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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Architecting Participation: Making Lived Models for and of Democratic Participation in
Barcelona

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Anthropology

by

Mariel Edith Gruszko

Dissertation Committee:
Associate Professor Keith Murphy, Chair
Associate Professor Kristin Peterson
Assistant Professor Sylvia Nam

2019

DEDICATION

To

Jon, Tamara, Adrian, and Julieta

in thanks for your encouragement and empathetic questions

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Architecting Participation: Making Lived Models for and of Democratic Participation in
Barcelona

By

Mariel Edith Gruszko

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Irvine, 2019

Associate Professor Keith Murphy, Chair

This dissertation examines how design and construction practices become techniques for building democracy in Barcelona. It draws on 21 months of ethnographic field research with participatory architecture studios and grassroots social movements engaged in urban place-making, including participant-observation, open-ended interviews, and audio and video recordings of participatory design meetings and construction workshops. The dissertation explores how residents and experts use building practices to intermingle community-making, democratic deliberation, and the production of lay expertise.

While residents' participation has been a component of urban planning in Barcelona since the 1980s, this dissertation finds that for many of Barcelona's residents, emergent forms of participatory design and construction that arose in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis offer a means of creating alternative political and economic futures. Through participatory architecture and collective construction, collaborative experiments in making something new from the residues of post-industrial and gentrifying landscapes become

exercises in practical democracy. I demonstrate that residents and architects make design processes into spaces of encounter where finding ways to agree on urban futures also cultivates new relationships. As residents build a city that offers different ways of living together, they reanimate both empty urban spaces and design and construction processes as shelters for care work and community-making.

INTRODUCTION

In November of 2016, I accompanied some friends who worked at the architecture studio Voltes to a long-running *okupa* (squatted house) in Vallcarca, where we ate lunch. Vallcarca, a neighborhood on the northern periphery of Barcelona near Parc Güell, looks like the bombed-out remnant of a city. Buildings are regularly interspersed with vacant lots that contain only the demolished remnants of foundation walls. The neighborhood is undergoing a new speculative turn. But the walls of buildings that used to touch other buildings, their colors more vibrant where their now-demolished neighbors shielded them from the sun and rain for decades, are the exposed underbellies of the previous speculative turn. Barcelona's 2004 *Pla General Metropolità* (Metropolitan General Plan) approved the demolition of many buildings in Vallcarca, in anticipation of building hotels and a tourism industry in the neighborhood. The city had anticipated that demolishing residential buildings would allow the land to become more profitable as a tourist hub. After the demolitions but before new buildings were erected, the financial crisis of 2008 arrived. The building plans, which had been received with excitement by investors and city politicians but with apprehension by Vallcarca's residents, could no longer be carried out. The residents were left to live with and on the scraps of the failed plan. The neighborhood is still full of life. But the patchwork of vacant lots is a constant reminder both of the government's lack of regard for the residents' own desires for their neighborhood and of the failed promised development that would have made the demolitions right or—at least more tolerable within capitalist logics.

Residents in Vallcarca are working to make the now-empty land sustain their community and produce other kinds of value. Murals made by residents cover many of the exposed walls. Some of the murals were made as part of celebrations of the annual festival of Vallcarca, some of them demand justice for Mexican and Argentine disappeared people, and residents can't seem to remember how a few of the murals appeared. Residents are organizing to advocate for their interests within the latest municipal plan for the neighborhood; they have successfully pressured the municipal government to implement a participatory planning process. There is a collectively-run woodshop and a thriving community garden. At the same time, a new speculative cycle is underway in Vallcarca. *Okupa* houses are being evicted—both those that house residents with explicitly political goals and those that house residents who cannot afford to pay Barcelona's ever-increasing rents.¹ Indeed the *okupa* where I had lunch in 2016 has since been evicted.

That day in 2016, we easily fell into the routine of preparing the meal alongside the residents of the house and other neighbors from Vallcarca who had come for lunch. After our meal we relaxed, pushing our chairs back from the table and leaning backwards to tilt our heads up at the uncommonly bright November sun. Soon we would spring into motion to return the chairs and tables to the interior of the house and walk back to the architects' studio, but for a few minutes we were able to savor the house's large tree-filled yard and mountain views and listen as someone strummed a guitar. Júlia leaned in to speak with my partner, who was visiting from Baltimore. "Baltimore?" She asked. "That's a lot like Vallcarca, isn't it? Really deindustrialized? I've seen it on *The Wire*, and it looks a lot like

¹ Of course, these categories overlap.

here—you have lots of vacant lots.” We nodded. “So you must have a lot of opportunities [there] from which to make free culture, right?”

To this day, my partner laughs when I remind him of this conversation. At the time, less than 18 months had passed since Freddie Gray’s murder and the Baltimore Uprising that followed.² Baltimore’s vacant lots did not feel much like sites of freedom.

But as Júlia well knew, in Barcelona any vacant lot or empty building is a site of possibility. That is not to say that these possible futures are always positive. As Gemma, a resident of a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in the city center explained to me,

when they take away, demolish the houses, well this is an opportunity and also a threat, right? In the sense that what we don’t want is for that to become what we already have, right? What the rest of the neighborhood is becoming. So it’s a space that we have to, jeje, see to it, try well that—to occupy, in other words to define it, but to be there.

But at the very least, these places’ futures are not determined solely by Barcelona’s uneven distribution of economic and political resources.

