

La Tabacalera of Lavapiés: A Social Experiment or a Work of Art?

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Image 1. Entrance to Tabacalera. Credits: Lucía Domínguez.

This text tells the story of the first years of a remarkable experiment in Europe—the turning over by the federal Ministry of Culture in Spain of an enormous state-owned building to a group of activist artists to run as an autonomous, self-organized social center. This is not so unique. A number of large squatted buildings

in European cities have become state-sanctioned centers of culture, usually after years of struggle. But the case of the Tabacalera in Madrid, while it certainly involved squatters, was rather different. It was a proactive “gift” of sorts by a ministry that was toying with an idea of “new institutionality”—a different kind of relation between cultural institutions of the state and the politicized social movements which have been behind squatting in Europe since the 1970s. This move was evidence of a slow, careful institutional current of motion beyond the politics of antagonism, which unfolded during two different regimes: first one of the liberal left (PSOE, Partido Socialista Obrero Español), and then a right-wing austerity government (Partido Popular, PP). This current has surfaced dramatically in the recent (May 2015) municipal elections throughout Spain which put new faces of the ‘radical left’ into power. Many of these people come from the social movements—activist formations like neighborhood associations, and issue-specific groups, and have been active squatters.¹ The story of Tabacalera gives a hint of what will likely become more common in the future—truly self-organized autonomous projects, produced with state cooperation, which make provision for both political activists and creative producers. Sounds great, right? Well... here’s our story.

“Meet Us in the Morning”

It was March of 2010 and the early spring sun was shining in Madrid. I had an appointment after lunch, at Embajadores Street, number 53, in the highly diverse neighborhood of Lavapiés, traditionally home to the working class and more recently many immigrants. When I arrived, the activist artist and professor Jordi Claramonte was waiting with a mop and bucket in his arms. Soon our number grew to around 40 people, and we went inside the huge building that was to be the social center Tabacalera.

That day we went in through a narrow entranceway, and a security guard, hired by the government to take care of the empty

building, kept our ID cards. Only those first 40 people were allowed to enter and start the cleaning.

The old tobacco factory is around 32,000 square meters—an entire city block. It is a labyrinth, with an extensive basement. We could not use the upper floors, but that day we visited the whole building. The underground of the old factory was for the “tobacco ladies” (cigarreras) making cigarettes, and the upper levels for clerks. It had a bar, a small salon with a beautiful floor, a central “nave” like a public plaza in the middle of the building, a back yard, and three different storage garages packed with machinery.

From those first moments we thought about suitable places for the different collectives. Like the wild west, La Tabacalera de Lavapiés was an unknown territory, with no laws, where different colonists could look for a home. In the coming days, after a callout on the internet, thousands arrived. The place was soon cleaned and organized for all the neighbors and their different needs.

Every day during that spring security guards hustled us out at 10:30 pm sharp. And we could not get in before 10 am. The deal with the government, even before any document was signed, was just for the daytime. We were never allowed to stay the night. After some five years of Tabacalera, at 11 pm the building must always be empty and clean.

During those early days we met after working to think together about how to organize the huge space. Someone cooked lunch in the cafe. We had some beers at the end of the day and continued talking. It was intensive. All that first year our lives were “La Tabacalera de Lavapiés”, all day long and into the night.

The Old Tobacco Factory

The Tabacalera dates from the late 1600s when it was used to make playing cards and snuff for the Spanish royal court. In 1809 they began to make cigarettes. It grew throughout the centuries as

the central processing plant for the state's monopoly of tobacco. The building, designated historic, is administered by the Ministry of Culture, Department of Fine Arts.

It retains a special place in the history and imagination of the Lavapiés district. In 1809, almost all the workers were women who had been making cigarettes illegally in Lavapiés. Las cigarreras were well organized and often rebellious, well-known for their feisty image. Bizet's operatic character Carmen was one of them. During an epoch when the place of women was in the domestic sphere, the cigarreras were an exception. These workers, hired for their skills, started the first women's union in Spain. Their solidarity and spirit of mutual support inspired us in our experiment.

The massive building of the Tabacalera is close to three world renowned art museums: the Prado, the Reina Sofia (MNCARS), and the Thyssen-Bornemisza. This privileged setting puts the big empty building at the center of the cultural politics agenda in Madrid. Closed in 2000, it was only the largest of the 19th century factories in Madrid's city center which were closing at the end of the 20th century. With the decommissioning of all this industrial space, the cultural scene in the city started to roar.² What couldn't be rented was squatted. But the side effect was predictable. Already by the 1990s neighbors in Lavapiés realized that the gentrification of their old and historically poor district was exploding, and began to organize.

The struggle against gentrification was organized with the neighborhood associations—the asociaciones de vecinos³—which have a long tradition in Madrid. They began in 1968, under the dictator Francisco Franco. While they gather in the currents of different social movements, their autonomy, their strong local organization, and their capacity to negotiate with civic powers have made them key elements in the urban transformations of every Spanish city, especially Madrid.

