of squatting—to make an open intervention in the territory. That was the idea behind making the occupation public." As an experimental project, Labo1 "lay the grounds for creating a certain impunity for intervening in the neighborhood's public space"—the neighborhood as an experimental ground for thinking and doing public space. "We also had Internet connection at a time when few people had," another original Labo1 squatter adds at one point, as if to stress the extent of the Laboratory's experimental vanguard. Someone remarks that Labo2, the second reincarnation of the laboratory project, following the squats eviction from the vet school in December 1998, was home to some of the first hacking academies and free hosting websites in Spain. "What on earth did squats do before the age of the Internet?" someone retorts jokingly.

The group leaves the park and crosses over to La Tabacalera, the morning's third stop. The old tobacco factory was occupied in 2010 and signals another momentous landmark in the history of squatting in Madrid. For the first time, the occupation was actually "blessed" by the authorities. The building had long been conceded to the Ministry of Culture for the future location of a national center in contemporary visual arts. But when the crisis hit public finances the project had to be shelved. In its place, the ministry reached an agreement with a group of local artists, university professors, and activists (many of whom were once associated with the various Labo squatting projects) to have the building turned into a *centro social auto-gestionado*, a self-organized community center. On occasions we have heard some people refer to La Tabacalera as the fifth of the Labo projects, one that signals a moment of experimentation in the squatters' relationship with the state. Today the woman who tells us the story of La Tabacalera starts by making reference to a local schoolteacher's initiative to have a local debate about the uses the neighborhood could give the abandoned building. That was back in 2000. Later, in 2004, a group of locals aired a concern about the scaffolding of the building's façade. Installed at a time when the ministry still had an ambitious plan for the building, the scaffolding was seriously damaging its structural conditions. The occupation was a reaction to such deterioration. Squatting, she implies, is a project of care toward our urban surroundings.

The Walk moves on: straight to Labo2, skipping planned visits to Labo3 and El Solar de Olivar, although the histories of these occupations are told to us as we march. Labo3 hosted the experimental squatting project from 2002 to 2003. El Solar de Olivar, also known as the "Laboratory in exile," is a vacant plot whose occupation was conceived as a form of squatting without a building. El Solar thus marked the extension of the concept of squatting to the neighborhood at large: it was the neighborhood as a community that was being called to make an appearance and fill-in the vacant ground, and in so doing take responsibility for—take care of—its management. The Walk comes to an end at Plaza de Cabestreros, one of

Lavapiés's Popular Assembly's meeting points. It is here that, in recounting the history of the various squatting projects that have seen the light in the neighborhood over the past twenty years, someone notes that the rise of the assembly last year could well be placed in this genealogy of occupations. "With every eviction of a squatting project," he notes, "there goes a bit of local history. Public space is reinstated as a blank slate. The assembly, however, has popped up as the latest of such 'irregularities' in the governance of public space."

Experimental rhythms

The itinerary of Jane's Walk is no doubt a celebration of the history of squatting in Madrid, and in particular of the experimental role of such projects in the redefinition of the local urban commons as a neighborhood commons. It is the neighborhood's history of immigration, anarchism, deviance, and revolution, that is narrated as the group travails its streets; and it is the neighborhood's infra-structures, architecture, buildings, schools, plazas, vacant plots, that are reinscribed into such a narration as its political material forms. The story makes space for the appearance of the assembly as indeed the latest of such infrastructural and political projects—that is, the assembly as a laboratory for neighborly life, a space for the production of "irregularities," in the idiom noted above.

In a very real sense, the Walk also serves to *rhythm* the assembly as an urban practice. This is of course what Jane's Walks worldwide are meant to do: to open up spatio-temporal excursions through which the city is experienced anew. In the case of the Lavapiés Walk, however, there is a second sense in which the march helped produce a particular kind of urban rhythm. By framing the assembly as a historical form of squatting, the walk further offered a spatial and temporal format for thinking about it as an experimental urban object.