“Being there” does not just include spending time in a place but instead entails inhabiting it in a fuller sense. Residents reclaim public spaces by keeping them clean, by dragging furniture and cookware from their houses to the street so they can cook and eat collective meals in public view, or by staking slightly more permanent claims in the form of vegetable plantings, a pergola, or some bleachers.³ By “being there” residents can “define”

² In 2015, members of the Baltimore Police Department arrested resident Freddie Gray and subjected him to a “rough ride,” where Gray was handcuffed and placed in the back of a police van without a seatbelt. By the time Gray arrived at the police station, he was heavily wounded with a severed spinal cord and multiple blunt force traumas. He died shortly thereafter. Following Gray’s death, residents of Baltimore engaged in several days of public protest which included civil disobedience and property damage. The official response to the Uprising included mobilization of riot police and days of curfews; a Department of Justice investigation which found extensive civil rights problems in the Baltimore Police; and an unsuccessful prosecution of the officers responsible for Gray’s death.

³ Throughout this dissertation I use the phrase “public space” to refer to all shared, non-private spaces rather than only to government-owned urban space.

and determine places' futures. Sometimes, "being there" takes the form of a permanent occupation. But it is just as likely to consist of spending a few hours caring for an otherwise uncared-for place, leaving, and returning the next day or the day after that. These practices of care are also forms of *autogestió*—a term that, in Barcelona, refers to grassroots social movements' techniques for making and managing their own spaces and encompasses economic self-management, democratic self-determination, and DIY (do-it-yourself) handicraft and construction work.

For instance, in the vacant lot that Gemma was active in, activists gradually moved from cleaning debris out of the lot themselves, to organizing festivals in the lot, to asking the municipal government to keep the lot clean, to demanding and then participating in the design of a plaza on the site of the empty lot. The gradual progression from maintenance work to design simply continued residents' earlier practices of caring for the lot. If in engaging in collective design work residents also moved into closer contact with the municipal government, they hoped not to cede control of the lot to the government but instead to expand their management of the lot into the previously inaccessible domains of governance and state-sponsored place-making techniques. Gemma became active in the vacant lot near her child's school through her involvement with the *Comissió Grogà* (Yellow Committee), a grassroots neighborhood organization that was founded in late 2012 by a group of parents and named after the *Marea Grogà* (Yellow Tide) of the 15-M movement.⁴

⁴ 2011's 15-M movement launched about a dozen colored "tides", each of which focused on a different issue. For instance, the Blue Tide centered water as a common good that should remain public; the White Tide opposed privatization and cuts in the healthcare sector; the Red Tide opposed unemployment and the Garnet Tide opposed forced economic emigration; the Brown Tide defended the environment from speculation. The *Marea Grogà* (Yellow Tide) was specific to Catalonia; in other parts of Spain, the *Marea Amarilla* (Yellow Tide) defended the public library system while the *Marea Verde* (Green Tide) worked to defend public education. Many of these tides or their offshoots remain active today.

Like the *Marea Grogà*, the *Comissió Grogà* seeks to defend public education in the face of austerity. But the other part of the *Comissió*'s mission is to "reclaim and promote a more livable and friendlier neighborhood for everyone." For activists from the *Comissió*, working with the city on the vacant lot's design was not a contradiction; it was a political achievement. As they saw it, the only alternatives to participating in the city's design project for the empty lot would have been continued austerity and neglect, or for residents to become "an afterthought" while the city worked hand-in-hand with neighborhood businesses and hoteliers on a design geared primarily to tourists.

I was drawn to Barcelona because from my very first visit in 2008, I had a sense that the city offered radically different political possibilities than those I was accustomed to encountering in the United States. Notwithstanding its similarity to other metropolitan areas in the global North, whenever I spent time in Barcelona I was also reminded of Latin American cities that I knew well. Just as in many Latin American cities, working-class and poor residents living in neighborhoods on Barcelona's periphery have historically built their own houses, which have gradually been replaced by formal housing and official public spaces. But Barcelona especially reminded me of my birthplace, Buenos Aires. In both cities, the geographies of working-class neighborhoods are defined not only by homes, public spaces, and workplaces, but also by afterschool care areas administered by unions, libraries run by neighborhood activists, and grassroots *ateneus* (in Spanish, *ateneos*; in English, cultural associations). Thanks to these shared places, residents can encounter alternative political possibilities in the course of their everyday routes through their neighborhoods.

Many of the grassroots activists who I got to know in Barcelona attributed this sense of possibility to the city's urban spaces and material worlds, instead of exclusively to the intentional organizing projects carried out by social movements. For instance, resident-led historical walking tours through the landmarks of Republican- and Civil War-era Barcelona are fairly common—both as a commemoration practice on important historical dates and as part of the celebration of neighborhood festivals. The Republican-era city is a site of fascination for politically active people because, as one activist explained at a roundtable during the alternative neighborhood festival in Gràcia, “together all of these spaces formed a constellation, a web, a materiality that made available a certain way of being. We want to recover this and give the foundation, materially, for an other life.”

If the city—its materiality and sociality alike—is central to people's ability to forge new kinds of convivial political relationships, then what makes particular urban spaces into sites where these disparate threads of political becoming can gather together as a collective project?

