Also saying yes: overcoming the "anti" stage in social movements

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Abstract

This paper explores the question of transcending reactiveness in social movements. By analyzing the square movements*, it teases out three ideas with which the movements engaged in theory and practice: (1)* refusal*, (2)* destituent power *and (3)* creative resistance*. These concepts did not operate as part of an explicit ideology but were rather enacted in the encampments, public assemblies and protest actions. Philosophy drew from practice. The first two concepts (refusal and destituent power) have been salient subjects of debate in the square movements and similar movements of resistance in the last twenty years. However,* creative resistance *is the least documented of the three, and I argue that it is the key to transcend the reactive stagnation (the "anti" stage) that social movements often face. The paper explores the question of how to escape the trap of shaping movements of resistance in function of the powers that are being contested. Going further, it analyzes the role of affirmative personal transformation and everyday life politics in social change. It draws from a two-year fieldwork and participation in the square movements (in Barcelona, New York, Paris, Montreal and Mexico City) and engages with texts and debates on the movements. It contextualizes these debates – historically and philosophically – in order to draw lessons for future social struggles. The square movements showed the importance of outrage as a triggering factor for social struggles, but also raised questions about the dangers (and ultimate futility) of dwelling in reactiveness. The article proposes that striving for creativity and engaging in proactive experimentation could be crucial attitudes to go beyond the sole acknowledgement of injustice. Ten years after the coming about of the square movements and with the prevalent culture of reactiveness and outrage, these questions are more important than ever in contemporary social movements.*

Keywords: life-affirming politics - creative resistance - destituent power - square movements - Occupy movement

1. Introduction

In the height of the square movements in 2011 and 2012, many philosophers and intellectuals joined the protest encampments. Some read speeches and others participated in the general assemblies. Angela Davis, Judith Butler, Naomi Klein and Slavoj Zizek visited Zuccotti Park. David Harvey read a speech in Occupy London. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt spoke in events organized

in the context of the 15M movement in Madrid.[1] Others, like David Graeber and Marina Sitrin actively participated in the organization of the mobilizations while engaging in public and academic debates. Numerous books and essays were written as a response to these movements (Zizek 2012; Harvey 2012; Graeber 2013; Chomsky 2012; Purcell 2013; Badiou 2012; Hedges 2012). However, in none of these cases were these intellectuals perceived as leaders or ideologues of the movements; rather, they spoke as regular participants taking their turn in the general assemblies. While in some cases, these speeches were considered inspirational and influential for the movements' identities, they were often just diluted in the sea of participation.

The square movements developed a practical philosophy based on their commitment to practice in the encampments, general assemblies and protest actions. They were prefigurative in essence (De la Llata 2017; Sitrin 2012). That is, they did not develop a program to be attained in the future, but rather enacted it. Theory was drawn from practice and "developed through action" (Maeckelbergh 2012).[2] Therefore, academic debates were considered seriously by the movements only to the extent that they responded to the actual experience of the movements in the field. Thus, the line between intellectual thought and activism was blurry, as the square movements were fertile ground for what Gramsci (1992) calls 'organic intellectuals.'

Drawing from a two-year field research on the square movements (in Barcelona, New York, Paris, Montreal and Mexico City) and an analysis of texts and debates about -- and often directly produced within -- the movements, I identify three moments that were to some extent transversal across these movements: (1) the acknowledgement of injustice, (2) the desire to get rid of the unjust order and (3) the experimentation with alternatives to the perceived unjust order. These stages also reflected to three transversal debates that took place in the movements (respectively): (1) *Refusal*, (2) *Destituent power*, and (3) *Creative Resistance*. The reported outrage, indignation and weariness of the general order of things mark the acknowledgment of injustice and is therefore a point of departure for these movements. Here, it is worth mentioning that even though the struggles were so different in nature and motivations, most of them appeared to have shared a similar attitude of refusal – especially in their first stages of the movements. The notion of *destituent power* and explicit references to revolution or deposing the ruling power were also commonly discussed. While refusal and destituent power often constituted commonly held visions, the participants were split about what should come after. This was an issue that haunted the square movements across the world, as it has happened with other social movements in the past. But, even though there were differences, there was one thing the movements seemed to agree about: *how* things are done informs *what* is done. The means do not justify the ends: the means *are* then

[1] Joining the Indignados in Madrid, Negri confessed that even though the struggle really inspired him, he was beginning to feel "too old," after a life-time career as an activist.

[2] Sturgeon (1995) proposes the idea of "direct theory," which is the application of the concept of direct action into theory.

ends. There was never an explicit intention to seize power. Therefore, there was a strong focus on the processes rather than on the outcomes of the revolutionary process. But the question about what the movements were actually *about* -- not only *against* -- and about which processes are truly revolutionary and which are not still remains open. This is where *creative resistance* comes into play. The notion of *creative resistance* (De la Llata 2017), as I will outline further on, is the necessary mechanism to transcend the reactive "anti" stage of only articulating what one does *not* want. Creativity is essential to social movements. The square movements brought to the table the question of how to move from refusal to an affirmative position of taking "the offence [and] making positive demands" (Sparrow in Humphrys 2012). However, beyond demands, the question is, What would be the opposite of what is refused and, consequently, what are the processes that are to be destituted?. In other words, *What do we really want to achieve?* The question is as simple and practical as it is political and historical. And, it echoes Lenin's "What is to be done?" and Martin Luther King's "Where do we go from here?." Furthermore, the objective of the paper is to explore questions that are often overlooked in social movements: How do we identify the role we -- actively or passively -- play in perpetuating injustice? And, what are the concrete steps (beyond only calling out injustice) that we need to take in order to experiment with and ultimately achieve radical change?

The debates in the square movements (online and offline, inside and outside of the encampments) reveal the historical anxiety towards the movement itself mirroring the powers that are being contested. The danger of this anxiety is to be trapped in reactiveness. That is, becoming paralyzed and "caught in theory" because you do not want to err. This is the result of the tendency to externalize power and to articulate a language of resistance that locates power as force that is alien and therefore imposed on the oppressed. This anxiety towards power, similar to the adolescent who fears resembling the parents, often detaches resistance movements from their own power.

In what follows, I explore the concepts of refusal, destituent power and creative resistance. Building on an *ontology of becoming* (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, 1983; Nietzsche 1886, 1887; Negri 1999; Hardt & Negri 2000, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2017) and the work of thinkers and activists that either participated in or inspired the movements, I propose striving for creativity and cultivating a life-affirming approach in order to transcend the reactive stages of resistance.

2. Methodological note

The field research of this paper is based on direct observation, interviews and the analysis of texts produced in the context of the Occupy Wall Street Movement and the *Indignados* Movement in Spain, and briefly in sister movements in Mexico City, Montreal and Paris (See Figures 1, 2 and 3). This paper teases out the discourse of these movements. This was expressed in texts that were often directly produced within the square occupations as well as on the theoretical debates that responded to these texts. However, this philosophy

is by no means entirely new, as it draws inspiration and adopts practices from other movements of resistance, which will be discussed further on.

Figure 1. Temporary occupation of Washington Square (New York City) in the context of the Occupy Movement. Source: The author. New York, New York. March 15, 2012.

This paper analyzes the discourse(s) of the movements in search for common threads, practices and sources of inspiration. To do so, I conducted an immersive ethnographic work in protest actions across the previously mentioned movements. I did participant observation in demonstrations, marches, sit-ins, pickets, protest encampments, student strikes, two general strikes, general and neighbourhood assemblies and occupations of public and private buildings. During the most intense period of the research (between the summers of 2011 and 2012), I attended on average one protest action a day, while I was living between Barcelona and New York City. Later, as the movements became a global phenomenon, I decided to explore other movements that explicitly manifested solidarity or inspiration with those movements. So, I did participant observation in the occupation of the esplanade of La Defense in Paris (2011), and interviews with activists from the YoSoy132 Movement in Mexico City and the Students' Movement in Montreal in 2012. The fieldwork was also complemented by a detailed analysis of online materials, such as videos, blog posts, articles, pictures, and minutes that were posted on websites and Facebook, YouTube and Twitter groups, as well as printed material that was distributed in the streets, such as flyers, newspapers, brochures, and posters. I also joined online assemblies, meetings and solidarity actions in these five movements. These materials allowed me to identify common practices and influences across the movements.

