{CARAC TERES}

Estudios culturales y críticos de la esfera digital

En este número participan ▌Simone Belli, Wladimir Chávez Vaca, Celia Corral Cañas, Elsa García Sánchez, Beatriz Leal Riesco, Antonio Martínez Arboleda, Marisa Martínez Pérsico, Alessandro Mistrorigo, Rafael Pontes Velasco, Pau Damià Riera Muñoz, Carlos Santos Carretero y Adrian Nathan West.

PALABRAS

EDITORIAL

DELIRIO

Caracteres. Estudios culturales y críticos de la esfera digital

Caracteres es una revista académica interdisciplinar y plurilingüe orientada al análisis crítico de la cultura, el pensamiento y la sociedad de la esfera digital. Esta publicación prestará especial atención a las colaboraciones que aporten nuevas perspectivas sobre los ámbitos de estudio que cubre, dentro del espacio de las Humanidades Digitales. Puede consultar las normas de publicación en la web.

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What Is #occupymainstream?

¿Qué es #occupymainstream?

Simone Belli (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)

ABSTRACT: The exceptionality of #occupymovement give rise to a collective subjectivity and shared social unrest. This social event generated an innovative speech and the reappropriation of public space. It became a body capable of making visible emotions that are inside each of us. Because the body exists also in the virtual space, participants in the #occupymovement used social networks to mobilize people. Physical bodies (demonstrating at Zuccotti Park), voices (ideas, posters, banners, tweets, meetings) and emotions (invisible but real) constitute this new mixture that can be understood as machines, technologies which fuse with the bodies. Most bodies in the square, while shouting, approve, argue, and write banners, as well tweets, texts messages on social networks, shared images. Real space and virtual space intersect within this mix, enriching the linguistic and expressive chaos of social unrest in different places. Ordinary objects for common people, like plastic chairs clobbered with mobile phones, give voice to thousands of bodies in a system that usually suppresses these voices. A camping-like place such as the one in the picture becomes an offline world, while Internet mobile phones, in an online world, are capable of fighting against formal institutions. The ability of putting the body in the language is a feature of the mutant-figure, a body that has won the man with lungs, thanks to a set of voices, emotions and new technologies. Thanks to these technologies, the body becomes a mix of digital and analogical elements, from the virtual and the real world, an online and offline experience.

RESUMEN: La excepcionalidad del movimiento 15M ha producido una subjetividad colectiva, que comparte su malestar social a través de un discurso innovador y de reapropiación del espacio público real y virtual. Cuerpos online y offline que expresan voces (ideas, carteles, pancartas, tuits) mediante sus dispositivos móviles, representando un cambio significativo en los movimientos sociales. En nuestra etnografía del 15M hemos podido recoger diferente tipo de material analógico y digital: carteles, imágenes, grabaciones de audio y video, hashtags y tuits. Hemos observado que muchos de los cuerpos en la plaza, al tiempo que gritaban, aprobaban, discutían y escribían pancartas, compartían imágenes a través de sus redes sociales y escribían mensajes en sus tuits. Uno de nuestros objetivos ha sido entender dónde se producía un hashtag por primera vez, si en el mundo real, la plaza, o en el mundo virtual, las pantallas móviles. En la investigación, se pudo observar que había más gente en la calle que tuiteando, pero a partir del movimiento 15M se empieza a mezclar mundo digital y analógico. El 15M ha generado un archivo digital y una memoria colectiva gracias al apoyo de herramientas humanas y tecnológicas. Cada sujeto en la plaza se convirtió en un periodista, documentando, fotografiando, y compartiendo información, publicándola en sus plataformas digitales.

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Introduction

During these years as a graduate and postgraduate student[1], I have focused my research on emotions and language (Belli, Harré, Iñiguez, 2009), since it is possible to express emotions

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[1] From a lecture given at the San Diego State University 29th August 2012 http://sdsumalas.blogspot.com.es/2012/08/simone-belli-visiting-resident-malas.html.

through language. Communicating means to put "something" in common: emotions are this "something".

I have observed emotions in different contexts: cybercafés (Belli, Gil, 2011), multilingual classes (Belli, 2013), videogames (Belli, Feliu, Gil, Lopez, Gil, 2009) and, from May 2011, I am focusing on Social Unrest and negative emotions in Occupy movements.