I conducted field research in Barcelona from September 2015 to January 2017, along with shorter preliminary research visits in the summers of 2013 and 2014. I investigated how urban design and construction in Barcelona come to take on not just political, but specifically democratic, valences. My field research focused on participatory and collective building practices because my interlocutors in Barcelona, many of whom were veterans of the 15-M movement and earlier social movements, contrasted what to them appeared as the tangibly democratic qualities of these shared design and construction practices with their thin and insubstantial engagements with voting and with political parties (see also

Fishman 2011 on the importance of informal political channels to Spanish democracy). I conducted my field research alongside three organizations: two participatory architecture firms; and one public archive. The architecture studios LaCol and Voltes⁵ welcomed me into their studios and invited me to accompany them to participatory architecture workshops that they facilitated across Barcelona and in its surrounding areas. The *Centre de Documentació de Moviments Socials* (Center for the Documentation of Social Movements), an *autogestionat* and unaffiliated public archive that specializes in materials about Barcelona-based social movements, embraced me as an archive volunteer even when I had more to learn about the history of Barcelona's social movements than many of the archive's users. Volunteering weekly at the archive allowed me to experience Catalonia's rich associational culture firsthand and to experience for myself the sometimes-grinding work involved in physically and economically maintaining an *autogestionat* space. Because the archive moved to Can Batlló in 2015, my work at the archive also became a window into Can Batlló's shifting collective construction and management practices. From 2015-2017, I lived in the neighborhood of Sants, a few blocks away from where the La Bordeta neighborhood begins. LaCol's studio is in Sants, while Can Batlló is in La Bordeta. Living in Sants allowed me to reach these research sites more easily and often on relatively short notice; furthermore, I came to better understand lifelong residents of Sants and La

⁵ During the time that I was working with Voltes, the studio operated under two names: Volta for participatory architecture; and Investigació Canyera for eco-architecture. However at the time the architects felt that these were interlocking projects, both because many of the same architects were involved in each effort and because of theoretical and practical affinities between these architectural practices. The studio has since merged Investigació Canyera and Volta—which were always housed under a single roof—under a single name and administrative structure, Voltes. Throughout this dissertation I refer to Voltes when speaking of the architecture firm in general, and Investigació Canyera when discussing its eco-architecture practices.

Bordeta's attachments to their historically working-class, Catalan, and family-oriented neighborhoods.

The research for this dissertation began, as I imagine a great deal of research does, with a visit to a bookstore. In June 2013, as I walked for the first time to the room that I would rent that summer, I decided to stop by a leftist bookstore in Sants, a working-class and historically Catalan neighborhood. I entered the bookstore, *La Ciutat Invisible* (The Invisible City), from *carrer de l'Autonomia* (Autonomy Street). At the time I thought my research would be structured around the infrastructural politics of radio waves and not the more tangibly material politics of streets and buildings. But the names of these streets and businesses—and the insistence on making a different future from the same old urban fabric that they seemed to imply—were magnetic to me. They seemed to “narrativiz[e] a local cultural real” (Stewart 1996) that stood out to me as different from both the heavily touristed area near the Rambla where I was staying and Les Corts, the predominantly Catalan middle-class neighborhood where I would live in the summers of 2013 and 2014.

The bookstore felt like a social center for the whole neighborhood. People came in and out constantly; some were newcomers, and some entered to discuss ongoing business they had with the bookstore or the people who worked there. A handful of people stood in the street right outside the door while drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes; someone came inside to offer us oranges. At one point a teenage boy entered, announced “I just got paid,” and requested a book about communism—but, he clarified, it had to be a relatively uncomplicated book because he did not know much about communism yet. He left a few minutes later with a graphic novel. After browsing for a while, I began talking with one of the bookstore's worker-owners about social movements in Barcelona. He explained to me

that even in Barcelona, Sants was a unique neighborhood thanks to its extensive history of self-organized working-class cooperatives in both the labor and consumption sectors. In fact, some of *La Ciutat Invisible*'s worker-owners had conducted a research project mapping the neighborhood's cooperative histories and present. That day, I took home a book on the history of punk in Barcelona as well as a pamphlet that *La Ciutat Invisible* had published in collaboration with the Barcelona City History Museum that mapped Barcelona's history of cooperativism.

In the summer of 2013, activists in Sants were dancing in the gravitational field of Can Batlló, a social center in a historic industrial compound on the border between the neighborhoods of Sants and La Bordeta. I quickly learned, thanks to activists' proud histories of Can Batlló—the transformation of a Falangist-owned textile mill into an *autogestionat* social center certainly deserves some storytelling—that two years earlier, in the immediate wake of the 15-M movement, residents had reclaimed the compound with demonstrations that wound their way through Sants and threats to occupy the industrial complex. Everyone had an opinion on Can Batlló. A friend with whom I volunteered at the Center for the Documentation of Social Movements, who was in the middle of preparing the Center's move to Can Batlló, enthusiastically shepherded me to general assemblies at the compound and administrative meetings for Can Batlló that were held in other activist spaces in Sants. An activist I knew from an anarchist cultural space in Sants worried that Can Batlló was too opaque to outsiders and shared her aversion to becoming involved in what she perceived as a rapidly bureaucratizing space. A worker who was employed in one of Sants' many cooperative businesses told me about his experiences participating in the

collective construction of Can Batlló and declared that “building together is the most democratic thing we do.”