My positionality in the research was that of a participant observer as I actively joined the protests. Here, it is worth mentioning that some of the lessons that derived from this research were that most of the participants did not spouse the idea of a division between intellectuals and activists or between practitioners and theoreticians. It would be misleading to think that activists are detached from reading or producing theory themselves. Most of the participants were very well informed on the "theory" and were often directly in contact with people otherwise deemed as intellectuals. Some of the works that are cited here belonged to veteran activists (who are also "intellectuals") who participated in social movements and were often invited to join assemblies and rallies (e.g. Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, John Holloway, Marina Sitrin, David Graeber, etc.) or to deceased activists who played a similar role in their time and therefore are often directly cited in debates in conversations by activists (e.g. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Albert Camus, Herbert Marcuse, etc.). I describe how these movements built a discourse by drawing ideas and practices from the overlapping and often indistinguishable worlds of theory and practice.

Figure 2. General assembly in Plaza Catalunya (Barcelona) in the context of the first anniversary of the 15M movement. Source: The author. Barcelona, Spain. May 15, 2012.

The open-endedness that prevailed in the protest encampments and the general assemblies (De la Llata, 2016) makes difficult to identify a thematic coherence in the debates. Nevertheless, there are some debates that were somewhat recurrent – not only across the square movements, but also throughout the recent history of social movements. The following description teases out three concepts that were recurrently discussed and that manifested in three stages.

Figure 3. Occupation of the esplanade of the arch of La Defense in Paris. Source: The author. Paris, France. November 10, 2011.

Methodological approach and problem delimitation

In 2011 and 2012, the square movements spread across the world. I arrived in the field with detailed calendars and maps of protest actions that I had developed from closely following the websites of the movements. I had clearly delimited the publics and spaces that I wanted to study. I had specific questions I wanted to ask the activists, such as when, how and why they had joined the movement; what was their ideology; what were their goals and motivations or what was the significance of the sites they had chosen to occupy. This research agenda proved close to futile. The marchers often improvised their itineraries and constantly changed their venues. Participants actively avoided answering whether or not they belonged to the movement. In addition, the movements were expanding across the world and growing in numbers day by day.

The encampments were diffuse objects of study. Thousands of people occupied public spaces for long periods of time (sometimes for over two months). It was difficult to pinpoint who was part of the movement and who was a stranger, who worked in favour, who against and who was neutral. All shared the space. In the absence of apparent physical or identity boundaries, anyone who volunteered to participate in the assemblies, the organization of the encampment or the protest actions was somehow "in" the movement. Through this realization I decided to adopt a Deleuzian approach. In this approach, as Hillier (2007) points out, "[one] cannot begin from the whole as a whole is never given or giveable" [and] one cannot begin from the outside in order to find its limits but rather, one has to start from the middle" (Hillier, 2007, p. x). Adopting this approach was imperative to understanding such an elusive phenomenon, as the ideologies of these movements and the spaces they created were relentlessly shifting.

Identifying the social and identity boundaries in the ethnography was a complex process. There are two main approaches in research delimitation in social sciences: nominalist and realist (Lauman, et al., 1989). In the former, the researcher delimits the realm of study based on the research questions and framework, while the latter assumes that "the proposition of the social entity exists as a collectively shared subjective awareness of all, or at least most, of the actors who are members." (Lauman, et al., 1989, p. 65). My research falls under the latter. These social movements showed an that separated the squares from the adjacent streets. The rejection of ready-made classifications and reductionisms were common across the social movements. Participants were elusive and even ambiguous when asked about their membership and level of involvement in the movement, as well as when defining the operational and physical boundaries of occupied spaces. I encountered this when I interviewed people who were involved in the actions of the movements. They reported either not being part of or being only close to the movement. Consequently, a realist approach (as opposed to nominalist) was adopted for the delimitation of the fieldwork and the ontology of becoming for the analysis of the results.

This ethnography seeks to understand how the movements dealt with spaces and their boundaries in respect to physical planning, management and identity. The methods include participant observation, direct observation, interviews with key actors and videophotographic analysis in the context of protest.

3. Three philosophies drawing from practice

The "square movements" (Stavrides 2014) (also referred to as the "movement of the squares" (Flesher Fominaya 2017)) began with the apparently random event of the immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia in December of 2010. The death

of Mohammed Bouazizi, the 26-year-old who could not find a job after getting a degree in computer science and was forced to become a street vendor, only to be harassed, humiliated and stripped from his wares by the police, sparked outrage across the country. It was an act of refusal, not only addressed to the police but to the larger socioeconomic structure (Hardt and Negri 2012). The reaction to this event ultimately led to the Tunisian Revolution. And subsequently the Revolution gave rise to the so-called Arab Spring and inspired other protest movements, such as the *Indignados* and Occupy Wall Street. The wave of mobilizations lasted way into 2014, and it later included the occupations of Taksim Square in Istanbul, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong as well as Students' Movements in Mexico, Chile and Quebec. These movements responded to a broad variety of causes and contexts in different countries. Therefore, they are difficult to cluster under the same banner. Some authors even claim that these kinds of movements are not movements in the traditional sense, but rather *movements of movements* (Mertes 2004), *non-movements* (Bayat 2013) or, simply *mobilizations* (Rebelaos 2012).

Even when there were some commonalities across movements -- the critique of representative democracy, the emphasis on occupying public spaces, the complaints of human rights violations, the commitment to practice and prefigurative politics, the sense of solidarity and internationalism, the wide use of social networks -- they did not share a defined ideology and would be impossible to homogenize them. However, they did share practices and engaged in similar debates in the general assemblies and online forums during the occupation of the squares. There were also explicit exchanges and gestures of solidarity between different square movements.[3] There were also conferences and scholarly works developing in parallel to the assembly debates.[4] Even though there were cases in which the debates deployed simultaneously or independently of each other, most of the time the topics were discussed in the

[3] There are numerous examples of these exchanges, such as the solidarity communiqués that the occupiers of Tahrir Square sent to The Occupy Movement (Comrades of Cairo 2011), the video-communiqués that the *Democracia Real Ya!* (associated with the 15M) sent to the YoSoy132 Student Movement, explicitly saying they were part of their movement, solidarity communiqués between the Quebec and Chilean and Mexican Student movements that were occupying squares at the time. As well, in all the cities that I covered in this research, there were sections of the general assemblies (often towards the end of it) dedicated to "international affairs." In their interventions, "delegates" reported on updates from their movements and, rather than being referred to as members of other movements, they were often introduced as brothers, sisters or comrades. The facilitator would often say something along the lines of, "the sister is here to tell us about the struggle in Egypt." Different as the those struggles might have been, there was an overall sense of internationalism.

[4] A good example of this activist-academic parallels is the case of the attempt of reoccupation of Zuccotti Park on its half anniversary, which I witnessed in March, 2012. During the Left Forum of 2012, filmmaker, Michael Moore closed the conference with a lecture that resulted in the attendants (most of them OWS veterans) marching towards Zuccotti with the intention of reoccupying. The NYPD showed up and there were more than one hundred arrests, according to activists. These activists presented papers, coordinated panels and organized discussions in the forum in the same way that they managed OWS commissions, think tanks and general assemblies.

following order: 1. The acknowledgement of perceived injustice, 2. The desire to get rid of injustice and 3. The experimentation with alternatives to the unjust order.