The future Tabacalera CSA—Centro Sociale Auto-Gestionado, or self-organized social centre⁴—really began in the early 2000s

when some activist artists and neighborhood organizers developed public actions to reclaim the recently closed tobacco factory. Activists had squatted another Lavapiés building to make a social center called Laboratorio,⁵ and after that was evicted, a second squat, the Laboratorio 2. Jordi Claramonte explained that as the next eviction drew near, “we began to look for other buildings in our neighborhood to move our activities. We looked at the Casa Encendida, but it was bought by a bank. Then afterwards we looked at the Pacisa cookie factory, and it was transformed into the Circo Price (a theater and concert hall). So we focused our energies on the tobacco factory, La Tabacalera. We started ‘La Tabacalera: A Debate’, and went out into the streets dressed as old cigarreras on a Sunday night, with big red flowers in our hair, and tight dresses... That’s why the Ministry called us when they decided to start a dialogue.”⁶

The principles of “La Tabacalera: A Debate” were directly stated—“From now on the future of this building should be open to public debate, the public uses of the factory and whatever we want to do here. We want this debate to be held inside the building. We want to know the place, to live the place, to produce the site. We want to create a social thread, a deep commitment, a community in such a way that direct action will be the basis for citizenship in the Tobacco Factory.”⁷ The social center-to-be then, already existed as a collective demand, organized with neighborhood associations and articulated through the colorful street protests faux cigarreras of the art collective *Fiambreira Obrera* (workers’ lunch box).

Another Big Museum

Even while neighbors, activists and artists were trying to be heard, the federal government agency in charge of the building was developing a total project that had nothing to do with their claims. In 2007 the council of ministers approved a plan to create a National Center for Visual Arts there, the CNAV. In July of 2008, a design competition was launched. The architects Nieto and Sobejano

were announced as the winners, with a 30 million Euro plan which included the biggest LED screen in the Eurozone. A banner was hung on the side of the building announcing the museum to come. But the crisis arrived first, and the project was halted.

The economic collapse in Spain put the spotlight on a long boom period which saw many ill-advised, even megalomaniac building projects (a giant useless airport in Castellon with an abstract statue of the local politician out front is perhaps the most notorious). A lot of these were cultural buildings. The City of Culture in Valencia, a project of star-architect Santiago Calatrava, ruined that city's budget. It is largely empty today, and already crumbling. Santiago de Compostela in the north emulated Valencia with the City of Culture of Galicia, designed by Peter Eisenman, which remains unfinished. Madrid, with three centuries of imperial infrastructure, instead saw grand scale renovations of historic buildings for cultural purposes, much if not most of which remained largely empty.⁸

In 2008 and '09, part of the Tabacalera was used for Photo España, an annual multi-site exhibition. Its abandoned state then seemed like a glamorous setting in which to exhibit Art. Pablo Berastegui, an active cultural agent in Madrid during these years and a one-time director of the Matadero center, employed a minimal installation of wire-hung panels to show some of the festival photos in the dusty factory. During that moment, when the building was re-opened for an artistic purpose, the real history of CSA La Tabacalera de Lavapiés began.

As Carlos Vidania explained,⁹ the purview of the Spanish Ministry of Culture is the whole of the country. They had no plans for the neighborhood. They simply developed an artistic use for some empty properties, some cheap exhibitions in buildings without restoring them.

One idea for Photo España was for an exhibition with the neighbors' associations around the building, one that would involve the network of agents working there—the Red de Lavapiés. Claramonte and Tina Paterson of the colorful art collective Fiambrera

Obrera were seen as perfect for the show. But these “creactivists” were not thinking of an exhibition of photos. They were thinking about art as direct action and as a way of organizing life.

As Paterson told me: “One day Jordi received a phone call. Ángeles Albert was then the new General Director of Fine Arts. She didn’t know a lot about art, but she knew a lot about social movements. After the phone call we proposed not a common exhibition but a self management of the building during a year. And Ángeles understood the idea perfectly well. So we started.”¹⁰ CSA Tabacalera was on its way to becoming.

The Experiment Begins

When we first arrived at the building to see it and clean it, we didn’t know what was going to happen. But many in that crowd were in on the plan, people from squats like the three Laboratorio projects and the Minuesa.¹¹ We were told, “it’s an experiment in self-organization,” to build a participatory system to decide what to do with the building. We would learn by staying together, deciding, proposing and building together.

Claramonte and Paterson had met during the Laboratorio projects. They worked there supporting demonstrations of the Global Justice movement.¹² The variety of inventive programs in the Laboratorios inspired curators and managers in the institutional sector.¹³ As the new Casa Encendida center funded by the Caja Madrid bank opened nearby, some artists were exhibiting there at the same time they were working in the squats.

These kinds of overlaps may seem paradoxical when seen from the position of a politics of antagonism usually associated with squatting, or conversely, from a perspective of strictly legal institutional procedure. Yet the development of culture is a political process, and this kind of borrowing is normal in the city (not the province) of Madrid. Our cultural institutions have imitated the participatory tools designed by citizens in different settings, from

experimental alternative centers for the arts to squats and social movements.¹⁴ The Tabacalera was a hybrid, a social center with permission. There we tried different tools for participation gleaned from the agendas of the new cultural centers, the organization of different political parties, and later from the assemblies of 15M in the plaza of the Puerta del Sol. This is less a paradox than the new way to survive in the post-Fordist era: re-invent yourself, be autonomous, look for new projects, organize yourself.