I began asking residents of Sants: What makes Can Batlló an exciting location from which to stake out a different world? How can you sense that it offers a way of doing politics and making democracy that is different from what happens in nearby activist spaces?

The answer that has stayed with me was offered by Mercè, a local activist who I had first met in a park at a roundtable discussion about Sants workers’ mobilizations in the 1920s and 1930s. One afternoon I joined Mercè at Can Batlló to help her build a rope barrier she had designed. There was a dangerous-looking unguarded drop of about four feet between the street that led from the main entrance to the warehouse complexes and an adjacent playground, and Mercè was worried that someone might fall. So she had gone to the hardware store to purchase some rope, hoping that she would be reimbursed later. Her spontaneous contribution of time and materials was simply a means of solving a problem she saw. As we worked, passers-by asked what we were doing and other users of Can Batlló gave us advice and encouragement. The security guard stationed at the main entrance, who was paid by the city government to keep an eye on things inside the complex, became particularly interested in what we were doing. He did not have much to do in the early afternoon lull. Several times, the security guard left his gatehouse for many minutes at a time in order to teach us new rope knotting techniques that he thought would be more effective for the work we were trying to do.

As we worked, Mercè explained to me that when the residents of Sants had first entered Can Batlló, they were unused to having a space of their own and therefore had no

plan for what Can Batlló should be or for how to arrive at any particular vision. Mercè asserted that the ideology underlying Can Batlló is the need to build something “for an ‘us’—a ‘commons,’ to use an academic phrase.” The reason Can Batlló had turned out the way it had, she claimed, was because making the space open to whatever people wanted it to become had in turn transformed Can Batlló into a place capable of receiving whatever people felt moved to bring to and build in it.

Mercè’s explanation of how our informal building activity would become part of a collective political project conveys something of what it felt like, at that time, to bring any idea or building material to Can Batlló and see it transformed into a means of caring for one’s neighbors. Looking back at my field notes from the summer of 2013, I notice that people often turned to their experiences with collective construction to illustrate why Can Batlló offered a different way of doing politics. In particular people frequently foregrounded their experiences of working with LaCol, the architecture studio that had facilitated a series of participatory design workshops at Can Batlló, as moments when they began to more concretely imagine what Can Batlló could become.

City-Making as Democracy and Nationhood

In Barcelona, questions regarding democracy, citizenship, participation, and the governance and physical form of the city have long been entwined. There is a wealth of scholarship in Catalan, Spanish, and English that tackles these intersections, particularly in the context of the Barcelona Model, the Second Republic, and the Civil War (Ealham 2010; Delgado 2007; Balibrea 2001; Blakeley 2004, 2010; Fabre and Huertas 2000). In this brief overview, I emphasize some inflection points in the

relationship between planning and citizenship practices that I believe are less commonly discussed.

Truncated Visions of a Different Barcelona

During the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939), material interventions in the city became a means of reproducing new democratic subjectivities. 1931's municipal elections were widely considered "a plebiscite on the future form of the Spanish state" (DiGiacomo 1987, 162) and after overwhelming victories by pro-republican parties in Madrid, Barcelona, and other major victories, the Second Spanish Republic was created (Ealham 2010). The newly elected mayor of Barcelona, Francesc Màcia, promised the electorate that Barcelona would become a garden city, that the working classes would have access to *la caseta i l'hortet* (the cottage and the kitchen garden) and that Barcelona would become "a democratic republican city" (Ealham 2010, 57; DiGiacomo 1987). These campaign promises amount to "a vision of a free nation based on the values of a free peasantry, a modern nation whose dignity would emerge out of the personal dignity of its citizens" (DiGiacomo 1987, 163). The city of Barcelona was the vehicle by which citizens' newfound economic and political dignity would be transformed into the foundation for a free nation. More concretely, taken on its own, *la caseta i l'hortet* was "a promise of material prosperity" to a citizenry that had experienced a succession of economic crises over the course of the 20th century (DiGiacomo 1987, 163). But combined with Màcia's other campaign promises, a scalar logic emerges where cultivating one's surroundings is a means of cultivating one's political positionality. *La caseta i l'hortet* imagines economic self-sufficiency, but it

grounds this self-sufficiency in an orderly individualistic world of neatly kept houses, each with its own garden. It is only through its integration with the urban plan for a garden city that the property-centered do-it-yourself ethos of *la caseta i l'hortet* becomes collective and shared—and therefore not just reconcilable with but foundational to a democratic republican city.

The decades-long dictatorship (from 1939-1975) that followed the Civil War and the end of the Second Republic brought with it a closing-off of public spaces for political action. Citizens were unable “to construct collective identity through situated and shared practices of public participation (citizenship, class struggle, etc.)” (Narotzky and Smith 2002, 209); only private spaces were free spaces. Strict laws against public assembly and speaking Catalan in public changed not only what was politically possible in Barcelona, but also its residents’ everyday experiences of urban sociality. Barcelona suffered extreme economic deprivation and political repression under the Franco dictatorship. Franco saw Barcelona as a key component of “*la anti-España*” because it was a Republican stronghold during the Civil War and because Franco believed that Catalan nationalism posed a threat to the National-Catholic model of social relations and government he had imposed after 1939 (McNeill 1999, 58). Donald McNeill observes that “as the city of three sins [regional identity, worker-driven politics, and anti-Catholic, anti-monarchy leanings], the repression taken out on Barcelona was fierce, enough to forge lasting memories which still inform the political culture of the city” (1999, 58). During the decades of the dictatorship, mayors of Barcelona (who depended on the central state for the security of their positions) neglected to provide either basic social services or planning policies that might have helped residents meet

their basic economic needs—all this in large part because of “Franco's distaste for the ‘enemy’ Catalan” (G. McDonogh 1991, 44; McNeill 1999).