Refusal: the acknowledgement of injustice

"That's it!", "Enough is enough!", "We can't take it anymore!" (Interviews at the 15-O Global Protest). These were the recurrent opening statements in a series of interviews I conducted during the *15-O* global demonstration (15th of October, 2011) in Barcelona. (See to Figure 4). The *15-O* were a series of protests around the world (one of the largest simultaneous mobilizations in History) and was a decisive moment in the development of the politics of refusal in contemporary social movements. In a sample of 20 interviews to screen the motivations of the protesters to join the protest, the only common idea in the sea of demands was what I would later learn was the notion of refusal (See Figure 5). Refusal was widely discussed in the encampments, protests and assemblies as well as in literature read (or produced) by the activists (Hessel et al 2011; Comrades from Cairo 2011; Kingstnorth 2012; Sitrin 2012; Tormey 2012; Hardt & Negri 2012; Flesher Fominaya 2015; Van de Sande 2013; Farr et al 2013; De la Llata, 2020). There was a clear refusal of representative politics (Flesher Fominaya 2015). Slogans such as "They don't represent us!" in Spain or the more straightforward ones of "Irhal!" (Leave!) in Egypt and "Ben Alí, dégage! (Go away, Ben Alí!) in Tunisia express a clear sentiment of weariness. The motivations for refusal were different in each context. In Europe, it was the alleged dismantling of the public health and education systems; in the United States, income inequality and the housing and financial crisis; in the Middle East, the lack of civil liberties; in Latin America, the rampant corruption and systemic violence. In general, refusal responded to the apparent failure representative democracy and therefore the encampments and general assemblies became laboratories to enact direct democracy and direct action beyond representative politics (De la Llata, 2020).

Figure 4. March in the context of the 15-O Global demonstrations. Source: The author. Barcelona, Spain. October 15, 2011.

Figure 5. Temporary occupation of the esplanade of Arc de Triomf in Barcelona in the context of the 15-O. Source: The author. Barcelona, Spain. October 15, 2011.

Occupy Wall Street activist and scholar, Marina Sitrin (2012) highlights this sense of generalized refusal: "our movements are the shouting of 'No!' The 'Ya Basta!' [Enough already!] The 'Que Se Vayan Todos!' [They all must go!] They are our collective refusal to remain passive in an untenable situation." (Sitrin 2012, occupytheory.org).[5] Similarly, in a communiqué to Occupy Wall Street, the Tahrir Square protesters said: "[a]n entire generation across the globe has grown up realizing, rationally and emotionally, that we have no future in the current order of things" (Comrades from Cairo 2011). The publication of Stephen Hessel's[6] (2010) pamphlet *Indignez vous!* was crucial in the articulation of a common language of refusal. The text is a call to reflect about the normalization of a system perceived as structurally and fundamentally flawed, and it was hugely inspirational to the square movements across Europe and North America (hence the name, *Indignados* movement). In the 2012 encampment of Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona, a half-letter size flyer cites a quote from the book:

> It is true the reasons to be outraged can seem today less clearly related or the world too complex. [...] It is a vast world, of which we have a feeling of interdependence. We live more interconnectedly than ever before. But in this world there still are intolerable things. To see them, it is well and necessary to look, to search. I say to the young people, "Search little, and that is what you are going to find." (Hessel 2010: http://indignez-vous-indignacion.blogspot.com/)

What Hessel describes here is not new. The book is in many ways an analysis of the current situation in the light of a recapitulation of his own struggle against fascism. And it was interpreted as a call for action to refuse contemporary (and less explicit) forms of totalitarianism. The concept of refusal is common in contemporary social movements, and it can be traced back to the end of the Second World War (Camus 1951; Marcuse 1955), but it has been decisively embraced by anti-globalization movements towards the end of the Twentieth Century, especially since the Seattle protests of 1999 (Holloway 2000; Hardt & Negri 2001) and the 2001 uprisings in Argentina (Collectivo Situaciones 2001). And, it has also been also a core concept for the Zapatistas in Chiapas since the 1990s. The square movements are in some way a continuation of such movements and what has been called the "Global Justice Movement" (Flesher Fominaya 2014).

Camus (1951 [2012]) had explored the concept before in *The Rebel: An essay of a man in revolt*. A rebel is someone "who says *no* (italics added by the author), but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation [but also] says *yes*, from the

[5] In this quote, she refers to the Occupy Movements and the Indignados, but also to other anti-globalization movements, such as the Zapatistas and the Argentine uprising of 2001.

[6] Stephen Hessel (1917-2013), a fighter in the French Resistance and the last alive (at the time of the square movements) redactor of the Declaration of Human Rights (1948), alerted that we were becoming increasingly compliant with authoritarianism.

moment he [or she] makes his [or her] first gesture of rebellion. [...] [Thus, saying no] affirms the existence of a borderline" (Camus 1951 [2012] p. 13).[7] Herbert Marcuse also explored the notion of refusal throughout his work (1955, 1964, 1969). The "Great Refusal," as he called it, was the response of the student movements of the 1960s to different forms of oppression and domination. In Capitalism, oppression is enabled not only because external desires are imposed but also because it is accepted and internalized by the oppressed (Marcuse, 1964). For Marcuse, life is reduced to consumerism and the internalization of false needs. Refusal opens possibilities for a new society, and refusal of oppression is an assertion of "life instincts" (even erotic drives) to recover its right place in existence. Refusing these imposed needs (and processes) is a response that asserts life desires and that has political potential as well (Marcuse, 1969).

The Italian *Autonomia* Movement also talked about the "strategy of refusal" (Tronti, 1980). And it is also a concept that Hardt and Negri (2000, 2003, 2006, 2012) have continued exploring ever since. In the same line, John Holloway (2002) writes about the notion of *the scream*: "a scream of sadness, a scream of horror, a scream of anger, a scream of refusal: *NO*."(Holloway, 2002 p. 1). The "scream" is a response to oppression that serves as an act of stopping to reflect. It is interesting to point out the agreement about the visceral (not only rational) character of refusal and the keenness on becoming life-affirmative across these works, that is to say, the commitment to find an affirmative response (a *Yes*) that overcomes the refusal (the *No*). Refusal is then a first response to oppression. And, it opens the question about how to get rid of a system that enables it. This is where the notion of destituent power comes into play.

Destituent power. The desire to end injustice

In the first days of the 15M movement, an activist shared with me an early draft of a text that was collectively produced in the Plaza Catalunya encampment in Barcelona:

> The occupied plaza is self-organized, in other words, it is in itself a process of self-organization. [...] In the plaza we are putting into practice the germ of a *Destituent Assembly* [Italics by the author]. It is clear that, in spite of what some of the voices present in the plaza say, we are not moving towards the direction of a *Constituent Assembly* [Italics by the author]. Constituent Assemblies have been

[7] The notion of "one no and many yeses" has been widely used in anti-globalization movements since the 1990s (See Kingsnorth, 2012). In a recent publication Naomi Klein, reflects on the square movements and argues that "No, is not enough," and that there is an urgence to find inspiring "yeses." (See Klein, 2017). Zapatistas also talk about saying "No" to the current neoliberal system, which does not allow for other ways of life. The slogan "un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos" (a world where many worlds fit) is often seen in the Zapatista communities.

> fundamental instruments for classic politics, a kind of politics that we explicitly detest (Autoorganizacion 2011 p.01) (Translation from Spanish by the author).

This was the earliest mention to the notion of destituent power that I identified in the 15M movement, but I later discover it was a central conversation in other square movements as well. This debate gained particular traction in Spain (especially in Barcelona) during the square occupations of 2011. The fragment reveals a longstanding tension between the notions of constituent and destituent power. They contrast the self-organization in the plazas and direct democracy with a constituent power that entails outlining a new constitution and developing a new form of government. But first it is worth giving an overview of the history and theory of the concept of destituent power.