Ever since its constitution on May 2011, the ghost of squatting and occupation has been haunting the assembly. The assembly has been meeting weekly in the Parque del Casino de la Reina, which as we saw above was home to the launch of Labo1. The park is also only meters away from La Tabacalera. Attendants to the assembly's meetings have spent hours discussing the importance to remain independent from the many squatting and activist projects and centers that populate the neighborhood. The arrival of winter, for instance, was dreaded by many, for it was anticipated that attendants would eventually concede taking the assembly indoors to one of the nearby squatted buildings. (Although the politics involved in deciding whom should "host" the assembly turned out so controversial that the assembly finally remained put throughout winter.)

The structural analogy between #occupation and squatting has been noted by many. Marco Roth, for instance, asks whether the global #Occupy movement may not be regarded as the "largest homeless rights movement on the planet" (Roth 2011: 29). Maple Razsa and Andrej Kurnik, in conversation over the radical #occupation of rights-based liberal theory that direct action democracy affords, imagine their claims precisely in the terms of squatting: "What would the right to housing look like concretely in our terms? Well, we've begun to challenge the banks' authority to evict. . . . We should move on to squat vacant bank-owned properties and distribute them to those most in need. We will govern this resource in common together, assuring that empty homes don't go unused" (Razsa and Kurnik 2012: 250). The analogy has even been read to underlie the existential

politics of our age, and it is thus that Paolo Virno writes, "'not feeling at home' is in fact a distinctive trait of the concept of the multitude" (2004: 34).

In the Spanish context, the case for analogizing the sociological forms of #occupation and squatting has been forcefully made by Miguel Ángel Martínez López and Ángela García Bernados (2011).[5] We certainly subscribe to this contemporary view of the politics of urban citizenship as a struggle for existential, even ontological residence: as a contestation over the very structural space from wherein to claim recognition as political beings.

Notwithstanding, we would like to flesh-out the terms through which this has taken place in Madrid by offering an ethnographic description of some of the ways in which the assembly has indeed taken residence in the vicinity of Lavapiés. That is, how the #occupation of urban spaces is organized as spatial, temporal, infrastructural, and relational forms. We offer a vignette of the types of urban actions that have come to characterize the assembly's interventions in public space. It signals to the assembly's form as an experimental rhythm: a social practice of *tâtonnement*, of groping, essaying, fumbling one's way through the experience of meeting and disappearing. Thus understood, the work of assembling produces the spatial conditions of the neighborhood as a space of epistemic tentativeness and possibility.

The vignette reproduces an extract of Adolfo's diary over a two-hour period on a day not unlike any other day:

> Monday, May 7, c. 7 p.m.
>
> I am on my way back home from our Hack the Academy Seminar [a seminar series convened at the Spanish National Research Council in the spring of 2012]. Alba calls me. She's been trying to get hold of me all weekend. She tells me there is a poster campaign later at 10 p.m. I didn't know about it, and agree to drop by. She also tells me that if I happen to bump onto Carmelo [a leading figure in La Tabacalera] I should remind him that the assembly has plans to meet at the centre to paint placards for the 15M anniversary march.
>
> I hang the phone and minutes later receive a call from Marisol. I am temporarily acting as the assembly's treasurer. At our latest meeting we have decided to have various people, and not just one person, bank our monies. Marisol is one of such people and wants to know at what time she can come by my house to take away the part she has agreed to take responsibility for. I tell her that am on my way to La Tabacalera; that I was meant to be there at 7 p.m. but am running late. Perhaps we can meet there? She can't make it that early, so we agree to talk later and make an alternative arrangement. I ask whether she'll be attending the poster campaign at 10 p.m. She will, so we agree to see each other then.
>
> A little later Emilio calls me. He too has to come by to take his share of the money. He is not far from La Tabacalera right now so we decide to meet there. The reason I am heading for La Tabacalera is that we need to take back to Casablanca [another squatted social centre in Lavapiés] some of the paraphernalia that we borrowed for organising a market fair

5. See Mario Domínguez Sánchez-Pinilla, Miguel Ángel Martínez López, and Elisabeth Lorenzi (2011) for the sociological background of squatting in Madrid.