Those at Tabacalera who knew what they were doing—or, as Carlos Vidania put it, those who knew what everything was about—came from the squats around the city, from Minuesa, the Laboratorios, and Patio Maravillas. Places like that had been occupied and self-managed since the early '90s. They all arose from the grassroots movements of the neighborhood,¹⁵ from the free culture movement,^{16 17} and from the punk scene.¹⁸ In these places people had gathered to live and work communally. They were places of solidarity, of political struggle, and public alternative culture. In those places you could find political meetings, conferences, poetry, performance, concerts, dances, parties, graffiti, sculpture, art. During the years of transition to democracy and after, they were catalytic places to meet other people, and to discover together what kind of city we wanted to build and fight for. These were (and are) Madrid's public spheres where we exercise our responsibility as citizens in our "coming of age", as Kant put it.¹⁹

But there were many new to this collective experience, who were involved in something like that for the first time. I had worked in alternative art places,²⁰ like the "Ojo Atómico",²¹ but Tabacalera was "culture" in a broad sense, not only a site for contemporary art and its rhetoric. When it opened in 2010, before the 15M encampment and movement of spring 2011,²² we were thousands mostly without previous experience. For me it was a laboratory, a new salon, an experimentation with others, participating, learning, failing all at the same time and always in solidarity. It can be really hard to "participate" and to "listen" and stay together. Today governments and institutions love to use the word "participate," often as empty

rhetoric.²³ But it's a hard and complicated process. You can learn, but you need time and patience, and a space of freedom. La Tabacalera became a place like that.

At the starting point a kind of magic flow organized everything, and everything flew. Tina Paterson, who worked on the graphic design for Tabacalera, explained that it as a simple interchange. You asked for a place to do your stuff, you did it, you cleaned, you took your turn to care for the bar or the entranceway—you did whatever might be needed for all. And it worked. In the huge building that was our new “a-legal” playground, our patio de recreo, everyone found a place: the sculptors, painters, skaters, graffiteros, musicians, performers, soapmakers, theater people, yogis, flamenco dancers, claué dancers, clowns, green gardeners, hackers, videotistas, sewing circles, draughtsmen, photographers, chefs and cooks, bartenders, old ladies, young ladies, kids, book lovers, serious people, frivolous people, social workers, pensioners, Africans.

The common phrase at the time was “El que la propone se la come”, a Spanish idiom, a kind of slang—if you make a proposal, whatever it might be, you are responsible for realizing it. You cannot just come and have an idea if you are not going to make it real. So everyone should get involved in creating the new space according to their personal capacities. In our thoughts I guess we dreamed with many different texts: Montaigne, Spinoza, Baltazar Gracian, Kant, Diderot, d’Holbach, Negri, Hardt, Rancière, even Bourriaud. We were playing the game of a new possibility. We thought everyone would be responsible, and a good citizen if they got this chance to change things from the bottom. We dreamed of that new world. And for a year we lived it. We developed proposals, we made them real, we worked under free license, always creative commons, free culture. Everything was free, and of course no one was sexist, nor racist, nor were corporations involved.

It was surprising that everything worked fine. But only at the beginning. Afterwards we had to organize properly to keep on going. The problem was the enormous number of people

involved and the difficulties of spreading news and making decisions. Communication, internal and external, is key in a place and process like Tabacalera. After some months, things became really sophisticated. Our internet experts made our mailing lists, and our website, with its calendar and different blogs. There were many groups and one big central group with everyone, called “Coordination.”



Image 2. La Flor de Lavapiés. Credits: Lucía Domínguez.

How Can We Organize This Mess?

After some months of chaotic order we organized what we called “jornadas”—work days. We closed the doors and gathered to think together new ways of organization, protocols and internal documents to manage the place. The internal jornadas, in October 2010, ended up being symbolized by the Pulpiflor, a schema that was a cross between an octopus and a flower.

The Tentapétalo or Pulpiflor was a graphic representation of the Tabacalera and its dwellers. The real spaces were represented as petals, and the people in groups as tentacles. In the central part of the Pulpiflor was what we called “coordination.” It was not a proper assembly, rather a group of representatives from the groups and collectives that were finding their place at the Tabacalera. This was a union of necessities and places, a coincidence of sites and functions. The basement was for the musicians; the Molino Rojo for theater people; the Nave Trapecio for artists; silkscreen and photo were in the “tactical area”; the bar was for all of us; the kitchen for the gourmet group; the bike people in the yard; the hackers in the rooms behind the nave; the central square was for collective concerts and parties. All the offices in the corridors were for meetings, administration, the central bank, the library, the children’s place. We had almost everything.

The Octopus-Flower lasted only some months, then we organized our second internal meeting. We reorganized everything into “commissions” and “groups.” We had assemblies every Monday at 8 pm. The commissions were: economy, programming, respect, shifts, and communication. The aim of each was to organize all the work under their charge. They gathered every Monday from 5 pm until assembly time. In the economy commission, where I worked, we organized accounting for the center. The programmers prepared the agenda for the week. The shifts commission organized the internal work of care, cleaning and protection of the whole space. The respect group was in charge of fixing any conflict among Tabacalera dwellers, and the communication commission took care of internal and external communication.

The settled groups were: Molino Rojo (theater), Library (books experts), Mediatech, Ciras (social workers), Cyclica (hackers), Malugú (social workers), Cigarra (rock and roll fanatics), bikes (repair and built), soap (a little industry), publishing house (Papel de Fumar), Afro Temple (all-around African culture), Metropolis (technology), Keller (urban art), Muestrarte (art to hang), Eje Metabólico (whole food and groceries), Rocódromo (rock climbing), Catenaria (art historians and

researchers), Dibuja Madrid (drawing workshop) , Nave Trapecio (sculpture), Diógenes (furniture recycling) Costura (sewing section), Bah Pies (urban garden), Serigraphy (silk screen) , Tabacanal (our TV channel), Homeless video (video artists), Nuclear (musicians), Skate, Cocinitas (cooks). Still others formed and dissolved.