Destituent power[8] has been referred to as the act of overthrowing, removing, deposing or neutralizing power and it was common currency in the square movements. These movements were explicit about demanding the fall of, not only the leaders of regimes, but also regimes themselves. They shared a generalized idea that most governments (not only dictatorships and authoritarian governments but also some representative democracies) were illegitimate. In Spain, France, Italy and Greece it was common to hear about "destituent processes," "destituent assemblies," "destituent collectives" and, of course, destitutent power. In Latin America, the term has been widely used since the times of the uprising that lead to the resignation of the Argentinian president in 2001 (Colectivo Situaciones 2002). But, with the rapid articulation of the different square movements across the world, the debate about both the means and ends of destituent power grew exponentially. The concept began drawing attention among English-speaking activists with the publication of the translation of Giorgio Agamben's (2014) lecture, "What is destituent power?" in the journal *Environment & Planning D: Society and Space*. The Italian philosopher read this speech in a conference in response to the square movements. Agamben builds on Tronti's[9] and Benjamin's[10] interpretation of the concept, and links it to his *Homo Sacer* project. More specifically, he contrasts destituent and consituent power, and proposes that "[o]nly a power that is made inoperative and deposed is completely neutralized [...] [Destituent power] deposes power once and for all" (Agamben 2013 p.65). Here, it is important to first explain the tension between constituent and constituted power. Antonio Negri (1999) describes *constituent power* as a potential (*potenza*) that is

[8] The concept of *destituent power* is present in most modern revolutionary movements, but the term, however, -- since it comes from Latin languages (French, Spanish and Catalan: Destituir, Italian: Destituire) -- is relatively new in English-speaking countries. Here, it is worth mentioning that *to destitute*, as used in theories of destituent power, has nothing to do with the meaning of poor and "without basic necessities," as often defined in English dictionaries.

[9] See Tronti M, 2008, "Sul potere destituente: discussione con Mario Tronti", in Pouvoir Destituant: Les Révoltes Métropolitaines/Potere Destituente: Le Rivolte Metropolitane (Mimesis, Udine) pp 23–32

[10] See Benjamin, Walter. *Critique de la violence*. Éditions Payot, 2

unfolding through democratic and revolutionary processes and *constituted power* as consolidated governmental power (*potere*). Michael Hardt (1999)[11] expands on the concept and links it to the dialectic tension between Labor and Capital. He describes that, in the same way that, according to Marx, capital is "dead labor," government (*potere*) is "dead democracy" (Hardt 1999). In this line of thought, a government (even a representative democracy) is no longer potential but consolidated, systematized and ritualized power. Constituent power entails potential. It is becoming-power, i.e. political power that is yet to materialize.[12] Constituted power is the consolidation of a government via law-making processes, the creation of institutions, a constitution, and, ultimately, of a new social contract. In contrast, destituent power is the response to move away from this possibility.

A theory of destituent power (Gavroche 2013; Newman 2000; Wakefield 2013; The Invisible Committe 2015; Laudani 2013; Nowotony 2009) has been developed from the lessons of the square movements as well as from Agamben's response. Destituent power focuses essentially in making power inoperative, rather than in confronting it with violence (via an armed revolution) only to end up replicating its practices.[13] Destituent power is presented as an alternative to the problem of revolutionary power that eventually consolidates into governmental power. It seeks to take action by being "indifferent" to power, rather than by confronting it directly (Gavroche 2017). Destituent power "[…] is not a question here of a new social contract, but of a new strategic composition of worlds" (The Invisible Committee 2014 p.85).[14] Destituent power is, as the notion of refusal, prefigurative in essence. It does not seek change through taking power but through enacting alternatives (Holloway 2002).

Going back to the debate in Plaza Catalunya's encampment, the authors of the text make reference to the constituent-destituent power tension. They text refer to "classic politics" as the post-revolutionary processes of law-making and the creation of institutions, a constitution and a new social contract. The authors were responding to a sector of the movement that sought to write a new constitution that recuperated the spirit of the protest encampments and their

[11] See Hardt's prologue to Negri's(1999) *Insurgencies*

[12] Other thinkers have also juxtaposed government with democracy and suggest there is a fundamental difference between politics as a process and politics as an outcome. Here, we can cite Miguel Abensour's (2011) concept of "Democracy against the State," and Ranciere's (2010) differentiation between politics, the political and the police. And, it is also worth mentioning Trotsky's thesis on "The permanent revolution" in contrast to a consolidated revolution.

[13] Gramsci explored this contradiction throughout his work. He suggests that counterhegemonic power can potentially become hegemonic power.

[14] In reference to Benjamin, Agamben comments: "The difference between veranlassen, "to induce, to provoke", and vollziehn, "to accomplish, to realize", expresses the opposition between constituent power, which destroys and always recreates new forms of law, without ever completely destituting it, and destituent power, which, in deposing law once and for all, immediately inaugurates a new reality […] It follows that the first of these operations is lawmaking but the second anarchic" (Benjamin, 1921 in Agamben, 2013: 71).

assemblies. This group became to be known as “Consituyentes” (The Constituents), and they had presence in several Spanish cities. During participant observation in one of their debates, a founding member of Consituyentes explained to me:

> We have a government that developed after the fall of the Franco dictatorship, and therefore is not legitimate, neither is legal or constitutional. Therefore, we are assembled to redact a new constitution that recuperates the spirit of previous constitutions [especiallly The 1812 Constitution of Cadiz], as well as the ideals of 15M movement. Yes, at the moment, we are going through a destituent process, and after that it is time for a constituent process [...] We know some sectors of the 15M don't like us and are distancing themselves from us, but it is important that this [the mobilizations] results in the promulgation of a new constitution (Interview with Felipe, May 2012).

A few days before this interview, in a 3-day encampment planned for the first anniversary of the movement, *Democracia Real Ya!*, a collective that was instrumental in the organization of the encampments, mentioned in a communique, "We demand a new *constituent power* [Italics added by the author] to recuperate our own sovereignty [...] [W]e take to the streets once again with legitimate and majoritarian demands, and we call for mobilizations as well as a consumption boycott [a strike]" (democraciarealya.es 2012, last accessed July 1, 2018).

In the square movements, destituent power was often associated with direct action and direct democracy. The concept of direct action generated substantial debate in the movements, and most considered it essential for a destituent process. Agamben suggests, taking power (even via direct action) is problematic, as the focus of destituent power should not be in the creation of a new government but on the creation of an ongoing destituent process.[15] In the movements, they considered direct democracy and prefigurative politics ways for achieving a "social revolution" (rather than larger political transformation).

Destituent power was used in reference to political economy both at the macro and micro level. Theoretical debates about destituent power focused more on the importance of destituent power to escape the hegemony-counterhegemony cycle at the macro scale. However, in the encampments themselves, the debates were more about finding different dynamics of communication and interaction

[15] In the context of Occupy Wall Street, David Graeber and Chris Hedges, debated online about the justifiability of the destruction of property and physical confrontation (the so-called "diversity of tactics") in a revolutionary process. The street combats in Syntagma Square in Athens and the blockade of the Catalan Parliament to stop representatives from approving laws perceived as unjust split opinions about the different interpretations direct action, and the attempt to stop the inauguration of president elect, Enrique Peña Nieto (in Mexico), on grounds of electoral fraud, revived discussions about the fragile tension between the legitimacy and legality of governments (De la Llata 2017).

to destitute hegemonic practices than to find means to depose hegemonic politics.