> a few days back. I have been text-messaging back and forth with Nuria and Miriam all morning trying to find a time that suits us all. I thought I'd made clear that I could not make it before 7:30 p.m., but Miriam has already sent me a text saying "*Vecino!* [neighbor], did you call me? See ya in Tabacalera at 7 p.m.". . . .
>
> When am done at Tabacalera I call Emilio. He does not own a mobile phone (I think he is amongst the very few in the assembly) so it is not always easy to improvise a meeting with him. I get through, however, and tell him that am on my way home. I'll pick up his share of the money and we can meet in the plaza in five minutes time. Scarcely a second goes by since we hang up and Alba calls me. I tell her my whereabouts so she, too, decides to "*bajar a la plaza*" (come down to the plaza).

In some respects, this account of the use of information and telecommunication technologies as infrastructure for sharing and amplifying the effects of social and political organization rehearses topics that have become commonplace in recent accounts of digital culture and activism (Hands 2011). Our interest here, however, is on what Henri Lefebvre called the "rhythmanalysis" of such interactions (Lefebvre 2004). In the vignette above, the social interactions among *vecinos* take shape in a fundamentally exploratory mode: they essay their own modalities of engagement, groping around for possibilities of encounter and dis/connection. They figure out as they go (Kelty 2008: 263–68). Relationships are expressed in a tentative, one could almost say *temptative* mode: a constant flux of calls, interruptions, intermissions, derivations, dislocations, superpositions, invitations, mis/encounters through which the work of assembling capillarizes the neighborhood. As Lefebvre put it, one wonders whether such arrangements may not "rhythm time as they do relations" (2004: 93): whether the neighborhood that gradually emerges does not do so as a rhythmic infrastructure of social and cultural experimentation.

Atmosphere

Our evocation of the notion of "experimental culture" follows Hans-Jörg Rheinberger's description of the culture and epistemology of experimentation in laboratory work (1997). "Research systems," writes Rheinberger, "are tinkered arrangements that are . . . set up . . . for the continuous reemergence of unexpected events. Experimentation, as a machine for making the future, has to engender unexpected events" (Rheinberger 1997: 32–33). Setting up the conditions for the emergence of the unexpected seems, indeed, what the work of assembling has been overwhelmingly dedicated to: allowing for the opening up of urban spaces where irregularities can pop up; tinkering with technology, architecture, and infrastructure in ways that allow for a certain spontaneity or improvisation in people's relationships toward one another, such that one can "drop-by" or "*bajar a la plaza*" without excessive effort or disruption, or simply tempt others into casual encounters, mapping out a sort of rhythmic, incidental topology.

Thus one wonders whether Castells, in describing the urban layout of Lavapiés as a "labyrinth of seventeenth century streets" (Castells 1983: 51) was not so much referring to an architectural landscape as to a social topology. It should not come as a surprise, then, if such an environment propitiates an experimental model of conviviality, for as Rheinberger noted, an "experimental system can readily be

compared to a labyrinth. . . . A labyrinth that deserves the name is not planned and thus cannot be conquered by following a plan. It forces us to move around by means and by virtue of checking out, of groping, of *tâtonnement*" (Rheinberger 1997: 74). Through the work of assembling, people in Lavapiés *look for* each other as they *look after* each other. They perform the neighborhood as an experimental space that is at once an object and practice of care.

At this point we would like to follow-up on the notion of a "practice of care." The formulation of a *logic of care* has recently been put forward by Annemarie Mol as an alternative to the logic of choice that prevails in the governance of institutional healthcare systems (Mol 2008). Against the view that patients should remain passive subjects vis-à-vis the doctoring of medical experts—their agency thus limited to making a choice between whatever alternatives their bodies are emplaced within—Mol takes the view that patients are in fact actively involved in doctoring their own bodies. Doctoring is a shared practice of care, not a simple matter of choice.