Towards a New Institutionalality

As mentioned above, a reciprocity of sorts exists between the structures which social movements create by direct action (i.e., squats) and cultural institutions. This also has a developed theoretical basis. In the second issue of *Carta*, the journal of the Reina Sofia museum (MNCARS) published in the spring of 2011, there are several articles on the idea of a “new institutionalality”. As museum director Manuel Borja-Villel writes in the lead text, “Towards a New Institutionalality,” the old cultural institutions have lost their capacity for social mediation. They need to change in order to be able to re-invent the social order, since they are the main structures for creating it. The idea of the public must be re-thought from the concept of the commons, so the museum works with different social movements and collectives from the city.

The project of new institutionalality, while frequently discussed, remains openly vague. Jesus Carillo, the program director at MNCARS during these years, defined it as a search for alternatives for cultural production and cultural consumption to those emerging under the neoliberal models of governance.²⁵ It is the principle of an institutional network, as one of the goals of *L’Internationale*, a long-term collaborating network among museums impelled by Charles Esche, director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands which recently launched a public-access “Museum of Arte Útil”—useful art—in one of their buildings.) Theoretical foundations stem from the work of Chantal Mouffe, a political theorist of radical democracy and “agonistic pluralism.” Artists and other art world actors should reject the kind of “exodus” suggested by Antonio

Negri and Michael Hardt, Mouffe writes, and instead transform art institutions into sites of research and socially engaged spaces of debate.²⁶ The weird and exciting exhibition “Principio Potosí” is a classic example of this impulse in the realm of history.²⁷ The impulse to re-examine the history of modernism in view of its political commitments has led MNCARS (Reina Sofia museum) and MACBA (contemporary art museum in Barcelona) to produce shows like “A Hard, Merciless Light: The Worker Photography Movement” (2011), and “Playgrounds: Reinventing the Square” (2014). The MACBA engaged closely with social movements around the turn of the century, during the period of the Global Justice movement, when they hosted a workshop with the creative activists (“creactivists”) of Las Agencias,²⁸ which Jordi Claramonte arranged. Borja-Villiel was director then, before he moved to Madrid.

In 2011, a clear practical instance of the new institutional impulse in the Ministry was the assistance given to the Casa Invisible in the coastal city of Málaga in the state of Andalucía. The Casa Invisible began as an okupa (a squat), the home of the “creadores invisibles,” the invisible creators, who felt excluded from the rapid touristically oriented development of that city on the “concrete coast” of southern Spain.²⁹ Through the not-so-subtle intervention of agents from the Reina Sofia museum,³⁰ the right-wing city government had been pushed to give the Casa Invisible a contract in 2011. But the “invisibles” had to renovate the historic building on a city-imposed deadline in order to conclude their agreement with the city. We of Tabacalera decided to give them money to make a key repair. The agreement which Casa Invisible made with the city government to allow citizens to run a city-owned building autonomously was a clear precedent in Spain.

While the historical project of uncovering and displaying the radical roots of modernism and postmodernism has continued in Spanish museums, the engagement with social movements slowed after the right wing took over Spain with an absolute electoral majority in 2012. In early 2015, however, the city government of

both Málaga changed from right to left. The Casa Invisible looks to be secure for the moment.



Image 3. Concert in the courtyard. Credits: Lucía Domínguez.

Inking the Contract

While Tabacalera was a sunset creation of the socialist government, it was not easy to achieve the first contract. Before the final signature when the future was unclear, we organized a conference with personalities from the local cultural scene in order to legitimize our work. The Ministry expected us to organize the place successfully: lots of visitors, plenty of activity and good reports in the media. The expression one civil servant used with our representatives was, “die of success,” a Spanish idiom that dramatizes the idea (and alludes to the ultimate fated dissolution of the project). Recognition by other agents working in mainstream museums, academia, and the art scene would be part of this.

The artists approached by the Photo España curators signed the first one year contract, from 2010-11 as their group SCCPP.³¹ This contract expired just after the right-wing PP won the federal elections. The text of the first contract spoke of “the social profitability of the building,” with the main objective of the Association SCCPP being “the organization and diffusion of cultural and artistic events dealing with social problems. To achieve these aims the Association SCCPP organizes exhibitions, conferences, workshops, performances and other activities that might achieve those objectives of social awareness.” The Ministry of Culture then agreed to undertake, in the wording of the contract, the “cultural project CSA La Tabacalera de Lavapiés, presented by the Association SCCPP, as a pilot experiment for the social interaction with different agents that might be committed to the social, creative and intellectual development of the people in their context.”

For the second year of the contract, we sought to bind the government to a longer-term agreement. We needed legitimation, so we asked for letters of support, and for people trying to change institutions from the inside to come to Tabacalera. Heads of departments at major museums came during a public event, Yaiza Hernandez from MACBA, Jesus Carillo from MNCARS and Amador F. Sabater, a philosopher tied to the 15M movement.

As we looked for a way to formalize our relationship for a longer term, we discovered a useful 2002 Spanish law.³² In late 2011, we signed for two years that might become eight, but we must re-sign and confirm our legitimacy every two years. Our new association is now responsible for whatever happens. Our authorization can be “extinguished” if the association does not adhere to the terms, or if the future CNAV, National Center for the Visual Arts, starts operation.