In the square movements, they were keen, for example, about assembly participants always speaking *ad personam*, about remaining open even to potential political adversaries, about not imposing rules and a sense of collective will in the encampments, about welcoming activists from other countries as part of the same international struggle, just to name a few. These practices reflect an awareness about what Foucault calls "microfascisms" (Foucault 1977). That is, practices that are latent in any revolutionary and democratic processes but that are the seeds of constituted power (and even fascism).[16] Foucault, in Deleuze & Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* prologue, talks about the importance of "the tracking down of all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives" (Foucault in Deleuze & Guattari 1977 p.v). Being aware of the potential of power crystallization becomes particularly important for uprisings happening in the context of socialist governments and representative democracies. In these contexts, it is more difficult to identify fascism nominally, as democratic governments can potentially engage in repressive practices and co-opt democratic processes. In the same way that democracy is not a regime, but a method and a process, fascism does not necessarily exist only in nominally fascist regimes – fascism is ultimately a practice.[17]

Destituent power, for the square movements, was the desire to explore relationships and interactions that sought to depose power structures at the level of micropolitics and everyday life. In fact, the protest encampments "emphasized the importance of transforming space as means of transforming social relationships" (Dhaliwal 2012 p.251). They appeared as seminal spaces and moments to test this kind of power at the quotidian level. Destituent power is perceived as a process that shifts power relationships, more than overthrowing power hierarchies. In sum, constituent power is in process of trans-formation. Constituted power is consolidated, crystallized power in the form of the state and government institutions. They exist in a dialectic dichotomy. Destituent power, on the other hand, is a political force that moves in the opposite direction (See Diagram 1). It seeks to disperse rather than

[16] Foucault asks "How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior?" (Foucault, 1977: xiii).

[17] Here, it is interesing to point out that most of the square movements (similar to the social movements of 1968) often made direct references to fascism and called for ways to challenge it. Foucault (1977) warned that activists should be aware of microfascisms *especially* in leftists movements, as they would be more likely to be unnoticed. Destituent power is perceived in the movements as key to prevent power crystallization and the cooptation of progressive struggles. As constituent power often shapes itself in response to constituted power – and often unconsciously –, the risk of mimicking its structures is always latent. The protest encampments were spaces in which people were particularly aware of these risks.

congeal power. Thus, the obvious question that arises is, Do we really want a perpetual disintegration of *all* power?

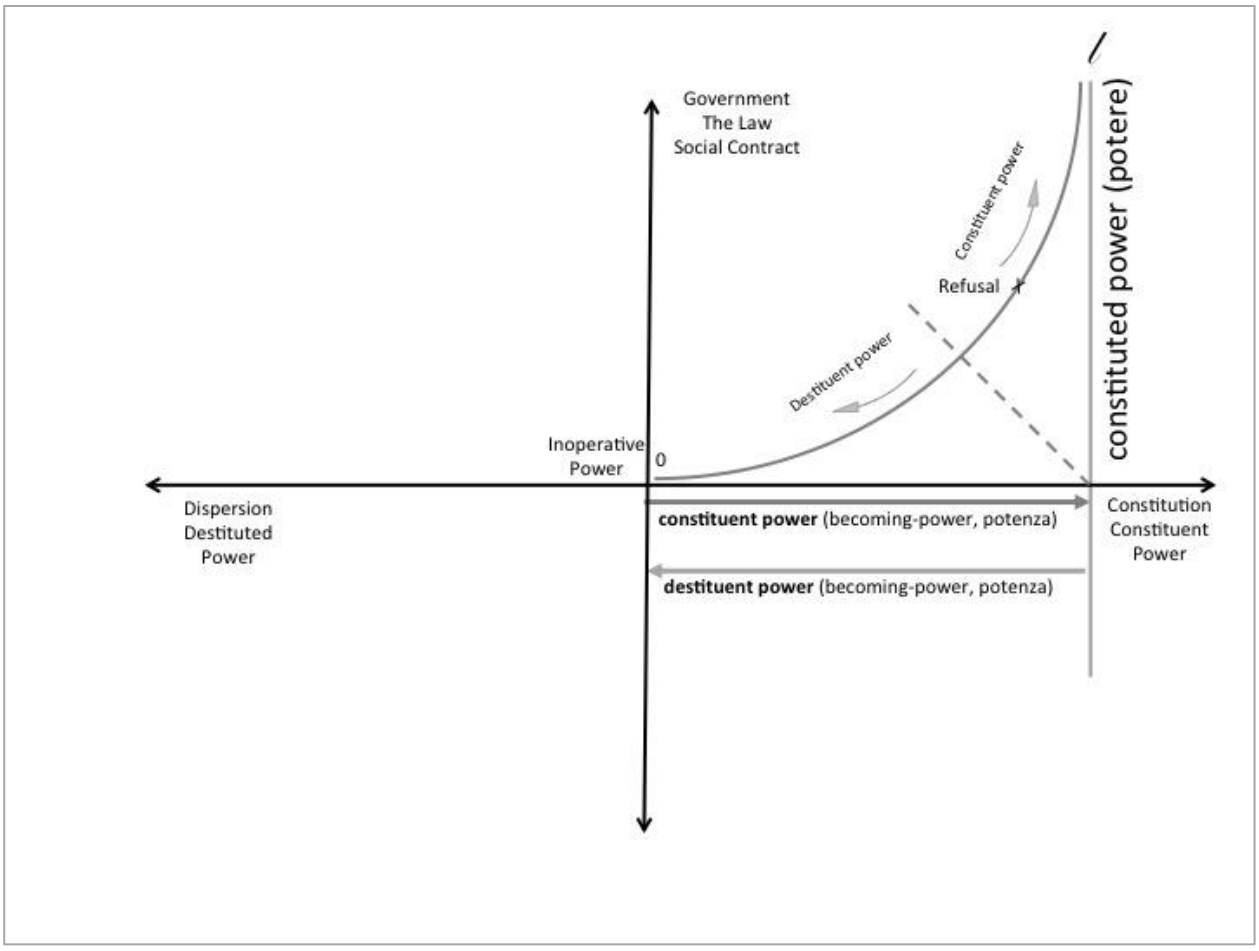

Diagram 1. *In this graphic we can see how constituent and destituent power operate. Constituent power tends towards constituent power and to constitution of power, and in doing so, law-making processes, the consolidation of institutions and a government also consolidate. Destituent power moves in the opposite direction. It tends to destituted power or inoperative power. They both operate as becoming-powers and only approximate consolidation. X = Power in the equations. Source: the author.*

Creative resistance: alternatives to perceived injustices

"To resist is to create, to create is to resist," wrote Stephen Hessel, author of *Indignez Vous!* Resistance and creativity are correlated to each other. Innovation entails disruption of the status quo (artistic, political, economic) and social change requires the testing of new realities. The notion of creative resistance was less documented than destituent power and refusal. But, I argue, is a more life-affirming response in movements of resistance. “Creativity,

innovation and reflectivity" (Flesher Fominaya 2014 p.114) are essential to social movements in general. In the case of the square movements, horizontality, diversity, prefigurative politics and debate in general was perceived as a condition for creativity. Therefore, participants resisted uniformity and top-down organization as it was perceived to have a "stifling effect on the creativity and autonomy of the movement" (Maeckelbergh 2012 p.227). Creativity is a way to refuse the ethics and aesthetics, and the form and content of oppressive power. Destituent power is associated with making power inoperative by engaging in prefigurative experiments.[18] [19] However, creative resistance goes a step further as it operates, not necessarily against, but beyond power.

The encampments were true "urban laboratories" (De la Llata, 2014, 2016) where not only new forms of art were tested, but also new forms of organization, communication and exchange. The encampments, occupied social centers and events to reclaim urban spaces that were associated to the square movements operated as self-managed settlements (Stravides 2016). Creative resistance was expressed in endless ways in the square movements but there were three main arenas of experimentation: politics, economics, and art.

[18] In *Now and Destituent Power,* Gavroche (2017) discusses the relationship between destituent power and creativity and the importance of withdrawing from power rather than to attack it: "The setting aside of any new constitution would seem to push away the ambitions of recuperation and novel sovereignty. The destituent gesture is one of withdrawal, but withdrawal is not escape; indeed, no escape is possible. (…) This is not an argument for passivity. It is rather an effort to intensify the implications of destitution." (Gavroche, 2017: autonomies.org)

[19] Reflecting on the square movements, the Invisible Committee describe how destituent processes operate vis-a-vis constituted power: "the destituent gesture does not oppose the institution, it does not lead a frontal attack against it; the gesture neutralizes it, empties it of its substance, it takes a step aside and watches the institution expire" (The Invisible Committee, 2015: 79).