Here we want to take up Mol's challenge to have "the logic of care . . . translated to a variety of other contexts" (Mol 2008: 85). In fact, we want to examine how in the work of assembling care itself is pieced together as a fragile and fluctuating topological artifact. The assembling of neighbors in open air is an assembling of care itself as an ambient-object. Care is an atmospheric installation: an environmental mood-space through which assembly-goers produce the effects of what it means to be a neighbor.

The assembling of an atmosphere mobilizes, and therefore assumes, a variety of dispositifs and forms: acoustic, material, temporal, technological, etcetera. Moreover, the atmospheric assembly irradiates a sense of presence that defies the classical spatial classification of (urban) politics as something that takes place either in a public or a private space. Matthew Engelke has made a similar point about the role of *ambience* as an environmental moodscape that places faith in a space that belongs neither to the public or private domains. Engelke has drawn attention to the sensual and material semiotics that can help move discussions of religion and spirituality beyond the public-private distinction by exploring how members of the Bible Society of England and Wales promote Bible reading groups in coffee shops or pubs, or how they invested in the design of an artwork that emulated flying angels at a shopping mall in Swindon (Engelke 2012).

In important ways Lavapiés's Popular Assembly may likewise be thought of as a senso-political ambulatory—that is, an object that is ambulant or capable of moving, but also a device capable of delivering care to outpatients or outside residents. Thus on May 8, 2012 the assembly had organized a *pasacalles*, a street parade for handing out leaflets and flyers in protest for the forthcoming eviction of two immigrant neighbors, Hazim and Zahid. A group of assembly-goers had agreed to meet at 8 p.m. in Plaza de Lavapiés, the neighborhood's hub. Some people arrive with pots and pans and start banging them, a form of protest known as a *cacerolada* that became popular during the banking crisis in Argentina in 2001. Andrea, who is heavily involved in Casablanca, brings pans and metallic plates from the squat for all to use. As soon as people get their hands on them they start banging them, with hardly any concern for symphonic orchestration.

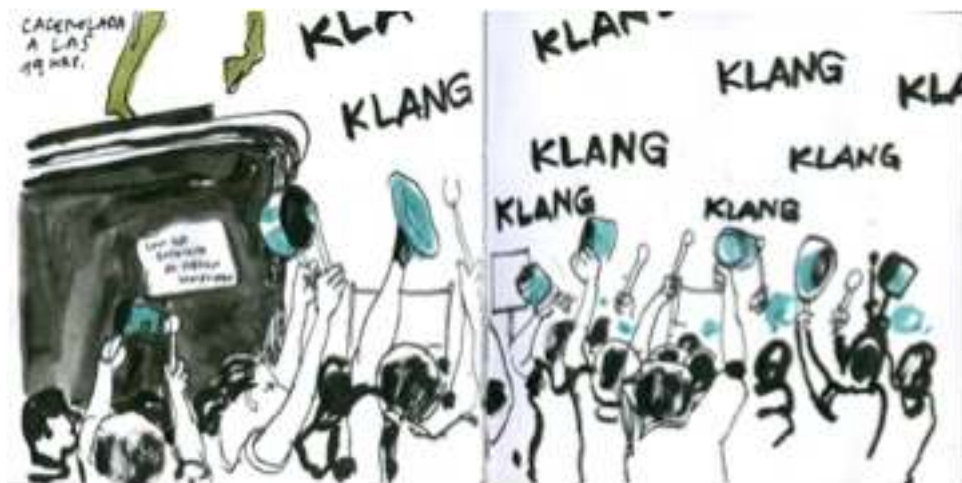

Figure 4: *Cacerolada* in Lavapiés, May 8, 2012. Watercolor by Enrique Flores, http://www.4ojos.com/blog/

The parade formally kicks off with the reading of a manifesto that calls people to gather early next morning at Hazim and Zahid's flat in order to stop the eviction. But the noise made by the pans makes it impossible to hear what the speaker, Javier, is saying. María walks around asking everyone to raise the intensity of their jamming and wait for her to signal a sudden halt. The concerted improvisation works beautifully, the metallic clangs crescendo until they erupt into a sonorous thunder, followed by an emptied-out silence. Javier then reads out aloud the manifesto. He intersperses it with the recitation of a romance he himself has composed. It is not the first time Javier writes romances to be read aloud at assembly meetings or parades. He has also adapted Frank Sinatra's "My Way" to make it sound a proper "indignant" song. It is time that the 99 percent have it "our way."