Figure 1: Schmopinions

In this article, I will present some occupied places, either real and physical or virtual and online spaces. It is important to think about an occupy movement not only as an occupation of a square or building, but also as a re-appropriation of something that we believe to be ours, even though, in a certain way, it has now changed. And it is possible to occupy just with an action, a social action or a performance. For example, I am a critical social psychologist, which means I occupied the mainstream social psychology before, but I thought differently about social psychology and, for these reason, I do not agree with the mainstream social psychology but with the critical social psychology.

If mainstream social psychology uses often quantitative methodology, with number, graphics, statistics, we, as researchers, can occupy with qualitative methodology, for example. We use it in our research, in Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA focuses analysis in power relationships,

subjectivity constructions, resistance in every context, everywhere, and in this paper I have adopted CDA to explain how the Occupy movements share social unrest (an emotional performance composed by negative emotions like anger, rage, frustration irritation and fear).

Say everything frankly

Michel Foucault, in 1983, gave six lectures in the University of California in Berkeley developing the concept of *Parrhesia* as a mode of discourse in which one speaks openly and truthfully about one's opinions and ideas without the use of rhetoric, manipulation, or generalization. In other words: say everything frankly.

Foucault says:

> [M]y intention was not to deal with the problem of truth, but with the problem of truth-teller or truth-telling as an activity. By this I mean that, for me, it was not a question of analyzing the internal or external criteria that would enable the Greeks and Romans, or anyone else, to recognize whether a statement or proposition is true or not. At issue for me was rather the attempt to consider truth-telling as a specific activity, or as a role. (Foucault, 2010: 15)

So the *parrhesiastes* is someone who takes a risk. When, for example Foucault explains, "you see a friend doing something wrong and you tell him what you think despite the risk of him being angry at you, you are acting as a *parrhesiastes*. In such a case, you do not risk your life, but you may hurt him by your remarks, and your friendship may consequently suffer from it. If, in a political debate, an orator risks losing his popularity because his opinions are contrary to the majority's opinion, or his opinions may usher in a political scandal, he uses *parrhesia*. *Parrhesia*, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the "game" of life or death" (Foucault, 2010: 16).

Occupy-mainstream is this: say everything frankly, like in occupy movements. In Occupy-mainstream things may be said in a brutal way many times, because it is an affirmation of the truth, like symbolic violence in society (Girard, 1987).

Occupy-mainstream is a movement produced firstly with discourses -discourse as action, as a performative act according to John Austin (1975)-. "I occupy" means "I do something", "I am here and I live", producing an action, a movement.

Occupy-mainstream is an everyday practice, a continuous performance in our everyday lives. How? Why? These are the questions that we will try ask in this paper.

What is an Innovative Action?

Occupy-mainstream, as every Occupy movement, is spontaneous and exceptional:

- It is spontaneous because it is formed in a few days, without political or organizational barriers, and involves many of the citizens who until that moment had remained outside any social movement.
- It is exceptional because of the time and space where/when the movement appears: Puerta de Sol or Zuccotti Park display technological devices everywhere. Both sites (through the offline and online worlds) have gained importance and intensity through communication. The uniqueness of Occupy movements results in a collective subjectivity -"others" in the same position of the subject-. They share their social unrest, generating an innovative speech and claiming public space. A subject can create a new space, a habitat (and inhabit it), in a temporary situation.

It makes their emotions –what they have inside- visible. Not only discursive practices are visible, but they are also in a public space. Through the use of posters and banners, the invisible is made visible. These emotions that stay inside the individuals isolated -being unemployed subjects, poor, with precarious conditions- at home, can rise up on the outside, in the street, on Twitter. And finally they are real, strong, "with colors", sharing with thousands of individuals this unrest, because this unrest is not only individual, it is a social unrest.

Visual art in the square (The context)

The exceptionality of Occupy movement gives rise to a collective subjectivity, sharing social unrest and generating an innovative speech and re-appropriating public space, creating a body capable of making visible what is inside, its emotions.

This body exists also in the virtual space, using social networks to mobilize people. Bodies (at the Puerta del Sol, Zuccotti park, etc.), voices (ideas, posters, banners, tweets, meetings) and emotions (something invisible) constitute this mixture that can be understood as a machine: technologies are fused with the bodies.

