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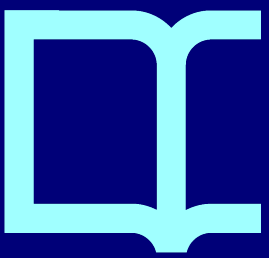


Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Technologies of friendship: Accessibility politics in the 'how to' mode

Tomás Sánchez Criado

Abstract

This text is an ethnographic account of a singular, Barcelona-based activist endeavour called *En torno a la silla* (ETS): a do-it-yourself and open design and making collective engaging in a very peculiar form of accessibility politics beyond a 'disability rights' framework. In it, I entangle intimately with ETS's relational interventions, in the form of making and documentation processes. What animates me is a political engagement with the practice of 're-description', paying attention to the singularity of what relational vocabularies and practices bring to the fore. In describing the context of its appearance, as well as several of the collective's endeavours, I address ETS's relational register. Rather than being a clear-cut activist group with the aim of materialising the 'inclusion' of 'disabled people' through 'technical aids', ETS engaged in producing what they called 'technologies of friendship': frail and careful material explorations opening up interstitial relational spaces of 'mutual access' between bodily diverse people. Through circulating tutorials, poetic accounts, digitally and in workshops and presentations, ETS's technologies of friendship became also ways of addressing how relations can be materialised and reflexively described, making available in its wake ways to re-enact them. Thus it produced an inspiring 'how to' accessibility politics: a material-political concern with the speculative opening up and materialisation of conditions for the very happening of relations, relating at the hinges of unrelatability.

Keywords

accessibility, bodily diversity, friendship, re-description, relations

Entangling intimately with relations: Re-describing *En torno a la silla*

This text has a humble purpose: to give an ethnographic account of a singular activist endeavour called *En torno a la silla* (ETS), which translates into English as 'around the wheelchair', which was mostly active between 2012 and 2016 in the city of Barcelona. ETS might indeed be introduced as 'a do-it-yourself making collective engaging in a very peculiar form of accessibility politics', or as an 'open design/free culture activist group working on accessibility issues, emerging after the *indignados* protests'. Yet this is far from my first attempt at giving an account of ETS: I have cowritten a fair number of descriptions of our experiences in recent years, seducing some fellow academics into helping me narrate several of its nuances. I have always believed that my very intense ethnographic engagement made it very hard for me to put things into context and identify some of its most interesting peculiarities. With colleagues' assistance, I have been able to shed light on

ETS's particular experimentation with forms of design and urban accessibility activism (Sánchez Criado & Cereceda, 2016; Sánchez Criado, Rodríguez-Giralt, & Mencaroni, 2016), as well as the experimentally collaborative impact it had on the ways in which I undertook fieldwork (Sánchez Criado & Estalella, 2018).

However, the more I think about some of these previous descriptions – where ETS is rendered as a 'collective' having to do with a vernacular form of 'disability' and 'accessibility' activism through 'making' – the less these choices of wording convince me, and the more violent they seem to be. Violent not in the sense that I was utterly inaccurate or uncareful – which I do not believe I was – but in the more nuanced feeling that, by having recourse to ready-made relational notions, I have tended to 'explain away' a crucial aspect of ETS: the peculiar relational mode that we managed to inhabit, what doing and situating 'around the wheelchair' implied and meant for us. This has prevented me from being able to single out the originality of ETS's mode of relating: the accessibility politics it brought forth, against the background of other 'disability rights' modes of doing so (see Winance, this issue).

In my contribution to this monograph, I would like to remedy this, entangling intimately with ETS in order to provide a 'better' account. What animates me is not merely an attempt at precision, but rather an engagement with a practice of 're-description' (Corsín, 2015; Lebner, 2017). Following Marilyn Strathern, this strategy signals a particular 'descriptive engagement with the fact of description, with how people generate accounts of themselves' (Strathern, 2005a, p. xii). As Strathern (2014) and some fellow anthropologists (de la Cadena, 2015; Verran, 2013) have reflected upon at length, describing the singularity of sets of relations entails a crucial issue: in giving particular accounts of relations – even in using the very concept of relation – we enable descriptive repertoires that matter not just for reasons of epistemological accuracy, but make available accounts of how the world or people relate or might relate, with a wide variety of more or less problematic reifying effects. Despite being a perhaps never-ending anthropological quandary, entangling intimately with how we describe thus becomes a fraught epistemic-political act.

In this re-description, thus, I seek to foreground and elucidate ethnographically the particular relational mode that ETS generated and shared. The first section ('Functional diversity as a "political ontology" of disability') aims to explain the context in which ETS emerged, and why 'disability' is not the most relevant repertoire. Indeed, disability is a complex term in my field of inquiry. This is because of the heavy influence of the scholarly and activist field of Disability Studies, which has been trying to substitute medical/rehabilitative readings of 'abnormal' bodies with social modes of explaining the sources of their 'disablement'. However, in all these years we have never used such a term. As I will describe in detail, ETS, emerging at the time of the *indignados* protests, was rather an open design expansion of existing activist repertoires around 'functional diversity'. This term had been used as a positive and vernacular self-representational term coined in the early 2000s by the Spanish independent-living activists in their struggles: seeking go beyond 'dis/ability' framings, they foregrounded all human bodily diversity, and encouraged anyone to share their fight against discrimination. This alternative repertoire proved extremely

effective at bringing together people of a wide variety of activist backgrounds to share a project of do-it-yourself (DIY) making.