People stop to watch and some echo the *cacerolada* with applauses as the parade makes its way up north through the streets of Lavapiés. Others voice their support. Some of the streets are so narrow and uphill that the noise bounces back from the asphalt and buildings, turning the march into a thunderous battalion. The parade circles the neighborhood, as if outlining the town's old medieval walls. It stops three times, and on each occasion Javier reads the manifesto and recites his compositions. The trail of the festive and blasting crowd maps out the neighborhood's sensorial and material contours. Back in the neighborhood's southern ward, there is some discussion as to where to head next. The various itineraries are all discussed in terms of atmospheric impact: which streets are more likely to welcome the march's festive mood at 10 p.m.? In the end, someone suggests that it might be time to go to Hazim and Zahid's flat. A proposal had been made at the assembly some days previous to spend the night in their house: to gather a crowd to confront the eviction squad the following morning. The march dissolves and some ten people make it to Hazim and Zahid's flat.

Once in the flat there is an expectation as to how many people will eventually turn up. When the action was first discussed at the assembly some twenty people committed to showing up—the larger the group, the bulkier the mass of bodies to

offer resistance to the police. But as the night goes by there is hardly any growth in numbers. An ambience of fear and risk takes over the spirit of those now squatting in the hallway of Hazim and Zahid's flat. A debate opens up as to how best to make use of the flat's spatial layout: where and how to crowd together so as to impede the police's access; or how to distribute people's very different degrees of fear and risk across the mass of bodies. Those with experience of previous evictions place themselves in front; others, less experienced or simply less inclined toward physical engagement, take a rear guard position. The festive atmosphere of the parade has transformed into a local and unstable object of ambient care. The labor of assembling thus redistributes the geographies of care and risk that traverse the neighborhood.

Figure 5: Demonstration against foreclosures by Bankia (A bank nationalized in May 2012) in Lavapiés. Watercolor by Enrique Flores, http://www.4ojos.com/blog/

The neighbor

Lefebvre's essay on the right to the city has recently drawn much attention in critical urban studies (Lefebvre 1996). The debate around the right to the city reproduces complex and fraught discussions on the nature of urban struggles—over housing, the regulation of public space, or simply access to land or water—in the production of democratic urbanism (Mitchell 2003; Attoh 2011). These are huge issues with which we can hardly engage anew. More modestly, we have used our ethnographic material to illustrate briefly how the work of assembling in the Spanish #Occupy movement designs and deploys a city *within* the right to the city. The relations, itineraries, and material culture of assembling may be seen as producing the right to the city as an experimental atmosphere. There is an interior design to the practice of rights' claims. Such claims extend, of course, to questions such as housing and public space, or against racial raids by the police. Our argument here, however, is simply that a practice of experimentation seems to underlie and animate these rights from within. The right to the city is first designed—laid out spatially, temporally, infrastructurally—as an experimental ambient form. There is a city inside the right to the city.

The work of assembling, we have seen, is burdened with difficulties and tensions. Activists, academics, and participants have likened assembling in Lavapiés to a novel form of squatting and occupation. It partakes of the Laboratory's history of public space dissidence and disappearance: a history of evictions, political homelessness, and architectural and spatial fugues. Such a tradition has a fraught relationship with the territorialization of public space. Its experiments in the production of neighborhood commons hardly last. They are "irregularities" with no duration. The Laboratory is in permanent migration, in exile, as the name for its latest reincarnation wonderfully put it.