This neglect extended into the urban planning arena, where the City Council allowed high levels of real estate speculation and the rapid densification of the city through new construction to go unregulated for decades (Carreras i Verdaguer 1993; Fabre and Huertas 2000; Montaner et al. 2013). The overcrowding and pollution that resulted from this unchecked development transformed parks, public land use, and the construction of infrastructure into “genuine objectives of the urban struggle” in Barcelona (Solà-Morales 1986, 13 qtd. in McDonogh 1991, 55;)—not just for their own sake, but also as a way of fighting back against the dictatorship (Carreras i Verdaguer 1993; McNeill 1999). Residents’ frustrations with the Barcelona’s low quality of life were “compounded by the lack of democratic accountability in the planning process” (McNeill 1999, 116), which made it impossible for them to voice their concerns.

Recovering a Democratic Tradition

The final years of the Francoist regime saw neighborhood associations emerge across Spain “as para-political organizations in the absence of authorized parties” (G. McDonogh 1991, 41; Castells 1983; McNeill 1999; Blakeley 2005). These organizations debated urban problems and contested the solutions imposed by Francoist governments, but tended to limit their protest to concrete questions concerning the physical spaces of the city (McNeill 1999). Sants’s neighborhood association, which was one of the city’s strongest and most influential neighborhood associations, took the city-wide neighborhood movement “beyond its initial preoccupation with concrete

issues such as the lack of public space or the threat posed by road-building, to the more pressing demands for freedom and resistance to the dictatorship of the middle of the decade” (McNeill 1999, 24). Pamela Radcliff argues that neighborhood associations constituted a space in which activists could create habits of democratic participation and move beyond their own private interests to make horizontal ties (2011). In Barcelona, urban protests and neighborhood-based activism dogged the Francoist City Council during the final years of the dictatorship (Blakeley 2005). As a result of this advocacy, in 1976 Barcelona’s City Council approved a General Metropolitan Plan that sought to end speculation and to carry out planning in the public interest. Barcelona was the only city in Spain where public interest-oriented planning predated the transition to democracy (Calavita and Ferrer 2000).

Immediately after Franco’s death, mass public demonstrations by neighborhood associations, trade unions, and other civil society groups exerted pressure toward democratization (Maravall 1982; Sánchez León 2011). In Barcelona, neighborhood associations were instrumental to the opening-up of democratic contestation to citizens who were not privy to the elite pact-making that dominated Spain’s managed transition to democracy. The FAVB (*Federació d’Associacions de Veïns de Barcelona*), the coordinating body for all the of city’s different neighborhood associations, was “one of the few organizations who could protest without fear of serious repression” and, by doing so after Franco’s death, it “successfully [showed] that the street could be reclaimed for democratic protest” (McNeill 1999, 121–22).

Despite democratic reforms that slowly moved Spain from dictatorship to democracy between 1975 and 1981 (this period of time is known in Spain as the

Transition),⁶ Francoist municipal councils remained in power until 1979, when democratic municipal elections were finally held—long after 1977’s general elections. At the beginning of the Transition, neighborhood associations had requested to be recognized by the new constitution and to participate directly in city councils, but they had been rebuffed (McNeill 1999, 118). In Barcelona, the socialist-dominated City Council, “in a conscious political move, involved neighbourhood associations in the design of its urban policy” (Mónica Degen and García 2012, 1024). Their inclusion was partly a capitulation to pressure from neighborhood associations, but it was also a way for the new municipal government to compensate for both budget deficits and deficits of expertise and democratic legitimacy that it had inherited from the Franco-era City Council (Blakeley 2005).

From the point of view of citizens and newly elected officials at the municipal and regional scales, specific organized steps needed to be taken toward the revival of the Catalan polity whose development as a democratic nation had been interrupted by the dictatorship (Fabre and Huertas 2000). The key aim of urban politics in Barcelona became “the recovery of the role of [Spain’s] second city” (Carreras i Verdaguer 1993, 473), including the city’s ability to function autonomously and to be intensely involved in international relations. Barcelona’s urban landscape has long been central to Catalan conceptions of nationalism and citizenship. But following the economic and political

⁶ Spain’s Transition is sometimes referred to as the Transition to Democracy. However, residents of Spain dispute whether the Transition—which was managed by Spain’s elite and did not include any sort of legal remedy or truth and reconciliation process for the crimes committed during the Civil War or during the Franco dictatorship—truly constituted a democratic transition. My interlocutors usually referred to this period of time as the Transition, so I follow their usage.

neglect Barcelona had experienced during the Franco regime, its revival became an important national project.

Shaping the Collective Sphere—Collectively?

Urban planning after the Transition was thus tasked not only with establishing democratic political system and training citizens in this tradition, but also with driving the resurgence of a Catalan polity and the renewal of Barcelona as an economic and cultural capital. Through the renewal of urban space, Barcelona's urban planning initiatives sought to transform people's understandings of citizenship and what it meant to participate in a democratic culture (Balibrea 2001; G. Martínez 2012; Montaner et al. 2013). Urban planning as practiced in Barcelona in the 1980s posited that projects for the collective creation of urban life should be accompanied by the equal distribution of urban services, and that both of these aims could be met by educating residents about "the potential of democratic action" (Bollens 2007, 238).