Many of the bodies in the square, while shouting, approve, argue, write banners, as well tweets, texts messages on social networks, share images.

Real space and virtual space intersect and mix, enriching the linguistic chaos and expressing this social unrest in different places, such as plastic chairs and mobile phones. Common objects for common people give voice to thousands of bodies in a system that does not allow these voices to express themselves. A camping-like place, the offline world, and an Internet mobile phone, the online world, have a power capable of fighting against formal institutions. This ability to put the body in the language is a feature of the mutant-figure, a body that has beaten the man with lungs, thanks to a set of voices, emotions and new technologies. This mutant is a figure evolving from Donna Haraway's cyborg (1990). Thanks mainly to the new technologies, the body is a mix of digital and analogical things, virtual and real world, and online and offline experience.

Thomas Hirschhorn says about his "Crystal of Resistance" exhibition in the Venezia Biennale 2011: "resistance is a conflict between creativity and destruction. I want my work to stand in the conflict zone, I want my work to stand erect in the conflict and be resistant within it".

Rebuilding that metropolitan jungle –the precarious transformation and re-organization of the public space as a new city- is an extreme example of disorder and chaos: plastic chairs and mobile phones for the online and offline body, voices and emotions between Occupy movement and the *plaza*.
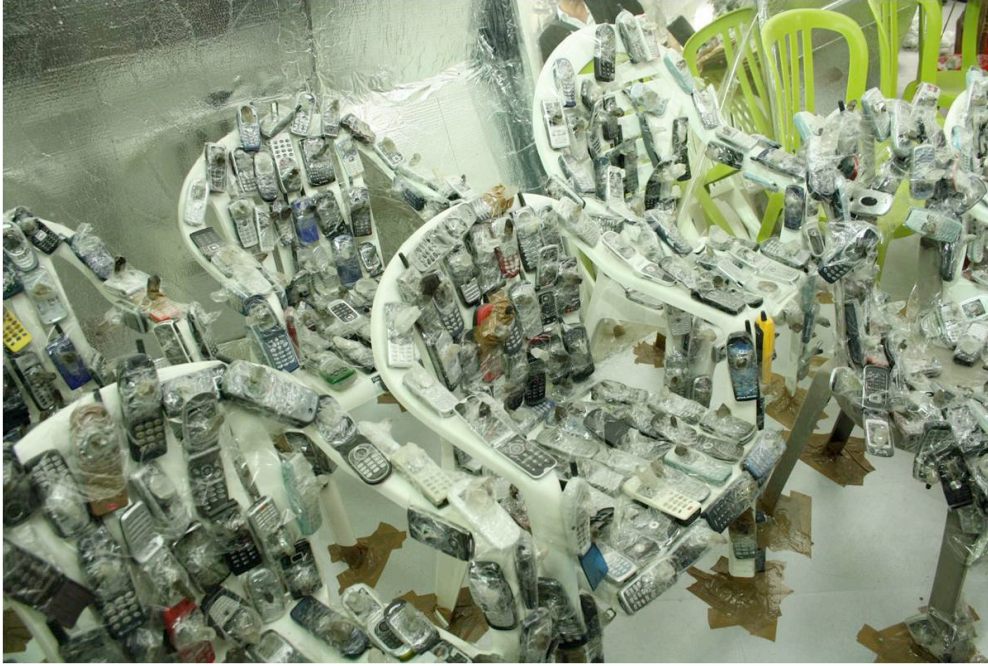
Figure 2: Photograph by Simone Belli

People inside the square (the subjects)

Paolo Virno, in his book *A grammar of the multitude*, says that the multitude moves between innovation and negation (Virno, 2004). His question is: how can this fragile multiplicity form a just social order?

To answer this question, Virno turns to language and ritual. From Wittgenstein, Virno borrows the distinction between rules and regularities. Here is where we can see his contribution to the past decade's heightened attention to the issues of sovereignty, the state, and the "state of exception."

Rather than merely finding in the state of exception an expansion of domination, Virno finds ambivalence in the fact that this type of political decision is rooted not in formal rules but in their suspension. The political decision belongs not to rules but to regularities, and regularities are not stable constants. As emotional performances, they constitute openness to the world, fraught with uncertainty and danger, as well as being the source of innovation. These regularities ensure uncertainty, oscillation, and disturbance, thus providing the conditions not just for enhanced sovereignty but for exodus as well.