Unlike the urban experiments of squats, however, the work of assembling extrapolates its preoccupations with and performances of public space beyond the territorial itself. Assembling mobilizes the city as an infrastructural, digital, and atmospheric bundle of relations. It puts all such relations to work across a variety of contexts, temporalities, and platforms—or should we say in a variety of rhythmic forms—in an attempt to galvanize new political identities and subjectivities. The assembly comes to life as an urban object through a series of *tâtonnements* or temptative interventions. Such interventions draw on various material, ambient, and relational resources to open up an epistemic space for public experimentation within the neighborhood. In this context, perhaps we can speak of the work of assembling, then, as a modality of political action that supplements Jeff Juris's logics of networking and aggregation with a logic of experimentation. Moreover, in Lavapiés, such a logic would contribute toward the construal of *the neighbor* as the rightsholder to experimentation, the neighbor as the persona of the urban experimenter.

Like all experimental forms, however, the assembly and the neighbor share in the problem of duration. It remains unclear and uncertain how to make experiments last. An organizational problem for the assembly, common to squatting projects at large, is that people are known to come and go, only to eventually disappear forever. "People show up to help, work awhile, then disappear," Keith Gessen noted of Occupy Wall Street (Gessen 2011: 200). Hence, the practice of care: a technique for upholding hospitality under conditions of provisionality and adversity. Hence, too, the importance ascribed to the atmospheric, which performs the role of a political ambulatory.

We come to a close with somewhat of a provocation. Placed vis-à-vis other classical anthropological personas, such as the stranger, kinsfolk, or the friend, the figure of the neighbor throws into relief certain problems of experimentation and duration in the nature of relationality. The question of what is a neighbor may thus be seen to shift the problem of hospitality in an urban context from the paradigm of stranger-relationality (Candea and da Col 2012) to the domain of atmospheric politics. The type of relationship qualified by neighborliness would thus appear not so much inflected by the umbra of agonistic intimacy (Singh 2011), by the ambiguity of inhabiting the threshold separating predation from production, by the tensions of symmetry and inequality in affinal or consanguinal relations, but rather by a concern with the making of its own atmosphere of care: a neighbor as an ambient-relationship. Neighbors would therefore appear to be qualified less by their belonging or relational incorporation into established systems of meaning (symbolic, ethical, of exchange, commensuration, proportionality, or otherwise) as by their very instability and provisionality. Valuation is here deemed *valuable* not

because it provides certainty and signification, but because it is experimental and uncertain. In our ethnographic encounter, atmospheres and neighbors are such ambulatory and fragile forms—and they are valued and treasured all the more for being so.

Acknowledgments

We want to express our sincerest gratitude to the members of Lavapiés's Popular Assembly, as well as related 15M collectives and initiatives. Our time among them has deeply shaped our understanding of the making of contemporary urban commons in Madrid. This article is only possible thanks to them. Our thanks, too, to Ton Otto and Rane Willerslev, who commented on a first draft of the text and offered valuable advice as to how to sharpen its theoretical scope. Conversations with participants at the "Anthropology of Value" workshop convened by Tom Otto and Rane Willerslev in Cairns on December 2011 were also instrumental in helping identify the strengths of our empirical material. Last, we are grateful to HAU's three anonymous reviewers for detailed and useful commentaries that have contributed to improving the text's final shape.

References

Attoh, Kafui A. 2011. "What kind of right is the right to the city?" *Progress in Human Geography* 35 (5): 669–85. doi:10.1177/0309132510394706.

Becker, Howard Saul, Robert R. Faulkner, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. 2006. *Art from start to finish: Jazz, painting, writing, and other improvisations*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Braun, Bruce, and Sarah J. Whatmore. 2010. *Political matter: Technoscience, democracy, and public life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Candea, Matei, and Giovanni Da Col. 2012. "The return to hospitality." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18: S1–S19. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01757.x.

Castells, Manuel. 1983. *The city and the grassroots: A cross-cultural theory of urban social movements*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Corsín Jiménez, Alberto, and Adolfo Estalella. 2011. "#spanishrevolution." *Anthropology Today* 27 (4): 19–23. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8322.2011.00818.x.