But, as I will show in the following sections ('Any system you contrive without us', and 'Technologies of friendship'), any good description of ETS should stay closer to its very aim and practices: in fact, its name signals a polysemic wordplay pointing to a reflection *en torno* – 'on' – the transformations of *sillas* – 'wheelchairs' – and their *entornos* – 'environments' or 'surroundings'. Hence, descriptive effort will be put into clarifying this mode of relatedness and its particular impact on accessibility politics through material interventions. Whereas accessibility tends to signal a wide array of design solutions, ETS's aim from the very beginning was clearly not the 'inclusion' of 'disabled people' through 'technical aids', as I will try to convey. Using as an example the process of making a video, as well as different documentary materials for their spatial interventions, I will highlight another potential register. As practised by its participants, ETS was always pure experimentation with *tecnologías de la amistad* (technologies of friendship). The remainder of the text will unfold the relational and political significance of this phrase.

As I will show, technologies of friendship functioned as operators of what anthropologists Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena call 'political ontology': a mode of doing that politicises and puts hegemonic understandings of the world, such as bodily diversity and the particular connections between disability and design, in suspension. Far from producing ready-made commodities enabling a distinctive one-way and static ontology of relations – i.e. including 'the disabled' in 'abled' worlds – ETS engaged in delicate and careful material explorations, opening up interstitial relational spaces that foregrounded questions of how to know bodily diversity and how to produce material interventions in seeking to host it. In them, accessibility was concerned with designing relations of 'mutual access' between bodily diverse people, as well as how to make the derived knowledge available for others. As I will argue in the closing section ('An accessibility politics in the 'how to' mode'), what emerges is a politics of accessibility in the 'how to' mode: a political register grounded in the reflexive materialisation of the very conditions of possibility of relations with bodily diversity, entangling intimately with what they bring.

Functional diversity as a 'political ontology' of disability

The genealogy of accessibility as a particular materially-interventive concern is a complex one. Although they focus on the US, works by Aimi Hamraie (2017) and Beth Williamson (2019) are marvellous introductions to the intricacies of these historical relations. Most of these interventions follow the so-called 'social model of disability', routinely addressing disability as 'a social and environmental construction, produced in the relationship between bodies and built environments, and thus not something innate to the body' (Hamraie, 2017, p. 99). Put another way, they highlight 'disablement' not as a bodily feature, but as an effect of the 'ableist', stigmatising and socio-symbolic environmental constructions in which those bodies operate (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). In Euro-American settings, accessibility has tended to define a mode of social 'inclusion' through the expert production of objects – i.e. technical aids – and urban

interventions, as well as legal enactments. Its different versions can usually be traced back to the impact of independent-living and disability rights activism, which effected a transition from rehabilitative approaches producing 'special solutions for special needs' towards more 'inclusive' and 'universal' ones (Imrie & Luck, 2014; Winance, 2014), from which evolved the wholesale redesign of cities, buildings, work and everyday life spaces 'for all', accessible bathrooms, dropped kerbs, podotactile pavements or door handles coming to stand as symbols of inclusive societies.

Yet these historians have also pointed out how these objects have sometimes become habitual at the cost of producing detrimental exclusions of the very activist relations that gave them birth (Williamson, 2019): traces of their origin are usually concealed from their end result, and an 'assimilationist' or 'functionalist' ethos has seemed to predate them. It is for this reason that in their work both Hamraie and Williamson have sought to connect the origins of the US independent-living movement to an anti-assimilationist struggle that displayed a concern for the makeshift, and DIY intervention and re-appropriation of their spaces (Lifchez & Winslow, 1979; Werner, 1998), re-narrated by Hamraie (2017) through the concept of 'crip technoscience':

> … a friction-producing concept through which accessibility materializes 'slantedly' […] through disorienting, tense negotiations of the categories of 'knower' and 'maker'. (Hamraie, 2017, p. 103)

The Spanish Independent-Living Forum (*Foro de Vida Independiente y Divertad*) can certainly be considered one interesting example of anti-assimilationist concerns (something we try to address at length in Sánchez Criado et al., 2016). Ever since its inception as a mailing list in 2001, it has experimented with concepts and organisational practices that seek to go beyond 'ableist' imaginaries. After an initial phase, in which they translated and promoted the independent-living philosophy developed in the US and the UK, they very soon developed vernacular adaptations (Pié Balaguer, 2012). For instance, they coined the positive self-representational term *diversidad funcional* (functional diversity), which allowed them to go beyond forms of identity politics around 'disability', bringing together other people in their struggle against 'ableist' terms and frames. This term evades 'disability' as a 'functionalist' framing. In their fight for diversity in modes of functioning beyond productive ones, value is given to a wide variety of forms of bodily diversity. Valuing functional diversity means addressing the many forms in which people sharing that fundamental and universal human trait (being bodily diverse) are discriminated against, and searching for ways to counter them.