Figure 6. Artistic performances in the context of the May Day General Strike organized by OWS (New York City). In the picture we see a group of artists braiding ribbons around a stick. This emulates a medieval ritual performed in small towns and that the activists used as a metaphor of collaborative organization. Source: The author. New York, New York. May 1st, 2012.

The relationship between art and activism has been well documented. Artists have historically been part of social movements and revolutions (e.g. Rimbaud in the Paris Commune, the Situationists in the French May, George Orwell in the Spanish Civil War, just to name a few) in the same way that activist and revolutionists have participated in artistic movements (e.g. Trotsky's involvement with the Mexican muralists, the Black Panthers involvement in graphic arts and music, Subcomandante Marcos' lifetime involvement in poetry and creative writing). The encampments were fertile ground for this kind of entanglement. In most protest encampments there were at least one commission actively dedicated to creativity. In the encampments, there were music performances, film screenings, open libraries, stencil workshops and architectural experiments using recycled materials. In Barcelona, the Art Commission, was among the three first commissions founded on the first day of the occupation of Plaza Catalunya (De la Llata 2016). The Zuccotti Park encampment hosted all sorts of music and art collectives and even a commission of urban planning and design, which was in charge of the spatial management of the occupation. The Acampada Revolucion, in Mexico City, was famous for the active involvement of poets and musicians in the organization of the encampment.

Figure 7. Marching band playing in solidarity with the 15M movement during a demonstration in Barcelona. Source: The author. Barcelona, Spain. May 12, 2012.

The square movements often hosted art symposia and workshops in parallel to protests. In a workshop taking place in the context of Barcelona's General Strike of 2012 in which I did participant observation, activists and artists met to discuss and test tactics of artistic resistance. One of the main overarching questions guiding the gatherings was, 'how can we reinterpret old gestures and symbols of resistance, and ultimately, transcend them by creating something new?' In the meetings, one of the presenters showed a slide with the picture of Catalan partisans in the Spanish Civil war, smiling at the camera with their left fists in the air. He asked the participants,

> "Look at this picture. The fist in the air might meant something in 1936. It was a symbol of resistance. But today, it has been completely devoided of meaning. It means nothing in the context of yesterday's strike [The General Strike of March 29 2012]. It is a nostalgic gesture. We need to reinvent and rethink new symbols and tactics according to these times" (Fieldnotes in Activist Symposium 2012).

Figure 8. Activists' workshop in the context of the 27M General Strike (Barcelona). Source: The author. Barcelona, Spain. March 30, 2012.

Not only the symbols and tactics had to change but the tone of the actions as well. Thus, irreverence and irony, for example, were considered crucial to contest power, as they are inherently transgressive. Irreverence often highlights the seriousness and uptightness with which the power takes ideology. Humor is associated with rebellion, creativity and experimentation (Flesher Fominaya 2014) and it is a well-known form of subverting power. As mentioned before, the square movements focused on the quotidian practices and "aesthetics" of power, not only in the content.[20] These kinds of debates permeated the actions of the square movements.

The creative expressions were not only in the domain of art. The occupiers also experimented with alternative economies. In Barcelona, there was a commission dedicated to discuss alternative economics. Recurrent issues discussed were the finding of alternatives to monetary exchange and to the dependence on banks.[21] Here, it is worth mentioning that these experiments operated at the everyday level, and therefore without clear agendas to expand to the level of macropolitics or macroeconomics. Thus, they operated independently of power -- rather than against it. For example, there were experiments with markets of barter that were later taken into other plazas as weekly events as well as networks of community gardens to produce organic and affordable food. In an interview, a participant working in a community garden explains: "we are part of network of community gardens and food sovereignty producers across town. There is no hierarchy. We decide and work horizontally. We can say that we are "federated" [quotes added gestually by the interviewee] in practice, but not officially. We chose the model of the network because it is the most robust and resilient kind of social structure" (Interview with activist at Aurea Barcelona May 2012).

[20] The outcome of this workshop, in which I participated, were a series of creative protest actions, such as "squads" that used ironic props to engage the riot police in unlikely humorous confrontations. An example of that was the "reluctant volleyball:" a gigantic air balloon that the protesters threw at the riot police, and which they repelled with their batons only to be thrown at them by the protesters. Another, action planned in these meetings were the creation of the "foreclosure tours," guided visits to show tourists buildings that had been subject of real estate speculation and foreclosure. This action built on the Dadaists tours to the "most iconic" places of Paris, which included dumpsters, dark alleys, etc.

[21] In my interviews I discovered that a significant percentage of the movement's participants closed their bank accounts and opted for non-corporate credit and saving "mutuals." However, each movement had a different approach towards this topic. A participant in the Barcelona encampment mentioned how at the beginning, they did not want to have anything to do with money. However, later they received donations which they eventually used. Contrarily, in the OWS movement, they received money donations from the beginnings of the encampment. By the end of 2011, an assembly participant reported that the movement had more than one million dollars in donations. This money was mostly used to pay for the bails of participants that had been arrested. And, it was discussed that the NYPD, might actually had a strategy to arrest occupiers systematically in order to deplete the movement from this fund.

Figure 9. Aurea Barcelona's Public Library, a project created with donations and volunteer work from activists from the 15M movement (Barcelona). Source: The author. Barcelona, Spain. May 20, 2012.

The scale of the experiments is not circumstantial, but rather fundamental to the spirit of the movements. As one of the main issues in the square movements was the disproportion of corporate power vis-a-vis popular power, they advocated for small-scale social and economic organization that allowed for face-to-face interaction, direct accountability among members and compassion. In the political arena, the encampments and assemblies were in themselves experiments with politics. The general assemblies taking place in public spaces sought to be alternatives to the downsides of representative democracy. They were open to potentially all citizens, the issues were discussed transparently and people shared their opinions *ad personam* (not as part of a political party or organization). The hand sign language to approve and reject proposals used in the Spanish assemblies was later adopted by Occupy Wall Street, and the "People's mic" was adopted in turn by other Occupy movements. The so-called "progressive stack," a measure to ensure equal participation according to race, age, gender and class was another experiment tested in the Occupy Movement. The dynamics of the general assemblies were the result of both philosophical discussions about democracy as well as the practical testing of these ideas. But above all, the encampments were sites that were open to the autonomous appropriation and co-production of space -- or 'commoning' (Stravides 2016) -- and to experiment with forms of self-management.