The reconstruction was not limited to remaking physical space; instead, planning interventions were designed as vehicles for wider-ranging discussions about the nature of Catalan nationalism and democracy. Most notable were the dozens of new neighborhood parks and neighborhood-based public spaces that the city built in the 1980s, which staked out a civically-oriented vision of Catalan nationalism (Bollens 2007). For instance, public spaces built in the years immediately following the Transition incorporated space for public meetings and were designed to accommodate different segments of the population's different ways of using space (Saurí, Parés, and Domene 2009). This focus on the construction of public spaces met civic groups'

demands for spaces for political expression, served the function of connecting spatially segregated working- and middle-class neighborhoods, and helped “to give shape to the collective sphere” (Balibrea 2001, 188; Mónica Degen and García 2012). Modifications to built space were supplemented with temporary interventions, like public festivals and cultural events, that opened neighborhoods up to residents of other parts of Barcelona (Degen and García 2012, 1025; see also Noyes 2003 on linkages between built space and festival politics in rural Catalonia).

However, the democratic effects of these planning policies were unevenly distributed. Barcelona’s planning envisioned a democratic sphere that is open to all and sought to materialize it through shared public spaces. But, as critics of the liberal public sphere have pointed out, the construction of a shared public sphere implicitly relies on a series of gendered, raced, and classed exclusions (Fraser 1990; Warner 2002; Jackson 2008; Morton 2014). Similarly, although Barcelona’s public spaces have been “rhetorically defined as open to all and therefore as a place of encounter and of the production of collective culture” (Balibrea 2001, 192), this openness relies on the exclusion of some people from collective encounters. Many of Barcelona’s public spaces are more open to tourists or to middle- or upper-class residents than they are to the working-class residents of the neighborhoods in which they are often built (Balibrea 2001; Mónica Degen and García 2012; Anguelovski 2013; G. McDonogh 1987). As a result, the construction of new public spaces and more ambitious neighborhood “renewal” programs often displace the original residents. Despite these patterned (one might say systematic) exclusions, the reconstruction of Barcelona has been widely

understood as a “democratic” project simply because it relied heavily on the creation of new public spaces (Monclús 2003; Benach 2004).

Simultaneously to the construction of new public spaces and their spatialization of exclusion,⁷ participation itself became an object of planning and policymaking as residents and the municipal government worked to rebuild their city along more democratic lines (Blakeley 2005). Planning and democracy were so closely entwined that “planning was probably *the* carrier of local democracy for the first 10 or 15 years after the end of Francoism” (Marshall 2004, 316, emphasis in original). Over time, planning and cultural projects helped to replace “a discourse of class...with one of municipal citizenship” (McNeill 2003, 83). They also helped residents of the city imagine themselves as part of “a common democratic culture” (Mónica Degen and García 2012, 1025). The collective identity, imagined community, and democratic citizenship promulgated by interventions in the built environment were specific to Barcelona, and tended not to connect the city to either the Catalan or the Spanish nation (Balibrea 2001, 197; Blakeley 2005).

Fighting Precarity with Conviviality: Urban Experiments After the Crisis

Spain’s post-2008 real estate crisis, coupled with what many of its citizens have characterized as a years- or decades-long crisis of democracy, has inspired efforts to re-think citizenship through the lens of urban life. Susana Narotzky and Gavin Smith argue that the history of Spanish politics has been characterized by elites’ efforts to generate

⁷ During this time period, new parks and plazas were built primarily in middle-class and wealthy neighborhoods. Working-class neighborhoods were more often the target of urban regeneration programs than of efforts to build new public spaces.

an atmosphere of crisis in order to force citizens to accept their preferred social, political, and economic arrangements (2006), One consequence of elite-dominated attempts to exert control by generating precarity, they claim, is that poor and working-class people feel alienated from public politics (Narotzky and Smith 2006, 7–8).

Perhaps because of this, in the most recent crisis, citizens have invested their hopes for eliminating precarity in spatially-oriented politics rather than in election- and party-dominated public politics. Exclusion and instability are not only a crisis, but also an opportunity to experiment and to build something new. For example, Alberto Corsín Jiménez's Madrid-based interlocutors approach their city as "a political process 'under construction,' which self-generates precisely because it has not yet been completed, because it inhabits a democratic limit or apocalypse" (2008, 322). The *okupa* movement, the 15-M movement that in 2011 occupied squares and other public spaces across Spain in order to build popular assemblies, the movement to resettle villages that were abandoned after the financial crisis, and a surging cooperative economy exemplify Spanish activists' interests in building new types of politics, experiences, and conviviality into urban spaces (G. Martínez 2012; M. a. Martínez 2014; Sabaté 2016; Hughes 2011; Flesher Fominaya 2015). These movements all work through built environments as a way to confront the crisis of more traditional forms of citizenship or politics and to move beyond these traditional formulations' apparent limits (Colau and Alemany 2012; Angelovski 2013; de la Peña 2013).