Yet their conceptual struggle should not be seen as a cosmetic and politically correct issue. As I interpret it, it should be considered a pure act of what anthropologists Mario Blaser and Marisol de la Cadena (2017, 2018) call 'political ontology': that is, an explicit disputing of dominant ontologies, in this case the 'functionalist' framings defining some of these diverse bodies as 'in need' or 'lacking', and suggesting assimilationist modes of their 'inclusion.' In fact, disability as a category of medical and rehabilitative discourse enacts a particular ontological project that has been disputed in various ways not only by

independent-living activism in many countries in the North, but also by decolonial movements in the Global South (Grech & Soldatic, 2016). In the Spanish case this particular political ontology has expanded further since the early 2010s, beginning from the interest of independent-living activists in mingling with other activist struggles, notably feminist ones (Agulló et al., 2011; García-Santesmases, Vergés Bosch, & Almeda, 2017). These crossovers signalled a more explicit concern to open up to a non-identity politics around issues of disability, as well as a reflection on and engagement in the production of material interventions necessary for living in bodily diverse societies.

One such expansion of functional diversity happened in connection with the *indignados* protests (known locally as 15-M, because of the 15 May 2011 demonstrations that started them, which are better known internationally as the 'Spanish Occupy'). The origins of these protests were as varied as the responses and collectives emerging from occupations of public squares that lasted for months: many people felt called to protest by a very complex web of concerns, ranging from austerity measures (impacting an already austere welfare system) to a perceived lack of institutional democracy in the country. In particular, different members of the Independent-Living Forum were fundamental in setting up two 'commissions of functional diversity' that appeared in the Madrid and Barcelona encampments (Arenas & Pié Baluguer, 2014). These were only a small part of the manifold topic-based 'commissions' (autonomous nuclei that openly documented their debates and experiences on a diverse wealth of digital platforms, as well as reporting and giving recommendations to the daily General Assemblies in the encampments) that grew up in them.

The *Comissió de Diversitat Funcional 15M Barcelona*, where I occasionally dropped by, usually met in the main site of the encampment, the iconic Plaça de Catalunya. There one could find: activists from the Independent-Living Forum, (trans)feminist activists, engaged health and social care professionals, designers, architects or craftspeople concerned with accessibility issues, people with disabilities and their relatives who had stopped believing in the associative politics of big representative organisations or bodies, social scientists and scholars working on inclusive education, and regular bystanders worried by the austere transformations suffered by the welfare state, or wanting to learn from the 'functional diversity' struggles.

As part of their many debates and discussions, statements and interventions – usually documented in their blog – they reflected in particular on the inaccessibility of the spaces they were occupying. A particularly vivid reflection took place on 28 November 2011, in the *Cos i ciutat* (body and the city) street workshop. The outcome was published as a blog statement, foregrounding the paradoxes accompanying their ways of seeking to render the city more habitable for the plural constituency of the commission. It signalled a very powerful anti-assimilationist position:

> Every time we're together we create, we sustain, we carry public space with us […] We make the city accessible, we eliminate the barriers to decide amongst all us the direction and intensity of our movements […] Moving around [*desplazándonos*] in the city we also displace [*desplazamos*] the social roles, the segregated habitats,

> the words naming us that aren't our own. It's been a while since we left our homes, and we will never be the same: We've abandoned the dead-end territories originally assigned to us.

As this post and their subsequent practices of spatial intervention made apparent, what emerged there was a political ontology dispute: in the practice of the commission, 'functional diversity' became a challenge to the established ontology of the body and spaces of the social model of disability and its urban expression in universal standards that should allegedly be producing inclusion, therefore bringing to the fore the 'problematic overemphasis within Disability Studies on the constructedness of environments according to able-bodied norms', and showing 'alternative conceptions of space and place', which along with other postcolonial contexts, 'require that we rethink what is meant by disabling environments' (Barker & Murray, 2010, pp. 231–232). Or, to put it in the commission's terms, public space rather than an external or physical milieu was here turned into something we 'do', 'support' or 'carry.' This became an important realisation on the need to re-appropriate the means of doing spaces and forging a different accessibility politics.

In the playful, overflowing, asynchronous and knowledge-sharing-prone atmosphere of the 15-M, such a concern drew together Antonio Centeno, one of the main independent-living movement's activists, with a few friends he had made in the functional diversity commission of Barcelona: Alida Díaz (architect), Pepe Rovira (expert craftsman) and Rai Vilatovà (fellow anthropologist and also a craftsman), all of whom had a strong record of political activism. As a result, *En torno a la silla* was created in the summer of 2012 with the original aspiration to make an open-source toolkit that could activate alternative relations of wheelchair users with their environments. From the onset it was an unstable project that sought to respond through open design and auto-fabrication practices to a particular pressing need: not being able to find gadgets and devices to prolong the nascent friendship that had sprung up in the squares between a few independent-living advocates and people with design and making skills.

I joined ETS in the autumn of 2012. My original aspiration was to do an ethnography of a case of participatory design of care technologies. However, in a situation in which everyone was sharing their knowledge and skills, I was lured into a very different dynamic, and I became the digital documenter of the project.[1] What this allowed me to be part of was not a form of 'inclusion' of 'disability' through the design of 'technical aids', but an ongoing, fragile and difficult material exploration whereby independentliving activists and fellow designers or craftspeople readdressed, altered and intervened in the particular ways in which their bodily diverse experiences could be spatially accommodated and put in common. It was an exploration that foregrounded 'functional diversity' and 'friendship' as explicit relational and material approaches, something akin to 'design under ontological occupation', as Arturo Escobar (2018, pp. 68–76) calls it, a 'political activation of relationality' (Escobar, 2018, p. 95) through design interventions that went beyond 'disability' as a biopolitical and Western-liberal ontology (Mitchell & Snyder, 2015), commonly managed through expertocratic and market-centric readings of 'non-normate' bodies

(Hamraie, 2017). In order to make this apparent, I will tell two concrete stories.