——. 2014. "Assembling neighbors: The city as hardware, method, and 'a very messy kind of archive.'" *Common Knowledge* (20) 1.

Engelke, Matthew. 2012. "Angels in Swindon: Public religion and ambient faith in England." *American Ethnologist* 39 (1): 155–70. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01355.x.

Galison, Peter. 1987. *How experiments end*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gessen, Keith. 2011. "Laundry day." In *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, edited by Carla Blumenkranz, Keith Gessen, Mark Greif, Sarah Leonard, Astra Taylor, Sarah Resnick, Nikil Saval, and Eli Schmitt, 195–212. London: Verso Books.

Graeber, David. 2011. "Occupy Wall Street's anarchist roots: Opinion—Al Jazeera English." http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/11/2011112872835904508.html.

Hands, Joss. 2011. *@ is for activism: Dissent, resistance and rebellion in a digital culture*. London: Pluto Press.

Harvey, David. 2012. *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. London: Verso Books.

Jacobs, Jane. 1972. *The death and life of great American cities*. Middlesex: Penguin Books.

Juris, Jeffrey S. 2005. "The new digital media and activist networking within anti-corporate globalization movements." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 597 (1): 189–208. doi:10.1177/0002716204270338.

———. 2008. *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalization*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2012. "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation." *American Ethnologist* 39 (2): 259–79. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2012.01362.x.

Kelty, Christopher M. 2008. *Two bits: The cultural significance of free software*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Latour, Bruno. 2005. "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik or how to make things public." In *Making things public: Atmospheres of democracy*, edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, 14–43. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Latour, Bruno, and Peter Weibel, eds. 2005. *Making things public: Atmospheres of democracy*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Lefebvre, Henri. 1991. *The production of space*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

———. 1996. "The right to the city." In *Writings on cities*, edited by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, 147–59. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.

———. 2004. *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time, and everyday life*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Marres, Noortje, and Javier Lezaun. 2011. "Materials and devices of the public: An introduction." *Economy and Society* 40 (4): 1–21.

Martínez López, Miguel A., and Ángela García Bernardos. 2011. "The occupation of squares and the squatting of buildings: Lessons from the convergence of two social movements." http://www.miguelangelmartinez.net/IMG/pdf/articulo_Bilbao_v4_book _doc.pdf

Mason, Paul. 2012. *Why it's kicking off everywhere: The new global revolutions*. London: Verso Books.

Mitchell, Don. 2003. *The right to the city: Social justice and the fight for public space*. New York: Guilford Press.

Mol, Annemarie. 2008. *The logic of care: Health and the problem of patient choice*. New York: Routledge.

Moore, Joan W., and Raquel Pinderhughes, eds. 1993. *In the barrios: Latinos and the underclass debate*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Munn, Nancy D. 1986. *The fame of Gawa: A symbolic study of value transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Otto, Ton, and Rane Willerslev. 2013. "Introduction. 'Value as theory': Comparison, cultural critique, and guerrilla ethnographic theory." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (1): 1–20.

Pérez-Agote, Alfonso, Benjamín Tejerina, and Margarita Barañano, eds. 2010. *Barrios multiculturales: Relaciones interétnicas en los barrios de San Francisco (Bilbao) y Embajadores/Lavapiés (Madrid)*. Madrid: Trotta.

Postill, John. 2011. "Democracy in the age of viral reality: A media epidemiography of Spain's indignados movement." Manuscript. Sheffield Hallam University.

Razsa, Maple, and Andrej Kurnik. 2012. "The Occupy Movement in Žižek's hometown: Direct democracy and a politics of becoming." *American Ethnologist* 39 (2): 238–58. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2012.01361.x.

Rheinberger, Hans-Jörg. 1997. *Toward a history of epistemic things: Synthesizing proteins in the test tube*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Roth, Marco. 2011. "Letters of resignation from the American dream." In *Occupy!: Scenes from Occupied America*, edited by Carla Blumenkranz, Keith Gessen, Mark Greif, Sarah Leonard, Astra Taylor, Sarah Resnick, Nikil Saval, and Eli Schmitt, 23–29. London: Verso Books.