Jeffrey Juris and Geoffrey Pleyers argue that the practice of organizing "physical spaces ...as laboratories for developing alternative values and practices" has been developed specifically by youth activists (Juris and Pleyers 2009, 58), particularly those

with links to the alter-globalization movement. But De la Peña's study of activists' and architects' collaboration on the construction of semi-autonomous (*autogestionado*) spaces suggests that the recognition that built space not only is political, but also influences how people learn and choose to practice their politics, is now traveling outside of activist circles and into professional, public domains (2013). Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga's description of an interdisciplinary collaboration between anthropologists, architects, and urban designers that was inspired by the proposed demolition of a public housing project in Barcelona speaks to this emerging area of concern as well (2012).

An Epilogue for Urban Democracy?

In the past decade, the production of neighborly relations of conviviality and consensus, the transformation of neighborhoods into political spaces, and a re-making of neighbors as political actors have been shared political projects across many parts of Spain (Frekko 2009; Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2013b, 2013a). As Corsín Jiménez and Adolfo Estalella describe, the 15-M movement and the neighborhood-based assemblies that have continued to meet since 2011 have been central to this process, and have helped to reimagine citizenship as “an archival, an infrastructural, and a methodical practice of urban conviviality” (2013a, 170).

Yet the movement for Catalan independence, which unfolded contemporaneously with and shares many starting premises with post-crisis assembly-based politics, has sought to return to and reclaim a more traditionally political form of citizenship—one that is located in both the ballot box and the *castell* (human tower). Today, political

control of Barcelona's municipal government is a heated ground of contestation between Catalan nationalist and Spanish nationalist parties—as I write this in early June 2019 following municipal elections in May, either the ERC (*Esquerra Republicana Catalana*, a leftist Catalan nationalist party) or *Barcelona En Comú* (a leftist party with a “pro-referendum” position whose leader, current mayor Ada Colau, has stated that she opposes independence) might be able to form a municipal government, depending on how the coalition politics among the parties elected to City Council seats work out. Opinion journalists from both persuasions write about Barcelona as “the crown jewel” that either must be brought under, or must under no circumstances be permitted to come, under Catalan nationalist control.

Have residents of Barcelona set aside their democratic visions for planning, redistribution, and non-expert participation in technical domains in favor of a form of democracy where power can be exercised in more immediately satisfying ways? This is not a question I can answer with any certainty. But I would like to highlight a quirk of language that hints at why understanding contemporary Catalan nationalism requires that we attend very carefully to the nature of the relationship between place-making, democracy and participation. The Spanish government has never agreed to a legal referendum on the question of Catalan independence. The first referendum on Catalan independence, in 2014, was blocked from taking place by the Spanish Supreme Court. In response, the government of Catalonia organized a *procés participatiu* (participatory process) that asked the same question the referendum would have asked and was held on the date for which the referendum was originally scheduled. A *procés participatiu* is also the banner under which city residents' participation in urban planning is

organized—although, as I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 2, these deliberative encounters look nothing like, and indeed sometimes explicitly disavow, voting. Of course, the availability of “participatory process” as a legal category that allows for collective political engagement partly explains why it appeared in this context. But coupled with demands for a *dret a decidir* (right to decide) and the colloquial description of Catalonia’s fits-and-starts journey toward independence as *el procés* (the process), the participatory process that was transparently a referendum starts to look a bit different. If democracy is a process rather than a singular vote, and if what is central to the life of a democracy is the right to decide rather than the decision itself, then what does it mean for democracy to be participatory? At the very least, it means that if Barcelona does become the “crown jewel” of the Catalan independence movement, it will not do so through electoral politics alone.

Making Our Own Lives? Architecture and Self-Determination

If architecture and urban planning have over time become more and more committed to formalizing residents’ roles as participants in design and building work, this is largely in recognition of the skills and expertise that residents bring to the drafting table. Yet architects’ efforts to incorporate public participation in design and construction are not uncomplicated. In the short term and at the immediate scale, residents who act as non-professional designers and builders create housing and public space that attends to the needs of their communities. But a somewhat wider perspective—one that looks beyond communities’ immediate needs and extrapolates short-term solutions into long-term trends—reveals that very often, public participation is used to spackle over the gaps where

states can no longer design nor build shared and domestic spaces that are adequate to their subjects' needs. The debate closely recalls numerous other debates about neoliberalism: if people are empowered to act despite and beyond the state, does this excuse the state from its responsibilities and therefore pare back the welfare state even further? And on the other hand, what are people supposed to do while they wait for a state that can no longer act to take action?

In 2016 one of architecture's highest prizes, the Pritzker Architecture Prize, was awarded to the Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena. Aravena is best known for creating the social housing "Do Tank" Elemental. Using both participatory design and "participative building" to work with community members, Elemental builds social housing projects where each house is "half of a good house": the house's structural walls and foundations; a staircase; a bathroom; electrical wiring; and a kitchen (Aravena Mori and Iacobelli 2013). Residents build the other half of the house themselves, and infrastructural services such as roads and sewage are paid for and provided by the Chilean government. In the citation that accompanied the announcement of Aravena's Pritzker Prize, the jury members wrote that by taking on roles beyond "the singular position of a designer...he gives the profession of architect a new dimension, which is necessary to respond to present demands and meet future challenges of the field" (The Pritzker Architecture Prize 2016b). In addition to the promise Aravena's approach to social housing offers in an increasingly disaster-prone future, the jury praised Aravena's "understanding of the importance of the aspirations of the inhabitants and their active participation and investment in a project" (The Pritzker Architecture Prize 2016b). Aravena's work has widely been interpreted as an innovative

contribution to the incremental housing tradition that can be traced back to MIT architect John F. C. Turner's *Housing by People* (1976).