Figure1. Rendering of the portable wheelchair ramp. Picture BY NC ND *En torno a la silla* 2013.

Any system you contrive without us …

Around April 2013 we had just finished prototyping a portable and foldable, two-track wheelchair ramp that could hold up to 250kg – the weight of a powered wheelchair – and were about to commission the production of the final aluminium version (see Sánchez Criado et al., 2016 for a more complete account of this process). Alida had asked her brother's architectural studio if they could develop renderings of the ramps, so that we could display them on our website. At the time we were thinking of starting a crowdfunding project to support our making activities, and these portrayals could be handy for the accompanying media campaign. They had sent us several versions, some of them featuring an imaginary wheelchair user with a hat about to tread on the ramps (Figure 1). What developed thereafter unfolded from a joke, as did many of the things we did. When we were checking them, Alida said out loud: 'It's Leonard Cohen. Come on, look at him, he just looks like Leonard Cohen!' She even started searching for pictures online, and we all laughed at the striking resemblance. That's perhaps when the joke started. These pictures would be

referred to from that moment on as Leonard Cohens.

In the coming weeks, I remembered that *Any System* – one of Cohen's poems – had been something of a hit, circulating massively at the time of the *indignados* protests in a version performed by Constantino Romero, the most famous Spanish voice actor, with a powerful deep voice, singularly displayed in the dubbing of Darth Vader, Dirty Harry or Captain James T. Kirk. Perhaps this had to do with its harsh, and perhaps a bit dated, political slogan, which happened to lighten up many at a time of suffering because of harsh austerity measures, and the concomitant cries for another direction in the country's institutional politics, or a more direct democracy:

> Any system you contrive without us / will be brought down / We warned you before / and nothing that you built has stood / Hear it as you lean over your blueprint / Hear it as you roll up your sleeve / Hear it once again / Any system you contrive without us / will be brought down. (Cohen, 1972, p. 121)

Having to think of a media strategy for our potential crowdfunding campaign, I had a crazy thought and emailed the rest: 'Perhaps we could play with the poem in connection with our ramps?' In fact, in one of our meetings I started playing about, listening to the poem's audio whilst displaying the renderings, while all of us laughed at the connection. The joke lingered, and Antonio replied a few days later, 'Perhaps we could involve Oriol to dub this?' Oriol Roqueta, a lawyer with cerebral palsy and one of Antonio's fellow members of the Independent-Living Office of Barcelona, could certainly give the dubbing of the poem a more powerful and precise meaning than Constantino Romero's: one resonating with the 'nothing about us without us' motto of the independent-living movement.

This is how Antonio, Oriol and I ended up spending a whole spring afternoon in 2013 drinking wine and rehearsing the poem at Antonio's. I had brought my computer and a professional recorder. We tried to do the poem in full, but Oriol struggled to find the right breathing cadence, some words proved difficult, or required bodily movements that shook up his wheelchair, whose screeches affected the recording. Then we tried full phrases and, in some cases, we recorded word by word. After a while, Oriol was exhausted. Once done, I edited a first audio file on the spot to check whether it worked. Upon listening, we were taken aback by the powerful message it conveyed in both form and content. Everyone at ETS was also amazed when we shared it, it was a bit 'hard to follow' at times, or sounded 'a bit harsh', but could be *muy potente* (very powerful), they said.

But we never seemed ready to embark on the nightmare that crowdfunding implied. Indeed, we happened to be very busy just learning to know what the ramp did and what it allowed us to do. That coming summer we tried it out in many circumstances, we started jokingly 'assaulting' inaccessible pubs and bars, and took it on a very fascinating collective trip to a house in the Pyrenees. This proved an interesting logistic challenge, but was also a marvellous experience of being together, reflecting on what it all implied and provided (Figures 2 and 3). These convivial moments were also 'very powerful' for reflecting on what Blaser and de la Cadena might refer to as our 'uncommons': the

processes whereby our divergences can be worked out and displayed without desiring to explain them away using common categories of understanding, producing situations in which we realised we might have 'an interest in common that is not the same interest' (2017, p. 191).

Figures 2 and 3. Using the ramp on a trip to the Pyrenees. Picture BY NC ND *En torno a la silla* 2013.

Indeed, we realised that the ramp, rather than being seen as an add-on of a solitary project of simply accessing places, might be best treated as a collective disruptor of a certain spatial order, changing the potentiality of the places we were entering, producing an event that created the occasion to discuss

and challenge their inaccessibility, but also enabling us to forge connections not just with the places but both between ourselves and with the people usually using or hosting them. This was very different from the assimilationist inclusive design project of just being able to go autonomously to places where nobody might interact with you afterwards, which, as many of our colleagues discussed, might not prevent situations of exclusion.

That summer Arianna Mencaroni – sociologist and videographer – had also joined ETS, and clearly enhanced audiovisually my amateur approach to audiovisual documentation to date. At the time, Arianna had begun experimenting with interactive documentary platforms, and with the potential crowdfunding strategy in mind wanted to explore these to tell ETS's story. Albeit it remained a brief experience at that time, the connections we had forged between open design, functional diversity and accessibility activism proved very challenging to tell in a unified narrative.