With this argument, Virno seeks to establish a source for the "right to resistance". He defines innovative action and creativity as "forms of verbal thought that consent to varying their own behavior in an emergency situation" (Virno, 2004: 71). He finds in the structure of jokes the ultimate diagram of innovative action, insofar as they are an unexpected deviation from routine.

Also, the vision about intellectual proletariat proposed by Negri (2005) is characterized by being precarious and digitally dangerous: it is a group that knows how to use such powerful tools as discourses and new technologies, innovative social discourses and practices. The Occupy movement has created a very dangerous precedent for the political class, it has generated a before and an after in social movements.

In 2011, however, a series of social struggles shattered that common sense and began to construct a new one. Occupy Wall Street was the most visible, but it was only one moment in a cycle of struggles that shifted the ground for political debate and opened new possibilities for political action over the year.

Movements of revolt and rebellion provide us with the means not only to refuse the repressive regimes under which these subjective figures suffer but also to invert these subjectivities in relations of power. They discover, in other words, new forms of independence and security on economic as well as social and communicational grounds, which together create the potential to throw off systems of political representation and assert their own powers of democratic action. These are some of the accomplishments that the movements have already carried out and can develop further.

For instance, what happened in the Lavapiés district of Madrid just a couple of months after the 15M is a clear example of citizen empowerment in a public space and of the ability to create a discourse of legitimization of citizenship itself. An assembly of people in the square of Lavapiés, after the fact that the police tried to stop a young man who did not have the required documentation in a police checkpoint in the subway station, reacted spontaneously and

directly confronted the police in a peacefully way. Acts like these, which occurred in the city of Madrid, are a clear sign that the 15M has created a precedent[2].

To consolidate and heighten the powers of such subjectivities, though, another step is needed. The movements, in fact, already provide us with a series of constitutional principles that can be the basis for a constituent process. One of the most radical and far-reaching elements of this cycle of movements, for example, has been the rejection of representation and the construction instead of schemas of democratic participation. As Tomás Ibáñez says: "It's not enough that something is possible to happen" (Ibáñez, 2006).

Between the square and the screen

The border between the virtual and non-virtual is doubtful, uncertain, difficult to define. According to Bakhtin (1937-1941), the transformation of a date, a time and space, a chronotope in a collective, such as in 15M, is a redefinition of meaning.

It is difficult to define where a hashtag first appears, for example. Does it appear first in twitter, or on banners from Zuccotti Park? This is one of the questions we ask when trying to study how the virtual and non-virtual intersect, how they mixed at the square as a set of speeches, emotions and new technologies.

While researching, it was possible to observe that there were more people on the street than people tweeting. One of the slogans chanted in the square was outraged saying just that: "No Twitter no Facebook. We are on the street". But, for the first time, thanks (largely) to the new technology that came fully into our private lives, this data can be analyzed as follows: the movement is mixed between digital and analog, between virtual and non-virtual, the online and offline world. Many people in the square, while shouting, approving, arguing, writing banners, at that same moment, tweeted, posted messages in social networks, shared images: they were organized, thanks also to virtual town square and virtual social identity.

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[2] See video: Cristh36 (2011) "Vecinos de Lavapiés se enfrentan a la policía Por las Redadas a Extranjeros no comunitarios." *Youtube.com* http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=oZV2pNs-7c0 (16-04-2013).

They took photos of the square, later used as a hashtag, spreading the word about what was right at the time, what was "trendy" or, simply, what at that time would have produced more effect. It is therefore difficult to understand where this label is formed, if on the screen or at the square. Many posters and banners reproduced, proposed, chose a hashtag and vice versa. Thus, the square itself created hashtags.

For example the feminist movement of the square has been changed, from #todosenlaplaza, to #todasenlaplaza.

#Acampadasol also had to fight face to face with # spanishrevolution, a label that does not seem right to many people at the square, but that generated in the online world more effects and impacts than its rival. Using a hashtag in English had more impact on Twitter than using Spanish.