Sánchez-Pinilla, Mario Domínguez, Miguel Ángel Martínez López, and Elisabeth Lorenzi Fernández. 2011. *Okupaciones en movimiento: Derivas, estrategias y prácticas*. Madrid: Tierradenadie.

Singh, Bhrigupati. 2011. "Agonistic intimacy and moral aspiration in popular Hinduism: A study in the political theology of the neighbor." *American Ethnologist* 38 (3): 430–50. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01315.x.

Sloterdijk, Peter. 1998. *Sphären I: Blasen*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

——. 1999. *Sphären II: Globen*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

——. 2004. *Sphären II: Schäume*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

Small, Mario Luis. 2004. *Villa Victoria: The transformation of social capital in a Boston barrio*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thrift, Nigel. 2009. "Different atmospheres: Of Sloterdijk, China, and site." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (1): 119–38. doi:10.1068/d6808.

——. 2012. "The insubstantial pageant: Producing an untoward land." *Cultural Geographies* (February 29). doi:10.1177/1474474011427268. http://cgj.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/02/27/1474474011427268

Virno, Paolo. 2004. *A grammar of the multitude: For an analysis of contemporary forms of life*. Translated by Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

La personne atmosphérique: valeur, expérimentation et « faire des voisins » dans les assemblées populaires de Madrid

Résumé : Le mouvement Occupy en Espagne, connu localement comme le mouvement du 15 mai (15M), s'est singulièrement développé courant 2011 en un réseau d'« assemblées populaires » de voisinage. Plus de cent assemblées surgirent dans la seule Madrid. Cet article explore le travail de conception et d'infrastructure fournit par les assemblées dans la production d'une expérience particulière de *quartier* (*barrio*). Le quartier est devenu la pièce maîtresse de l'imagination politique et géographique des assemblées. Nous proposons ici un récit ethnographique de la façon dont le travail des assemblées fut constitutif d'une nouvelle expérience de la relationnalité : « faire des voisins » comme le disent les participants aux assemblées. On se fait des voisins grâce à des processus de déambulation et grâce à un investissement dans la production rythmique et atmosphérique de l'espace. Le voisin prend ainsi la valeur d'une *personne atmosphérique*. En outre, sous cette forme, il est devenu à la fois un modèle de et un modèle pour une citoyenneté politique exprimant un *droit à la ville*. Cette exploration de la question « qu'est-ce qu'un voisin? » par les gens offre ainsi une étude de cas ethnographique sur l'invention de nouvelles formes de relations sociales et de valeurs politiques en milieu urbain public, et sur l'émergence de la personne urbaine du voisin comme un expérimentateur social et politique. La valeur, donc, comme une forme *expérimentale*.

Alberto CORSÍN JIMÉNEZ is an associate professor at the Spanish National Research Council (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas) in Madrid. He is the author of *An anthropological trompe l'oeil for a common world: An essay on the economy of knowledge* (Berghahn, 2013), and editor of *Culture and well-being: Anthropological approaches to freedom and political ethics* (Pluto, 2008) and *The anthropology of organisations* (Ashgate, 2007). His current work examines the rise of an urban commons movement and the development of open-source urban hardware projects by architects, artists, and academics.

Alberto Corsín Jiménez
Centro de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales
Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas
C/Albasanz, 26-28
Madrid 28037
Spain
alberto.corsin-jimenez@cchs.csic.es

Adolfo ESTALELLA is a postdoctoral researcher at CRESC (The University of Manchester) with an interdisciplinary background in anthropology and Science and Technology Studies. He is interested in the intersection of digital technologies with the city and the emergence of forms of urban experimentation.

Adolfo Estalella
CRESC
178 Waterloo Place
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester M13 9PL
United Kingdom
adolfo.estalella@manchester.ac.uk