Before the trip to the Pyrenees I had been assisting her to interview relevant actors and shoot demonstrations, meetings, parliamentary hearings and several of our 'assaults' with the ramp. One day, wishing to create a short video snippet that could be used for the crowdfunding, we discussed whether we might show one of our 'assaults' with Oriol's recorded audio of the poem. In fact, she very quickly edited a raw cut. Although it was not wholly convincing – the image looked a bit too sinister and there was something dated in the political message – we found it funny. There was also a potential irony in the very harsh message being juxtaposed with images of a joking intervention in a pub during festivities in the Sants district. In order to soften it and make the final product more parodic, she started adding filters to make it look even more sinister, together with very big comic letters during the parts where Oriol's voice-over stated *cualquier sistema que montéis sin nosotros será derribado* (Any system you contrive without us will be taken down). When it was finished, she uploaded the video to YouTube to share it with the rest of ETS, to everyone's amusement.

Then an interesting conversation arose. For the untrained ear, the message was sometimes difficult to get, and we started wondering: 'Should we add subtitles'? This is a rather under-theorised but very conventional predicament in the practice of documentary film-makers (Zhang, 2012). Subtitles can be relevant to show appreciation or to make the message of the diverse communities represented more accessible to 'standard' or 'global' viewers, particularly on occasions when the voices are speaking in a broken tongue, or when filming in complex audio conditions. However, any notion of the standard viewer was challenged from the onset by our independent-living colleagues, who expressed their worry that this could mark Oriol's voice as explicitly 'disabled'.

In what could be re-described as an attempt at displaying these crucial 'uncommons' that we came across in the making of the ramp and the video, Antonio argued convincingly that it could be more relevant for any kind of inclusive politics to force viewers to get used to Oriol's voice (in itself a manifestation of bodily diversity), hence we should not include subtitles. Wanting to respect this but given that we wanted to create a video that could circulate widely as our main message in a fund-raising venture, we reached a

compromise. I suggested a feature of YouTube might help solve the trick, instead of including permanent subtitles, the platform allows their activation and deactivation on demand. Also, I said, we could also include subtitles of the original poem in English, so we could highlight the poem and its different versions, instead of Oriol's voice. Everyone agreed, and that's how the 'Cualquier sistema' video was circulated.[2]

Technologies of friendship

The crowdfunding campaign never happened, even though for several years it was a recurrent issue, as we continued operating on little or no budget. The video, in turn, became part of our burgeoning production of audiovisual documentary records, displaying many things: the uses of and reflections on the gadgets we prototyped, the events or workshops we hosted, the political discourses we employed, and different poetic reflections we engaged in. The overall 'unfinished-ness' of our endeavours was sometimes challenging. But we discovered in time that perhaps ETS's greatest aim could not necessarily be the creation of final objects or things 'just done', but perhaps it was more of an issue for us to experiment with different open processes of making around functional diversity. The aspiration was, rather, to explore what we increasingly started calling *tecnologías de la amistad* (technologies of friendship), a term Alida adopted in mid-2012 from Argentinian relational artist Roberto Jacoby.

This notion was initially used to talk about the gadgets we developed and their role in the transformation they wielded in our bodies and common environments, redefining accessibility into a material intervention to prolong the nascent friendships that had arisen in the squares, or to address processes whereby we could open up to any friendships to come. But our use of the term soon went beyond foregrounding technologies as objects or gadgets. It was a term we tended to use to highlight the material operations through which we produced relational openings. As we began to discuss, perhaps everything we did – including our documentation endeavours – had to do with constructing technologies of friendship in a more generic sense. In fact, the experience in and around ETS ended up having a great relational and many times an unexpected intensity, friendship becoming an interesting practice of entangling intimately with knowledge-production in what we were busy doing (see Ramírez-i-Ollé, this issue, for a similar account).[3] Indeed, several relations, more or less fugacious, also started happening around ETS's documentary productions and its media presence.

For instance, the short 'Cualquier sistema' video opened up an unexpected connection with Jaume Ferrete, a Barcelona-based artist who works monographically on the voice, and its relationship with presentations of self, identity and power. Interested in voice experiments and performances, he came across the video in late 2013 through Antonio, who was by then becoming involved in a performance for the *Museo Oral de la Revolución* (Oral Museum of Revolution), a curatorial project at the Contemporary Art Museum of Barcelona by renowned queer philosopher Paul B. Preciado in which Ferrete was also involved. Interested as he was in subaltern voices, the video was

remixed in one of his installations. Since then, the video has been shown and discussed in many of his presentations, for instance, in his *voice fail* series of performances, in which the comparison between Constantino Romero's and Oriol's reading of *Any System* routinely feature (Villaverde, 2016). Ironically, what had been created as a potential crowdfunding snippet now circulated as an operator of reflections around bodily diversity.

But many of the things ETS did also engaged us in the production of further relations. In late 2015, after a series of making workshops in Barcelona's main activist hub (Can Batlló), as well as relevant presentations in open design events (the internationally acclaimed *Free Culture Forum*), and in the BAU school of design, between 2014 and 2015, we were invited to show our gadgets, videos and reflections in the Seventh REHOGAR exhibition in Barcelona. Curated yearly since 2008 by the open and upcycling activist design collective MAKEA, the 2015 exhibition gathered 'more than 30 proposals of an open and shareable DNA'. As their curatorial statement declared, they wanted to 'account for processes, practices, and tools facilitating the social transformation of everyday life', showing a kind of design that 'evolves and grows because it can be upgraded and shared with others'.