Figure 3: Photograph by Dafne Muntanyola

This is the chaos of linguistic landscapes. As Shohamy explains, the linguistic landscape is symbolically constructed in social and public spaces (Shohamy, 2008). It is a material and

immaterial construction like these pictures in Puerta del Sol and Zuccotti Park. The history of the city is also articulated by social movements, and the appropriation of public space. Displayed as 2011, this re-appropriation has been articulated as follows in many cities worldwide: a square, people, buildings, camps, exported to other places in other cities, the same way of organizing, same structure, same posters. On Twitter, hashtags as *camping* or *occupy* have expanded in the same way as those incurred in the 15M, asking for the same intellectual tools and materials, like in these pictures that I took November 2011 in Mexico City:

Figures 4 and 5: Photographs by Simone Belli

Analogical and digital memory

'Before I watched tv, now television is watching me'

Egyptian rebel, 2011

Occupy movement has generated digital files and a collective memory supported by human and technological tools. Each subject became a journalist in the square, documenting, photographing, sharing, posting it. For the first time the real media are directly concerned. They could have first-hand information, making the old sources obsolete.

Again the mutant (Baricco, 2008) has beaten the man with lungs. This immense collective file is saved, recorded in physical, cognitive and silicon supports. It is a collective archive, social archive, which allows everyone open access memory in constant movement, creating an immediate and dangerous precedent. It is dangerous for the political class, which has a more powerful enemy, since the citizens can stop the system, can cause changes in the social and urban system. Zuccotti Park or Puerta del Sol are symbols for all that will come later.

Real space and virtual space intersect and mix. They are an enriching linguistic chaos, built in our cities to express this social unrest.

Plastic camping chairs and mobile phones are available to everyone, but they are also able to give a voice to thousands of people in a system that does not allow them to have one. A camping, the offline world, and an Internet connection, the online world, have a power capable of shaking institutions, political systems and mainstream contexts in a innovative, effective and persuasive way.

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Figures

Figure 1: Occupy Toronto. By schmopinions. 17th October, 2011 in Financial District, Toronto, ON, Canada. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/schmopinions/6256103637/>. (29-1-2013).

Figure 2: Padiglione Svizzera. Biennale di Venezia 2011. By Simone Belli. 2nd November, 2011 in Venezia, Italy.

Figure 3: #15M. By Dafne Muntanyola. 28th May, 2011 in Madrid, Spain

Figures 4 and 5: Acampada Coyoacán. By Simone Belli. 15th October, 2011 in México, D.F., México.

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Sobre los autores

Sobre los autores

Simone Belli. Es investigador Postdoctoral en la Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. Doctor en Psicología Social por la Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, mención Doctor Europeo con la tesis Emociones y lenguaje. Ha sido profesor visitante en la University of California, San Diego y en la Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, gracias al programa del Banco Santander de becas para jóvenes profesores e investigadores. Fue investigador postdoctoral en la San Diego State University y en la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, gracias a la Paulo Freire Innovative Technology/Pedagogy Post-doctoral Visiting Scholar y al programa Alianza 4 Universidades.

Wladimir Chávez Vaca. Obtuvo su Licenciatura de Comunicación y Literatura en la Universidad Católica de Quito en el 2000. Ha estudiado en las universidades de Bergen (Noruega), Århus (Dinamarca) y Newcastle (Inglaterra). Actualmente es profesor en la cátedra de Literatura Hispanoamericana en la Universidad de Nordland y en Literatura y Cultura en el Colegio Universitario de Østfold. Su doctorado trata sobre la copresencia de textos: *Un ladrón de literatura: el plagio a partir de la transtextualidad* (Universitet i Bergen, 2011). Artículos suyos han sido aceptados en publicaciones como *Dialogía*, *Variaciones Borges* e *Iberoromanía*.

Celia Corral Cañas. Becaria de Investigación PIRTU por la Junta de Castilla y León (2011) y FPU por el Ministerio de Educación (2011-2015), realiza su tesis doctoral en la Universidad de Salamanca. Ha superado el máster "Literatura Española e Hispanoamericana: estudios avanzados" y el periodo de docencia del doctorado "Vanguardia y Posvanguardia en España e Hispanoamérica. Tradición y rupturas en la literatura hispánica".

Elsa García Sánchez. Licenciada en Filología Inglesa e Hispánica por la Universidad de Salamanca, donde obtiene el DEA por su investigación sobre Decadentismo y Fin de Siglo, y profesora de Lengua y Literatura en el Ministerio de Educación de la Junta de Castilla y León. Combina su dedicación a la literatura con la exposición y publicación de su obra plástica, especialmente en el campo de la pintura y la fotografía.