4. Discussion. Do we really know what we want?

The practical philosophies enacted in the square movements are manifestations of a desire for transformation. They sought opportunities for emancipation at the personal and societal level. However, these approaches also posed a number of questions and challenges that are common to most social movements, especially refusal and destituent power. First, as these attitudes are responses to power, they risk being *in function of power,* that is, that the language of resistance articulates *only* -- or mostly -- around what the resistance is *not* about. Refusal, by definition, is a response to a state of things perceived as unacceptable. It is a necessary point of departure for transformation. Nevertheless, in that stage, transformation is only sought by differentiation -- the undesirable situation is identified, therefore anything that is different from that situation is perceived as a better order of things. Destituent power is perceived as the next step in this process, and it seeks to make power inoperative. It seeks to "starve power to death" and, it is in clear opposition of constituent power, as we have discussed. However, these first two stages are, somehow, reactive to power, in the sense that the discourse they use inevitably references power. Here, the key question is: Is it possible for social movements to overcome the reactive stage to move into a more creative and proactive resistance? Second, there is an often-imperceptible risk of dispersing *all* power (not only authoritarian power) and of potentially neutralizing the movements' own power. Constituent power is becoming-power, while constituted power is crystalized political power (i.e power as *being*). However, destituent power is also a form of becoming-power, only it moves in the opposite direction. And, if that is the case, if there are constituent and constituted powers in tension, there must be also be a destituent and "destituted" power in tension with the latter being power that is completely neutralized. Agamben (2014) proposes that that is the ultimate objective of destituent power: to make power inoperative. However, once – or if – this is eventually achieved, what comes after power is no more? And, third, there is a pending – or at least incomplete – debate about how these philosophies operate at the everyday life level. Throughout the development of the square movements there was a conversation between intellectuals and activists, and, as mentioned in the introduction, the dividing line was blurry. However, there was indeed one clear difference between the debates in academia and activism: the issue of scale. Intellectuals discussed refusal and destituent power at the macro scale (i.e. at the scale of global political and economic power), while the activists focused more on everyday applications of the concepts and practice. Thus, we go back to the questions raised in the introduction: How do we transform ourselves in the process of seeking social transformation? And, this invites to think about what is the role we personally play in perpetuating systems of oppression. That is, not to explain power as detached from ourselves but as an interdependent processes in which everyone -- willingly or reluctantly, passively or actively, implicitly or explicitly -- participates. Finally, there is a manifest anxiety about replicating and mimicking power in the process of contesting it in contemporary social movements.

Regarding the first question, the danger of dwelling in these two first stages of resistance is that our language, our discourse and even our general sense of selves cannot be understood and articulated without referring to power, that is, that resistance stays at the level of anti-capitalist, anti-fascist, non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical, anti-racist, and so on. The means to effectively overcoming the reactive stage of resistance is inescapably through creativity.

After most of the encampments were evicted by the end of 2011, several movements moved on to the strategy of the general strike (an action clearly associated with refusal and destitutent power). But in a post-encampment scenario, most of the movements moved on to smaller collectives, social experiments and neighborhood assemblies. In Barcelona, after the eviction of the encampment, the movement published this communiqué online: "[We will r]estructure the movement [for the] extension and reconception of the structural organization so that it can be decentralized creating a tight mesh across towns and barrios"(wiki.nolesvotes.org). A similar transition happened in other movements across the world. Occupy Wall Street continued having general assemblies and meetings after the eviction of the encampment, and they also engaged in neighborhood level organization.[22] This is the least known stage of the square movements and it had been often interpreted as a defeat. The transition from one stage to another often represent moments of rupture in social movements, as there are strong disagreements in the actions and strategies to be used.[23]

The tendency to "dwell" in the first stages is often a source of debate in social movements. Saul Newman (2009) analyzes the question of dwelling in resentment in revolutionary movements. By putting Nietzsche in an unlikely dialogue with theories of autonomy and anarchism, he proposes that overcoming resentment is key to revolutionary processes. Nietzsche was a well-known critique of progressive movements, such as communism, feminism and anarchism. He argued that they tended to live in resentment and to identify with what he called the *sklavenmoralen* (the morality of the slave). Newman proposes an approach to revolutionary movements, that takes Nietzsche's critique into account, and considers rebellion with the intention of overcoming resentment and the morality of the slave. To achieve this stage, there needs to be a clear desire for personal and societal transformation. Nietzsche warned that in a post-religious world, the danger was to be left without values that could fill the vacuum left by religion. He proposed that art was the only way to transcend not only an externally imposed morality (i.e. by The State, The Church, The Society, and so on) but also a life without morality (i.e. a nihilist

[22] Some authors (Marcuse, 2012) argue that the involvement of OWS in the neighborhood organization after the Sandy hurricane in New York (so-called *#OccupySandy*) was a practical application of the politics of Occupy Wall Street in the field. It was a creative gesture of direct action and prefigurative politics.

[23] For example, there was always strong disagreement about dissolving the encampments to move on to periodical general assemblies as well as about the place and frequency of the general assemblies.

view of the world, with no hierarchy of values whatsoever). He uses art in a broad sense (i.e applied to life as a whole) and suggests that we treat our life as a work of art. Therefore, taking an experimental approach to resistance is the first step towards transcending the tendency to dwell in the reactive stage. To arrive to this stage, one has to articulate a discourse that frees itself from the language of power and transcends the "anti" stage of resistance. This takes us to the second question, which is the challenge of what to do after power is neutralized.

Destituent power is in opposition of constituent power, nevertheless they are both becoming-powers. They are not consolidated powers (*potere*) but potential (*potenza*). Understanding the question of *becoming-power* is key to analyzing this problem. Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1983), like Nietzsche, propounded for an "ontology of becoming," focused on transformation in contrast to an ontology of being, which focuses on a fixed essence of things. Negri's (1999) theory of constituent vis-a-vis constituted power builds on the ontology of becoming.[24] Constituent power (i.e. democratic, deliberative and revolutionary processes) are powers that are in flow. Arguably, Negri's most important contribution is to analyze democracy and revolution as a becoming-powers.

An ontology of becoming transcends the binary dichotomies entailed in an ontology of being, i.e. things either *are* or *are not*. Through the lens of the ontology of becoming, things *tend to*, *tend towards*. They do not necessarily consolidate or crystallize, but "approximate" crystallization. In that sense, constituent power tends towards constituted power, in the same sense that destituent power approximates inoperative power (i.e. power that has been completely neutralized). For example, an assembly or an encampment in a plaza does not have a defined form. However, that does not mean they are completely amorphous either. The encampment *does* approximate a form. This was visible in the gatherings in the encampments. Even though they were technically boundless crowds, the agglomerations insinuated fluid boundaries (De la Llata 2021). Similarly, political processes differentiate from one another only insofar as they are becoming something else. Spatial and conceptual boundaries thus are never abrupt demarcations between adjacent realities. Instead, spaces, processes, identities differentiate in gradients. They are not defined realities but only the convergence of intensities. The temporality of constituent power is also defined by approximations. In the process of becoming, the political flows tend towards something, but never really reach *that* something. When the process of becoming concludes or becomes contained power, it consolidates and becomes constituted. Thinking about this tension graphically, we can say that, even though the forces operate dialectically, they move in the same axis. The condition of being-constituent implies that power is in the process of becoming

[24] In *Insurgencies* (1999), he comments: [I]f we isolate the extreme range of its epistemological impact between Nietzsche and Heidegger, Foucault and Deleuze, we find in the "alternative" currents of modern metaphysics (Spinoza and Marx) its constitutive process. This epistemological annotation is fundamental to the construction of the concept of "constituent power." (Negri 1999 p.344).

constituted. In that line, power consolidates little by little, always tending towards crystallization. Historical evidence shows that most revolutionary struggles often end with the consolidation of authoritarian regimes that institutionalized, ritualized and turned into regimes similar or worse than the ones that were contested. And, in the opposite direction (the direction of destitutent power) it tends towards making power inoperative.

The protest encampments and general assemblies were "spaces of becoming" – i.e. spaces in constant process of becoming something else and in which people could become something else (Autor 2021). The movement from constituent to constituted is "asymptotic" – it approaches but never quite touches the limit. Deleuze (1968) used the figure of *asymptote* to develop an interpretation of reality based on an ontology of becoming. The notion of *limit* illustrates how becoming-power (both constituent and destituent) is one that only approximates/tends constitution (and destitution), and that, in space, is recognizable when processes and flows become more intense without really crystallizing. Building on Deleuze's reference to the asymptote, a diagram helps us situate both refusal and destituent power vis-a-vis constituent and constituted power. And, it helps us reflect about how to transcend the reactive stages of resistance. This takes us to the question of, how can we imagine and envision ourselves differently -- both at the collective and individual level?