Aside from the arduous paperwork of the contracts, the government has also been concerned about the condition of the building. For this we have counted on architects who share the goals of the movement for free culture and the free use of public spaces. Even so, problems in our relationship with the Ministry remain. As

we write this article, an email comes from them concerned about “security inside the building.”

The first contract of Tabacalera expired in June of '11, just after the national elections in which the socialist government which had bowed to Euro-austerity was swept from power. Just before those elections were held, the 15M movement began with an occupation encampment of the Puerta del Sol, the main square of Madrid, by thousands of young people. The movement of the 15th of May changed the political landscape in Spain. At the time, it seemed as if every citizen with a bit of political sensibility made it down to the central square of our city. Of course, the Tabacalera was really supportive, and the 15M movements had tentacles inside the social center. Lots of furniture and stuff to build up the camp came from La Tabacalera. The hackers that worked with us were there. The urban artists from the Keller workshop brought enormous works of art that, imaged on the web, represented the awakening of Spanish civil society around the world. After the camp was evicted, material artifacts of the camp went to Tabacalera,³³ and the central courtyard was the site of a grand-scale musical, a performance celebrating the movement.³⁴

Finally, despite its origins and many connections with social movements and activist projects in Madrid, Tabacalera was not a political space. The squatted CSOA Casablanca, very near the Reina Sofia museum, hosted 15M campers from out of town when they came to Madrid, and held meetings for the Rodea el Congreso (Surround the Congress) demonstrations which were strongly repressed. Casablanca was evicted by police.³⁵ The low-level war waged by the city government against many neighborhood assemblies—they were forbidden to meet in public space, and so spawned several new okupas in Madrid—did not touch Tabacalera.

Never So Easy

The above-mentioned issue of the Reina Sofia museum's Carta journal contains another article, a critical self-reflection by Carlos Vidania and Ana Sánchez on Tabacalera. They write of the complexity of the project, and the difficulty of talking about it. They centered their text in the beginning and initial composition of the project. From the start they see the heterogeneous composition of individualities, and the lack of any common objective. For them the big "chaos" at the start of Tabacalera represented the real nature of the modern city: rampant individuality, lack of effective social ties (lazos sociales), lack of a common language—fragmentation.

The struggles inside Tabacalera came because it had to be invented—along with new habits, new ways of doing things, and new sociability. We invented new rules to govern our common ground, new norms against imperatives from the market. As a new institution La Tabacalera was an autonomous subject, and at the same time supported by the government, with relation to social movements. The new relationships we built were in tension. Vidania and Sánchez packed their text with open questions: "It is, in fact, a challenge for both parts: the wager (apuesta) by the public institutions that they can create a new frame for their relation with the social order, and the bet (apuesta) that the Tabacalera project can be an agent for a new institutionality."³⁶

The challenge was to create both a new model of cultural production and new ways for social and cultural production to be publicly legitimated. Through social cooperation, with an open, collaborative way of programming events, we sought to create culture with powerful meanings for the people around it, strongly connected to the city and the neighborhood, and all of it using only free license—"copyleft".³⁷ So the game is this: citizens can live in a place where they can create their own rules, their own forms and possibilities, their own desires, with no external impositions, with ever-open possibility, capacity, responsibility and determination. La Tabacalera started the new mechanism of self-organization in

a complex society with plenty of difficulties. The challenge of self-management is to be in charge of the common, and to take care of it. This difficult task, as we shall see, was in some sense too big, and it's still working itself out in a slow rhythm to this day.



Image 4. Tabacalera basement. Credits: Lucía Domínguez.

Flowers and Weeds

A lot of our time was devoted to putting out fires, and suffocating from those that refused to be put out. For sure, self-organization is not a utopia. It is a difficult project. While the experience of the Laboratorio okupas served as a model for many, Tabacalera was not a political project with a cohesive, struggle-tested collective of committed activists running things. Fault lines appeared continuously in the process of decision-making by assembly, and in the participatory democratic structures we designed for this kind of volunteer development of cultural resources.

Among these were executive decisions made without consultation with the assembly. Some of these came from the fiat nature of the center's creation, and the necessity of arranging things with the Ministry of Culture. We were also regularly damaged by the failure of so many to maintain our common resources due to laziness, non-participation in necessary building maintenance, and the casual theft of collective property. (In one case this was less than casual: a charismatic individual, an artist who dominated in the assembly was revealed to have been thieving from projects throughout the Tabacalera and storing the booty in his locked atelier.)

We faced problems with the immigrant communities of Lavapiés. Some were found to be accessing jihadist websites using the free internet, so that was shut down. Women complained of sexual harassment by men who would leave their wives at home and come to Tabacalera to cavort. The conflict between the assembly and the Templo Afro—organized as the Asociación Panteras Negras (Black Panthers) and understanding themselves as autonomous, as a “social center within a social center”—rose to intense levels. A leader of this group spoke insistently about the structural racism of the Spanish people, presented a bill of particulars alleging corruption and favoritism within the Tabacalera, and finally led a demonstration in the patio followed by an internal occupation of the cafe. The differences might have been resolved had this leader not been so inconsistent in his statements and approach, at one point agreeing to collective labor and at the next moment refusing, saying he was being forced to do it. The idea of a CSA within a CSA was impossible to deal with since with each assembly decision they reserved the right to agree or not. So at the end every single “consensus” was an error. Every time the strong personalities and their allies in assembly clashed, our utopia froze. At last we learned to live inside the conflict, and not try to get a consensus in assembly. Unfortunately, the conflict led to the permanent closure of the cafe, the major social center and an important source of money for Tabacalera. The salaries paid to some were the bones of contention. Now the cafe faces official sanitary inspections as

a barrier to re-opening. The many important projects that Templo Afro undertook, festivals, markets, days of cooking, rap concerts, which were important for the social integration of the Lavapiés community—all wound down during the period of conflict, and have not yet recovered their public dimensions.