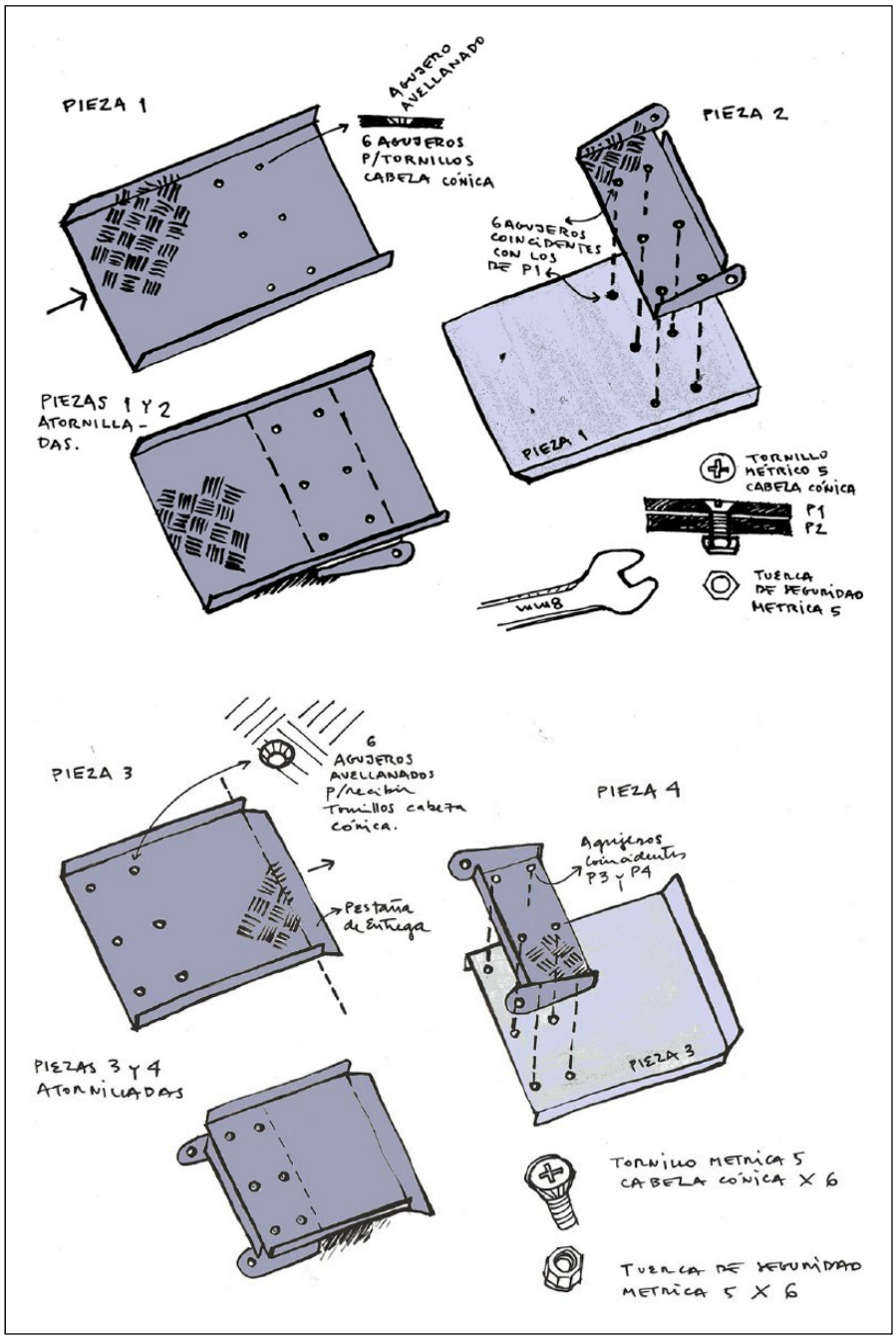
In preparation for our contribution, ETS members made a great effort: Arianna organised and collected some of the videos showing presentations and interviews we had been producing so far, Alida engaged in redrawing a 'how-to-assemble' tutorial for the portable wheelchair ramp (Figures 4–6). A special display panel (Figure 7) was also created for the occasion, providing textual and graphic information of both a technical and political nature: it not only contained relevant information on how to reproduce the ramp (e.g. measurements and materials), but also showed pictures and reflected upon what we had learnt in our 'assaults'. The ramp and its accompanying documentation and discussions were then displayed and shown for several weeks.