The question of personal transformation vis-a-vis social transformation has also been discussed in the framework of refusal and rebellion. Castoriadis (in Chatterton 2005) differentiates *individual* and *collective autonomy*. For him, autonomy is always a process in which there is a personal acknowledgement of one's own oppression and a desire to change it. Camus describes how in the process of acknowledging oppression individually, we develop a sense of collectivity and solidarity. This process even brings about an acknowledgement of one's own existence: "*I* rebel, therefore *we* exist" (Camus 1951 [2012] p.14) (emphasis in the transition from the first person of the singular to the plural). There is, therefore, a simultaneous development of individual and collective autonomy. *Autonomy* (*Auto*=self, *Nomos*=Law, government, order) entails self-government or self-management. Therefore, at the individual level, it also entails the development of the self. Refusal acknowledges what the self *is not*, but it does not identify -- yet -- what the self *is*. Destituent power seeks to neutralize the identified and unwanted self.

In Zizek's address to the Zuccotti Park general assembly, he raised the question of what comes after encampments. Zizek warns the occupiers should not "fall in love with themselves," and that the challenge was to commit beyond the utopia created in the encampments. He makes clear references about thinking beyond refusal: "Remember that our basic message is 'We are allowed to think about alternatives.' If the taboo is broken, we do not live in the best possible world. But there is a long road ahead. There are truly difficult questions that confront us. *We know what we do not want. But what do we want?* [Italics added by the author] What social organization can replace capitalism? What type of new leaders do we want?" (Zizek 2011 www.imposemagazine.com). The question

then is, how can we imagine a new reality (individually and collectively) that rids itself of the language of power at the everyday scale, that is, at the scale of Foucault's notion of "microfascisms"? Here, it is key to acknowledge that "we come from the same world as power, not from a 'natural' world removed from it." (Newman 2006, libcom.com). Microfascism is domination that has become internalized. At the everyday scale, it is also crucial to recognize that "[…] the principal enemy of freedom is not the authoritarianism of others, but our own and unconfessed authoritarianism" (Octavio Alberola, *Revolucion o Colapso* in Gavroche 2017 autonomies.org). A collective (through the individual) and individual (through the collective) reflection is urgent in order to transcend the reactive stages of resistance.

The diagram almost poses a trap. It works as follows. If one opposes constituted power in whatever form, one has to locate oneself in the realm of constituent power. However, this field also approximates constituted power. If we move in the opposite direction, we engage in destituent power, but resistance tends towards inoperative power. Is there an escape? This is where creativity comes into play as an alternative. Creativity works in terms of what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) call "lines of flight." Here, "[t]o flee is not to escape. It is rather to create what Deleuze calls runoffs through the cracks of a social system. That is, the creation of forms of life beyond the State and Capital are already weapons, the only weapons worthy of a revolution" (Deleuze and Parnet in Gavroche 2016).

Differentiation (i.e. refusal) is important in a search for transformation, but expression, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is crucial to achieve autonomy: "The real distinction [is] between forms, but forms belonging to the same aggregate, the same thing or subject. Now, however, expression becomes independent in its own right, in other words, autonomous." (Deleuze & Guattari 1980 p.80). Following up on the previous question, articulating an original language (i.e. one that is not in function of power) opens the door for new forms of emancipatory expression. The Invisible Committee (2015) hints about the question of expression in resistance movements: "[t]he true fecundity of an action resides in its very interior. This does not mean that there is no question for us regarding the verifiable efficacy of an action. What does it mean is that the power of the impact of an action resides not in its effects, but in what it itself expresses immediately" (The Invisible Committee 2015 p.77). Expressiveness offers the opportunity of moving away from the trap of power presented in the diagram before. Creativity is a "line of flight" to experiment and imagine new realities.

5. Conclusion. Also saying *yes*

In *Engagéz vous!*, the follow up of the influential book *Indignéz Vous!*, Stephan Hessel (2011) asks, "What to do?, then. In this strange and uncertain world, Should we discourage ourselves and drown in pesimism? No! […] There are alternatives" (Hessel, 2011: 10). The question is not only, what are the

alternatives, but also what are the attitudes that we need to cultivate in order to find new alternatives. Art (in the broad sense of the word) and creative expression are a life-affirming attitudes to overcome the reactive stages of resistance. It is a form of going beyond what we do not want and start saying *yes* to what we want. To arrive to that stage, it is important to understand that power is not external to resistance. Oppressive processes can be replicated, reenacted and mimicked. In movements such as the square movements, transcending the "anti" stage is fundamental. In order to do so, one must transcend the anxiety of "not getting it right" in theory. Hence, it is fundamental to test alternatives in order to "make the way by walking" (Chatterton 2005). Moreover, the focus of creating alternatives is about creating new power, and not necessarily only (even though it can potentially happen) on taking power away.

Nietzsche warned that "whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And if you gaze long enough into an abyss, the abyss will gaze back into you." This possibility has been a source of anxiety in the square movements, as well as in most movements in the last 20 years. Destituent power manifests that anxiety, as it backs up from power consolidation and the creation of a new order. Instead, it seeks to render power inoperative. These anxieties are not infused. History shows that the risk of counterhegemony becoming the hegemony is all too common in revolutionary movements. Creativity and prefigurative politics provide a line of flight to the power-counterpower-power cycle. Experimenting, imagining and creating alternative realities is key to overcoming the reactive stage of resistance. This entails, of course, that *the experiments might fail*. But that is a premise of any creative endeavor. Furthermore, we can consider "failures" as iterations of change.

After the dismantling of the encampments, many activists moved into small-scale creative projects in neighborhood associations, art collectives, students' assemblies and so on. The dispersion of the movements is often considered as a defeat resulting from the apparent lack of clear objectives. Nevertheless, many activists carried on incorporating these philosophies in their everyday practices. In this sense, the encampments were "Temporary Autonomous Zones" (Bey 1991). Autonomy can survive in time but not necessarily in space. That is, if an occupied space in which autonomous practices take place is evicted, the autonomy can be preserved in practice and taken into another space. The protest encampments where seminal spaces of autonomy that, after eviction, became new spaces of autonomy through creative experiments. In the presentation of *The Declaration of the Occupation of New York City*, the editor said, "by evicting us from Zuccotti Park, they have hit the honeycomb with a stick, now there are bees all over the city" (Sparrow 2012). The practices and experiments tested in the encampments were not necessarily replicated in other spaces but rather transformed into new experiments. In many ways, this is how the square movement proliferated. Between 2011 and 2014, there was an uninterrupted occupation of public spaces, if we consider that at least one square in the world was occupied at some point. This transference of autonomy

was often done via sharing information and tactics online, but sometimes it was an actual transference of knowledge by occupiers who traveled around the world.[25] The square movements cannot be analyzed under the perspective of "success or failure [...] [or] an all or nothing position" (Flesher Fominaya in Humphrys 2012 p.3), as their focus was not on the outcome of the movement, but rather on the development (Humphrys, 2012). To borrow Holloway's (2002) words, they aimed to "change the world without taking power."

Creativity transcends the potential reactiveness created by refusal and the danger within destituent power of depleting political transformation from all power. Creativity does not try to escape the danger of failing. It rather embraces that there is no escape from potentially -- or eventually -- failing. Any creative endeavor (political, economic, artistic, etc.) is subject of potential failure. Technically, any program will become obsolete due to societal, technological or cultural changes. Creative resistance is not about rejecting the anxiety of failing, but about acknowledging it and transcending the anxiety to motivate action. This operates both at the individual and the collective level. Oppressive power transforms in the same way that internalized individual power adapts and becomes something different. We become others, not only by transforming our context, but by acknowledging the interdependent role we play in an oppressive system and by creating something beyond it (i.e. not in function of it). Experimentation is a way to create alternatives beyond a power that can truly transform both the individual and the social. That is, to create from within our own inner power and to use that power creatively and expressively.

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[25] After the eviction of Zuccotti, one of the organizers explained to me how during the beginning of the occupation there were "two young women, a Spaniard and an Egyptian, who actively helped in the organization of the encampment and the general assembly sharing the experiences of Tahrir, Plaza del Sol and Plaza Catalunya." (Interviews with Brian at Zuccotti Park, February, 2012)

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