Some celebrities did projects at Tabacalera. One of these, lured by the huge crowds at the center, was Italian comic actor and theater artist Leo Bassi. He produced his annual *Belén* (Bethlehem), an elaborate nativity scene typical of Spanish Christmas, updated and politicized as a scene of occupation with Israeli soldiers arresting angels, tanks, bulldozers, etc. But for the most part, the better known professional artists in Madrid did not go to Tabacalera. We were not legitimized, and it was not good for their careers. Maybe they would come if we were recognized by European institutions. One might think that the rise of social practice should bring more artists of that kind to work at Tabacalera. However, everyone who wants to do something there, especially any newcomer, has to negotiate an assembly which has become increasingly ingrown and bureaucratic—a labyrinth of meetings and bureaucratic procrastination—before being allowed to do anything. And of course there is no funding for artistic projects.

As I learned, the knowledge one gains from doing autonomous art projects is useless for a project like Tabacalera, the work of making a citizens' open cultural center. Art making, especially on the academic level, relies on all sorts of common knowledge and agreements that art people have that are more or less unknown to most. The consensus of understandings and procedures that have built up around art do not exist when artistic interventions are proposed as pure ideas in a public assembly. Does this mean that the social center must forget about innovation and creativity, and resign itself to being solely a workspace for artisanal production? One answer given now is the project by the *Fondacion de los Communes* to deliver education about radical pasts and radical culture in a series that seems to be about converting the understandings of political practice, social practice in art, into some kind of political education.

The yearning of many of the mainstream cultural institutions for a relation to the social movements brought about the grounds of possibility for Tabacalera. This process of relation began during the period of the Global Justice movement, in which many present-day institutional actors were involved, and continues now with the economic crisis and the planetary crisis of climate change. It is an expression of the idealism of the institutions and the people working for them. Again, the recent “Playgrounds: Reinventing the Square” exhibition here, that wholesale attempt to reimagine the history of radical modernism, and propose art as a continuous effort to create a radical place for children (and adults) to play freely, expresses that idealism fully. As per Friedrich Schiller in “On the Aesthetic Education of Man”: “Man only plays when in the full meaning of the word he is a man, and he is only completely a man when he plays.” (Of course there’s a fair share of bloody noses on the playground, too.) All these experiments of new institutionality and self-organization are searching for the autonomous human, the one capable of deciding her place and her life. That is a full human being.

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Alan W. Moore has written on artists’ groups, cultural geography and economy, and social movements. He worked with the artists’ groups Colab and helped start the cultural center ABC No Rio in New York City. He wrote *Art Gangs: Protest and Counterculture in New York City* (Autonomedia, 2011), and chapters for Julie Ault, *Alternative Art NY*; Blake Stimson & Gregory Sholette, *Collectivism after Modernism*; and Clayton Patterson, *Resistance: A Political History of the Lower East Side*.

He presently lives in Madrid, and runs the “House Magic” information project on self-organized occupied social centers. He co-edited *Making Room* (JoAaP, 2015), and wrote *Occupation Culture: Art & Squatting in the City from Below* (Minor Compositions/Autonomea, 2015). He lives in Madrid and Milwaukee.

Notes

1. A clear example is the election to the city council of a squatter involved with a social center in the city of Terrassa. In a text he wrote with his compañeros in the Ateneu Candela social center, Xavi Martínez succinctly outlines all the contributions the political squatting movement can make to enlightened governance. See X. Martínez, “Centros sociales y revolución democrática,” posted at diagonalperiodico.net, the website of the fortnightly Diagonal, May 21, 2015. Co-author Moore’s translation to English was posted June 9, 2015 at the blog “Occupations & Properties.”
2. Enrique Fidel, blog post, “Desindustrialización y transformación urbana en Madrid,” April 21, 2008, at: urbancidades.wordpress.com. Thomas Aguilera, in emailed comments on this paper, points out that the Matadero, the former city slaughterhouse now converted to cultural uses, represents “the southern pole of this gentrification program and the symbol of the cooptation of ideas from the grassroots” political and artistic scenes.
3. About the asociaciones de vecinos, see: http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asociaci%C3%B3n_de_vecinos; and Vicente Quintana Pérez and León Pablo Sánchez (eds.), *Memoria ciudadana y movimiento vecinal. Madrid, 1968-2008* (La Catarata Ediciones, 2012).
4. The social center is a libertarian formation first named in Italy in the early 1970s during the Autonomist movement as “CSOA” for “Centro Sociale Occupato Autogestito” (self-organized occupied social center). (See *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*, “Creating Autonomous Spaces,” vol. 1, no. 1, 2007; *Social Centres Network, What’s This Place? Stories from Radical Social Centres in the UK and Ireland, 2007?*; SqEK (Squatting Europe Collective) eds., *The Squatters’ Movement in Europe: Commons and Autonomy as Alternatives to Capitalism*, Pluto Press, 2014.) Tabacalera was named “CSA,” i.e., not an okupa or disobedient occupation. Practically, the designation means that it is a social and cultural center managed and organized by the people who want to be in the project. It is open to everyone who wants to join, discuss, work, and take care of the place.