Beatriz Leal Riesco. Historiadora de arte, es investigadora *free-lance* en los Estados Unidos, desde donde escribe para diversos medios africanistas y es programadora del African Film Festival de Nueva York. Ha publicado múltiples artículos de teoría e historia cinematográfica en revistas tales como *Secuencias. Revista de Historia del Cine, Film-Historia, African Screens, Africaneando* o *Art-es*, editado libros y organizado seminarios, cursos y eventos centrados en cines minoritarios. Sus intereses se centran el papel de la música en el cine africano contemporáneo y en el papel del cineasta en la construcción de un discurso alternativo propio.

Antonio Martínez Arboleda. Licenciado en Derecho y MA Business Law (FHEA) es investigador principal en la School of Modern Languages and Cultures en la Universidad de Leeds. Inició su carrera como docente en el Instituto Cervantes y en la Universidad de Leeds en 1998 mientras cursaba sus estudios de posgraduado en Reino Unido. En 2009 empezó a trabajar en Open Educational Resources como parte del equipo HumBox. Disfruta desde 2011 de una beca SCORE y se convirtió en investigador del proyecto OpenLIVES. Es miembro del JORUM UK Steering Group.

Marisa Martínez Pérsico. Licenciada en la Universidad de Buenos Aires, obtuvo su Diploma de Estudios Avanzados en la Universidad de Salamanca. Se desempeña como profesora titular a contrato en la Università degli Studi Guglielmo Marconi (Roma), ha sido profesora invitada por la Università La Sapienza (2011 y 2012). Ha publicado "La República de Leopoldo Marechal" (Universidad de Lanús, 2005), "Tres formas del insilio en la literatura ecuatoriana del siglo XX" (Bubok Publishing Madrid-Fundación Marechal, 2010) y artículos en revistas argentinas, españolas, brasileñas, portuguesas y serbias.

Alessandro Mistrorigo. Actualmente *Visiting Research Fellow* en la Queen Mary University of London, consigue el doctorado en la Universidad Ca' Foscari de Venecia en 2007 especializándose en la poesía española del sigo XX. Es autor de varios artículos publicados en revistas internacionales y libros colectivos. Su actividad de investigación se dirige

principalmente al lenguaje poético contemporáneo en relación con las tecnologías digitales y el elemento de la voz.

Rafael Pontes Velasco. *Doctor Europeus* y Premio Extraordinario de Doctorado por la Universidad de Salamanca, en la actualidad trabaja como profesor de español en el Korea Defense Language Institute de la Joint Forces Military University (Icheon, Corea del Sur). Becario en la USAL (1999), en la UNAM (2002) y en Dankook University (2004), lector en Korea University (2005-2008) e investigador en la Université de Lille (2011), ha publicado un libro monográfico sobre el cuento, varios artículos filológicos y textos de creación.

Pau Damià Riera Muñoz. Pianista, violonchelista y compositor, ha estudiado en el Conservatorio Superior de Música Municipal de Barcelona y en la Escuela Superior de Música de Cataluña (ESMUC). Combina la docencia con la actividad concertística. Ha trabajado junto a figuras como Calixto Bieito, Marc Rosich, Albert Guinovart, Abel Coll y Jordi Faura. Paralelamente, desarrolla su faceta como compositor, muy enfocada hacia el trabajo con medios audiovisuales, habiendo compuesto música para danza y teatro, y colabora habitualmente con la productora de animación 23 Lunes, junto al compositor y director de orquesta Carles Gumí.

Carlos Santos Carretero. Licenciado en Filología Hebrea y Árabe por la Universidad de Salamanca, está realizando su estudios de posgrado dentro del programa de doctorado de la misma universidad en torno a la literatura apócrifa hebrea. Trabaja como traductor de árabe, hebreo, inglés y español y como redactor en publicaciones electrónicas de ocio y tecnología, como Tallon4 y Ociomedia.

Adrian Nathan West. Licenciado en Humanidades, traductor y escritor independiente. Además de haber traducido numerosas obras literarias del alemán, español, catalán y francés, ha publicado ensayos sobre figuras destacadas de la literatura austríaca como Josef Winkler y Jean Améry. Es editor contribuyente de la revista internacional de traducción online Asymptote.

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