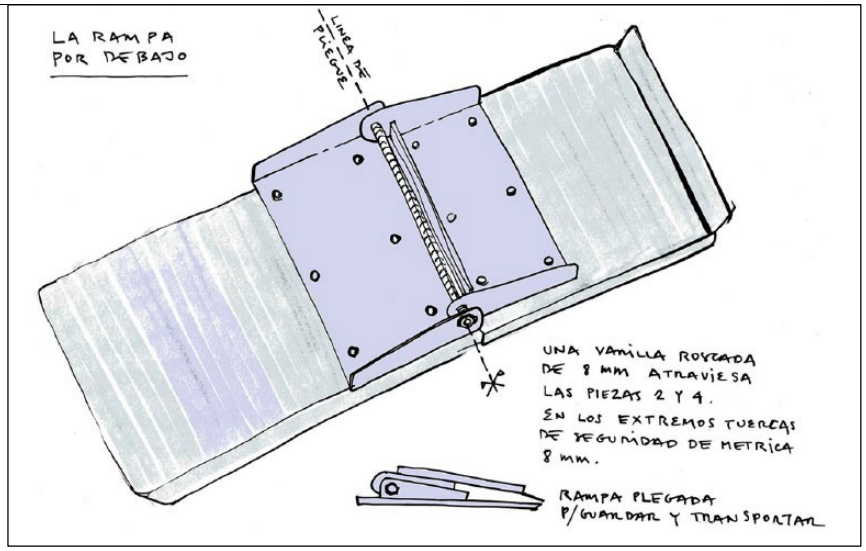
This documentary effort signals an understanding of accessibility as a form of open design. Open design has been addressed by fellow anthropologists Alberto Corsín and Adolfo Estalella in their work with guerrilla architects as a process of 're-sourcing', generating enquiries into and mobilising the different 'technical, legal and material resources that equip their practice' and that 'draw the city together today as a vibrant, emergent and dynamic field' (Corsín & Estalella, 2016, p. 147). Open design was a regular feature of ETS's making practices. Rather than merely signifying a concern with the commons and intellectual property, our 're-sourcing' through documentary production enacted many openings and interpretations in which the things we were doing were more a process than a product, a means rather than an end, thus not only opening up the making processes for a diverse range of people to participate, but also creating many conditions of appreciation over what we were doing bridging diverse bodily worlds.

Indeed, in April 2017, such a bridging of worlds was explicitly addressed by ETS members when invited by the artivist collective Enmedio to reflect on our (at that time) five-year experience of addressing accessibility issues in the public series of lectures/events called *MundoValla* (Fence-World). These addressed the many exclusionary divides, boundaries and borders articulating our contemporary worlds (as events such as the refugee and migration crisis in Europe were making

forcefully evident at the time). Even though the intervention was prepared collectively, it was Alida, together with Nuria Gómez and Marga Alonso – members of the Independent-living Office of Barcelona and the Functional Diversity Commission of the 15-M, who had become involved in ETS in recent years – who presented it.

Enmedio published a Facebook summary of the event, which highlighted how for ETS 'objects are not just objects, but interpellations to relate [*al vínculo*]', a 'space to meet as equals being different […] outflanking a series of thresholds, the "thresholds of separation". To do this a series of devices are needed. The creation of these devices is also a fundamental part of this collective. Devices or objects, such as their portable wheelchair ramp, which condense a sensitivity and a mode of being in the world capable of eroding that which separates us from one another […] "If we didn't have the portable wheelchair ramp we wouldn't be here with you", they told us yesterday, and added that this is why they call their technologies "technologies of friendship", a term we also loved.' Interestingly, a conversation had arisen there on whether inclusion was the political project ETS was after, something we had been discussing collectively before they attended the event. In the conversation Alida, Marga and Nuria stated 'We are against exclusion, of course […] but we're also against inclusion.' As Enmedio reinterpreted in closing, 'Any form of inclusion entails a previous exclusion, a separation through categories that lead to isolation: "what we would want is to be by your side, not on the other side", they concluded. And we all started clapping.' [4]


PIEZA 1
AGUJERO AVELLANADO
6 AGUJEROS P/TORNILLOS CABEZA CÓNICA
PIEZA 2
6 AGUJEROS COINCIDENTES CON LOS DE P1
PIEZAS 1 Y 2 ATORNILLADAS.
PIEZA 1
TORNILLO METRICO 5 CABEZA CÓNICA
P1
P2
TUERCA DE SEGURIDAD METRICA 5
M M 8
PIEZA 3
6 AGUJEROS AVELLANADOS P/recibir Tornillos cabeza cónica.
PIEZA 4
Agujeros coincidentes P3 y P4
Pestaña de Entrega
PIEZAS 3 Y 4 ATORNILLADAS
PIEZA 3
TORNILLO METRICA 5 CABEZA CÓNICA X 6
TUERCA DE SEGURIDAD METRICA 5 X 6



Figures 4, 5 and 6. How-to-assemble tutorial for the portable wheelchair ramp. Picture BY NC ND *En torno a la silla* 2015.

An accessibility politics in the 'how to' mode

In the previous sections, I have attempted a particular ethnographic redescription of *En torno a la silla*'s mode of relatedness in their 'technologies of friendship'. Yet friendship has been commonly used in Euro-American traditions as opposed to 'kinship', connoting voluntary relations between individuals in conditions of freedom. However, a growing contemporary literature in anthropology is describing the many complexities and imbrications of friendship and kinship as relational forms (Bell & Coleman, 1999; Desai & Killick, 2010). But the use of this relational term to describe ETS's diverse material and interventions offers an interesting twist, since it does not offer 'a description (a representation) of how these practices and activities take shape in the world [as much] as cracking open the terms through which they mutually describe each other' (Corsín, 2015, p. 184).

Figure 7. Panel developed by MAKEA for the REHOGAR7 displaying the portable wheelchair ramp, its process and uses. Picture BY NC ND *En torno a la silla*/MAKEA 2015.

In ETS's use of the term 'friendship', as carefully recounted in Enmedio's summary, something far more interesting was happening, holding in suspension what these relations might mean and imply: a relation not disentangling the social proper from the material.

ETS's technologies of friendship indeed make dialogue with recent debates in STS and Anthropology around how to care for 'difference' or

'diversity' in our 'worldings'. Not departing from an understanding that a 'common world' can be easily composed or even known without doing a great violence to the beings being composed, different scholars have been foregrounding practices whereby putting in common does not preclude divergences (de la Cadena, 2015, p. 280) but might also happen when making space for 'heterogeneous worldings coming together […] negotiating their difficult being together in heterogeneity' (Blaser & de la Cadena, 2018, p. 4), or as Latimer (2013) might call it, in situations whereby 'diverse kinds' learn to engage in practices of 'being alongside', without necessarily merging.