5. The Laboratorio series of occupations (there were three) were among the most institutionally connected of the many okupas of Madrid. They provided a model of assembly-driven self-organization for autonomous cultural production. See Kinowo media, *Laboratorio 3, ocupando el vacío* (DVD; 2007; 64"; English subtitles).
6. Gloria G. Durán, conversation with Jordi Claramonte, Madrid, December 19th, 2013 (an interview for my book project, "No Man's Land: An Oral History of the Madrid Art Scene"); see also Jordi Claramonte, *Arte de contexto* (Donostia: Nerea, 2011). As a massive government building, the Tabacalera was an unsuitable candidate for squatting.
7. The project "La Tabacalera a debate" is described at: <http://latabacalera.net/web2004/>.
8. Journalistic discussions of the crisis of institutional overbuilding: Tom Burridge, "Why Spain's regions owe so much money," June 1, 2012, BBC News, Madrid, at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-18277681>; The Economist: "The Bilbao Effect," December 21, 2013, at: <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21591708-if-you-build-it-will-they-come-bilbao-effect>.
9. Interview with Carlos Vidania, at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aOPa9wPZiY. Active in the Laboratorio okupas, Vidania was a main figure in Tabacalera.
10. Tina Paterson, op. cit. Ángeles Albert had worked for the Spanish government's international agency in Mexico City D.F. before coming to the Ministry of Culture. She was familiar with the large cultural centers there organized by citizens (Faro de Oriente is the largest, at <http://farodeorientee.org/>), and so understood the SCCPP proposal.
11. A recent book of interviews by squatters in Madrid, the result of the Seminario de Historia Política y Social de las Okupaciones en Madrid-Metrópolis, is *Okupa Madrid (1985-2011). Memoria, reflexión, debate y autogestión colectiva* (Diagonal, Madrid, 2015; a free PDF is online). For more, see SqEK, eds., op. cit., 2014.
12. The Laboratorios were centers for the Madrid-based Yomango project of the SCCPP (aka Fiambrera Obrera). Yomango was a shoplifting performance documented in Nato Thompson, et al., *Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art/MIT. 2004). The Global Justice movement creative activists manifested theories of the tradition of carnival as popular resistance. See; Julia Ramírez Blanco,

Utopías artísticas de revuelta. Claremont Road, Reclaim the Streets, la Ciudad de Sol [Cátedra, 2014]; Gavin Grindon, "Carnival against capital: a comparison of Bakhtin, Vaneigem and Bey," *Anarchist Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2004. These artists are a special breed, and there aren't that many of them. While the "creativists" had close ties to okupas, a continuous tension between the majority of artists and their activist peers exists. This is spelled out from the anarchist point of view in the short book *Contra el arte y el artista* by the Colectivo DesFace of Santiago, Chile (*La Neurosis o Las Barricadas*, 2012).

13. Jose Guirao, who set up the Casa Encendida as a non-profit project of the Caja Madrid, now Bankia bank, wrote that what he saw at the Laboratorio 3 inspired him in his design of the working structure of the new cultural center (see Jorge Fernández León, *Nuevos Centros Culturales para el siglo XXI en España. Consenso y conflicto*, Aecid, 2011). As Carlos told me, "One night Jose came to our bar at Labo 3, and said what a beautiful place." (Vidania, op. cit.) Later the director of the Casa Encendida praised the Tabacalera experiment to Marta Fernández Maeso as "an interesting gamble, and above all very participatory" ("Tabacalera: Two More Years of Experiment," *El País*, January 29, 2012, at: elpais.com/articulo/english/new/lease/of/life/for/the/Tabacalera/elpepueng/20120129/elpeng_4/Ten).
14. In the new century the cultural landscape of Madrid has changed dramatically, both physically and in terms of management. The three administrations, the town hall (Ayuntamiento), the province (Comunidad de Madrid) and the federal Ministry of Culture, almost seem to be competing to have the biggest cultural center. Now there is MediaLab Prado in a renovated former sawmill (<http://medialab-prado.es/>), Matadero Madrid (<http://www.mataderomadrid.org/>) in a former slaughterhouse, and inside that Intermediae (<http://intermediae.es/>), all depending on the Ayuntamiento; Alcalá 31, Sala de Arte Joven, and CA2M (<http://www.ca2m.org/es/>) depend on the Comunidad; MNCARS (<http://www.museoreinasofia.es/>) depends on the Ministry of Culture. All these new spaces for the arts use the same rhetoric of context, public as an active agent, local instead of global, process and projects, not finished exhibitions, based in dialogue, solidarity, and collaboration. They use some of the same language as the squats and self-managed social centers, but with public money.
15. Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (University of California Press, 1983)

16. The legendary programmer and proponent of free software Richard Stallman has been a frequent guest in Madrid, including at Tabacalera. He is fluent in Spanish.
17. Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: The Nature and Future of Creativity* (Penguin, 2004); free download at: www.free-culture.cc/freeculture.pdf.
18. Raul Lamarca Cruz, *Ratas de ciudad. Punks, Skin, Squatters y Antifas en Madrid* (Ediciones Descarriadas. Madrid, 2011).
19. In his famous essay of 1784, Kant defined enlightenment as “emancipation from self-incurred tutelage” and declared that its motto should be *sapere aude* – “dare to know.” Immanuel Kant (1784), “What Is Enlightenment?” at: <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/ets/CCREAD/etscc/kant.html>.
20. The movement of alternative art spaces was a universal post-1968 experience in the west. In the USA, it coincided with programs of direct government funding for artists for the first time since the 1930s. Julie Ault, ed., *Alternative Art, New York, 1965-1985* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002) contains a timeline which outlines the development of the alternative space movement in New York City. For Canada, see Luis Jacob, *Golden Streams: Artists’ Collaboration and Exchange in the 1970s* (University of Toronto, 2002). During the same time, many centers of new art were created in European countries, especially for media and book art. All of them were consorted internationally.
21. “El Ojo Atómico” was an alternative contemporary art space in the barrio of Prosperidad, Madrid. See: http://www.antimuseo.org/archivo/archivo_etapa1.html
22. The 15M movement is named for the date of a major encampment of the central square of Madrid, the Puerta del Sol, on 15 May 2011. Also referred to as “the Spanish revolution,” 15M was “a series of ongoing demonstrations in Spain whose origin can be traced to social networks and the Real Democracy Now (Spanish: Democracia real YA) civilian digital platform, along with 200 other small associations. Compared with the Arab Spring and May 1968 in France”, it started on 15 May with an initial call in 58 Spanish cities.” The movement maintains coherence, published a monthly newspaper, and as morphed into numerous political formations, many of which presently contest in the electoral arena. (Above quote: http://p2pfoundation.net/15M_Movement_-_Spain; 2012). There is more about 15M in the text below.

23. Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation* (Sternberg Press, 2010)
24. The history of Tabacalera is at: <http://latabacalera.net>, the link: : "Documentando" (documenting); fragments are in English.
25. A.W. Moore interview with Jesus Carillo in 2011. During this time, Carillo was traveling regularly to Málaga to assist the Casa Invisible. See also: Álvaro de Benito Fernández' interview with Carillo, "Latin American Conceptualism Bursts into the Institutional Arena Bringing New Management Models," *Arte Al Día* online, February 3, 2012, at artealdia.com.
26. "Chantal Mouffe: professor of political Theory, University of Westminster, London." *Artforum International* 48.10 (2010); accessed online
27. Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer, Andreas Siekmann, eds., *The Potosí principle: how can we sing the song of the lord in an alien land?* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.; Haus der Kulturen der Welt.; Museo Nacional de Arte, Bolivia; Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore, Bolivia; König, Cologne, NY; D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2010)
28. Jorge Ribalta, "Experiments in a New Institutionality," in *Relational Objects*, MACBA Collections 2002-2007, Barcelona: MACBA Publications, 2010; PDF online.
29. Giles Tremlett, *Ghosts of Spain: Travels Through a Country's Hidden Past* (Faber and Faber, 2007)
30. The Fundación de las Comunes was formed to mediate – to move funds, programs and influence between agents within the Ministry of Culture (mostly in the Reina Sofia museum), and other autonomous projects and organizations like the bookshop and publishing imprint *Traficantes de Sueños*, Universidad Nómada, and others. Tabacalera had a brief relation with the Fundación, but the foundation's main client was the Casa Invisible.
31. The SCCPP was a collective entity formed by the artists who received the first call from the Ministry to do something at Tabacalera. The artistic name SCCPP is "Sabotaje Contra el Capital Pasándosele Pipa," the parent of *la Fiambrera Obrera* and *Yo Mango*. But on all official papers the name is dramatically different – "Sociedad para la Cooperación y Convivencia de Pueblos y Personas." The website retains the original name – with images reminiscent of Mao-era China,

an allusion perhaps to Rudi Dutschke's idea of a "long march through the institutions" (see <http://www.sindominio.net/fiambreira/sccpp/>).

32. Ley de Patrimonio de las Administraciones Públicas de 2003, artículos 90 y siguientes. Sección 4, Autorizaciones y Concesiones Demaniales; Artículo 91 Condiciones de las autorizaciones y concesiones (at: http://noticias.juridicas.com/base_datos/Admin/l33-2003.t4.html#a90).
33. The archive of 15M, the Archivo Sol 15M, was moved from Tabacalera to CSOA Casablanca where it was locked up after an eviction; once recovered it was taken to ESLA Eko, a squatted social center in the Carabanchel barrio; now it is settled in a legal rented premises in calle Tres Peces called 3peces3, together with the library of the camp, BiblioSol.
34. Much of the music of 15M is at: <https://movimientoindignadosspanishrevolution.wordpress.com/la-musica-del-15m-videos-musicales/>.
35. Miguel Ángel Martínez, blog post, "The Necessary Squats" (2012), at: <http://www.miguelangelmartinez.net>
36. Carlos Vidania and Ana Sánchez, "La Fábrica Tabacalera: Experimentos del común," Carta, revista de pensamiento y debate del Museo Nacional y Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Spring-Summer 2011
37. "Copyleft" is the name applied to a form of licensing that gives the right to freely use, modify, copy, and share software, works of art, etc., on the condition that these rights be granted to all subsequent users. Licenses of this kind are described at Creative Commons: <http://creativecommons.org/about>.