In a very similar fashion, ETS's concern about friendship had no relational fixity, but entailed many technologies producing what Tom Roach – readdressing Foucault's (1997) reflections on friendship as a mode of sexual, or more generically, bodily liberation – calls a form of 'shared estrangement', or a 'relation founded on a finitude so radically unsharable [that] can be the cornerstone of a community that coheres not in identity but in a more radical being-in-common' (Roach, 2012, p. 12). They imply, indeed, searching for material means of connection between diverse bodies and environments that are not fully known to one another, for instance, putting in place methods of awareness and documentation, of participation and decision-making, of tinkering with materials and debating the necessary relational arrangements that need to be recreated all the time, and whose creation can recursively impact on and expand the very form in which environments are being produced and thought of.

Indeed, in the processes of materialisation addressed here, what was opened up was the very fabric of friendship as an exploratory and socio-material mode of relatedness where – analogous with Strathern's (2005b) arguments about the recursive expansion of kinship and relatedness through the many inventions brought about by new reproductive technologies – friends were always a surprise; as we have seen, 'technologies of friendship' designate fragile and careful explorations whereby ETS and its alliances could indeed be described as interesting group-becomings rather than as a 'group'. As a particular relational practice, technologies of friendship single out a way of doing in common that does not assume that we already know what we have in common, or who the people joining together might be. This is a peculiar relation, emerging precisely from what could separate us or impede our meeting. That is, technologies of friendship do not enact relations departing from a perceived or wished sameness, but could rather be understood as processes through which to create a series of troubled and troubling gadgets and devices to enable us to work out what we could do and create together, without fully knowing whether that could be possible (Berlant, 2016).

Technologies of friendship open up interstitial spaces foregrounding ways to know bodily diversity and produce material interventions in seeking to host it. Far from being something fully knowable and achievable that is accomplished through ready-made technological solutions (such as in the dominant accessibility paradigm), accessibility for ETS entails a space to deal with many 'unknowns': what bodily diversity might mean in practice, how it can be appreciated, produced and worked out through manifold materialisations creating entry-points between bodily diverse people. Technologies of friendship

are, in fact, articulations of situations of 'mutual access' to elicit, appreciate and situate bodily diversity in common, where what is meant by body and environment is materially and practically held in suspension and scrutinised (Sánchez Criado & Cereceda, 2016; Kullman, 2016). These materialisations signal a peculiar relational politics: a practice situated in the surroundings of wheelchairs and their users to materially rethink environments with the aspiration of generating the very possibility of a relation, making emerge, in turn, a particular conception of accessibility. Not a project of foregrounding 'technical aids' as a means of 'inclusion', but a material-political concern to design relations of 'mutual access' between bodily diverse people who would otherwise never have met because of the many discriminatory divides separating them.

Furthermore, in a truly open design fashion, technologies of friendship also signalled a worry about making the derived knowledge available for others. Thus, the circulation of 'how to' accounts suggests a desire to go beyond the here and now of a project like ETS. What emerges, hence, is a politics of accessibility that goes beyond regular assimilationist strategies. Our accounts made explicit a desire for our relations to happen in a 'how to' mode: circulating tutorials, poetic accounts, workshops and presentations, ETS's technologies of friendship also became ways of addressing how relations can be materialised and reflexively described by their very participants, making available in their wake the very hope of finding ways to re-enact them. Technologies of friendship enact relations of radical alterity and mutual exploration, fragile and prone to being dismantled, but also leaving a documentary trace, the trace of what can only be a perpetually unfinished search. ETS's practices thus open up a political register grounded in the reflexive materialisation of the very conditions of possibility of relations with bodily diversity, entangling intimately with what they bring, a wish to incite the creation of further situations where we could situate bodily diversity in common in a great variety of ways.

This is where technologies of friendship, as a 'how to' relation ceaselessly under scrutiny in our common practices, could become a relevant concern, inspiring political projects in other domains. I continue to wish that my intimate entanglement with ETS's mode of relating might also help us develop an experimental mode of bridging such diverse worlds further. In times of increasing totalitarian divides, border separations and a renewal of many exclusionary attempts at dividing us –what Enmedio called 'FenceWorld' – such a 'how to' politics might perhaps prove an inspiring material-political ground in which to care for diversity not through inclusion, but via practices of 'mutual access': a 'how to' accessibility politics addressing the problem of relating at the hinges of unrelatability, of connecting when all is conceived for us not to be able to do so, entangling intimately in the production of relations premised upon the speculative opening up and materialisation of conditions for their very happening.

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Notes

1. See https://entornoalasilla.wordpress.com/english/
2. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IqJwwDfn9jc
3. I have used a generic 'we' to describe my ethnographic/documentary undertakings. But precisely because of my concern with relational divergence this 'we' should not stand as an undifferentiated one. For a more complete account of the processes of reflexive making this entailed, and its impact on 'experimental collaborations in fieldwork' or the 'joint problemmaking' of anthropological problematisations, see Sánchez Criado and Estalella (2018).
4. Taken and translated from https://www.facebook.com/enmediocolectivo/posts/7587088142 97788

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