The video announcing his Pritzker Prize begins with Aravena declaring, “the most simple verbs—sleeping, studying, eating, meeting, resting—those verbs, in the end, make our lives. Those verbs happen in places” (The Pritzker Architecture Prize 2016a)—thereby echoing Turner’s “Housing as a Verb”, which argued that housing should be understood not as a commodity but as a process (J. F. C. Turner 1972). Aravena’s work, like Turner’s and like other projects in the incremental housing tradition, is controversial because it seems to accept governments’ refusal or inability to provide adequate housing. Not only does this displace the responsibility for providing housing—which is a human right—onto under-resourced people; it also accepts a form of inequality where the wealthy live in houses that meet all standards while the poor make do in substandard or incomplete houses. The critique of Aravena’s work boils down to the following question: Why is it acceptable for the poor to have only half of a good house, instead of a whole house? Turner distilled his philosophical and political counterargument to this critique as follows:

If governments cannot, or will not, make up the difference...then why do they create these problems? Why is the common sense solution of allowing and encouraging people to make the best use of what they have treated as subversive nonsense by the technocratic and bureaucratic authorities?...Why, in other words, are the ‘problems’ so universally defined in terms of what people *ought* to have (in the view of the problem-staters) instead of in realistic terms of what people *could* have? (1972, 150–51, emphasis in original)

Turner’s work, which is rooted in anarchist political theory, perhaps provides a way out of the apparently binary choice between the welfare state and a hollow neoliberal state through the concept of autonomy (J. F. C. Turner 2018).

What people could have, in Turner's view, is not simply a better house. By building and designing for their own needs and from their own abilities, people who are usually put in the position of having things decided and provided (or not provided) on their behalf by bureaucrats and technocrats can also access autonomy and self-determination (see, for instance, Holston 1991). The "realistic terms of what people *could* have" include both a lack of material resources and a deeply resourceful collective capacity to sustain and provide for themselves (J. F. C. Turner 1972, 151).

In Barcelona as in Chile, experiments with collective construction and participatory architecture are thriving as the democratic welfare state fades.⁸ The fact that new and interesting forms of community-building are bubbling up where the tide of the welfare state is going out does not, of course, mean that the welfare state's collapse can easily be papered over—many people, particularly the most vulnerable, are experiencing great harm from cuts in every sector. But out of necessity as well as choice, gaps in service provision become free space for new types of building and governance projects, and residents who are without basic services begin to organize themselves not only to demand services from the state but also to care for themselves. As will become clear in my dissertation, in Barcelona participatory architecture and collective construction often emerge as a direct response to the city government's neglect of buildings, lots, and whole communities. But these practices are neither less meaningful nor less important to city residents because they fill a void created by the state's abandonment. In fact, residents often become

⁸ However, in Scandinavia, where some of participatory design's most classic examples and founding techniques originated, strong welfare states have cultivated participatory design. Thus, participatory design is not necessarily a substitute for the welfare state's role in urban planning and housing provision, but nor is participatory design's presence in and of itself evidence of a strong welfare state.

enthusiastic practitioners of participatory architecture and collective construction precisely because through these practices they are able to reclaim not only urban but also political, economic, and social terrain that the state has ceded.

In Barcelona, supporters of a still-emerging participatory architecture tradition claim that participatory architecture “empowers” people by recognizing their expert ability to make both their own surroundings and their relationships to governing institutions. Meanwhile Barcelona’s nationalist, democratic, and cooperative and anarchist political traditions have long recognized residents’ relationships to the material and spatial structures of their neighborhoods as resources for living differently and creating autonomy within unequal political structures. In an interrelated development, Barcelona’s municipal government often seeks to build bridges to grassroots architecture and construction projects. For optimists, including the grassroots activists who entered elected and appointed positions in the municipal government when Barcelona En Comú won the mayoralty in 2015, incorporating grassroots building projects into official government planning is a strategy for co-producing the common good and collaborating with civil society associations. For residents who have observed that grassroots struggles are often sapped of their strength if they work too closely with the city government, increased efforts to bring social movement actors into government spaces are threats of co-optation, no matter if well-intentioned or not.

From 2013-2017, when I conducted field research in Barcelona, it was not uncommon for city residents who were involved in self-organized, often assembly-based, grassroots place-making work to gradually move into closer contact with the municipal government. The specific buildings and lots that sheltered and motivated grassroots place-making

became intermediaries and mediating terms in new and often fraught alliances between residents and the city government. These strategic relationships were often provisional and neither legally nor socially guaranteed to last. And they were usually sharply circumscribed—the limits of the working relationship between residents and government officials often overlapped with the boundaries of the lot or building that they had come together to repair or redesign.

Residents' place-centered work with the city government could and did take a variety of forms—some of them unique adaptations to a unique context and others systematic government-sponsored efforts to bring residents into the design and management of public space. For instance, the neighborhood social center of Can Batlló is *autogestionat* but the municipal government owns the buildings, pays the utility bills, and insists that its own security be present on-site in addition to whatever security arrangements Can Batlló's users make for themselves. And at the La Borda housing cooperative, which is Barcelona's first experiment with the *cessió d'ús* (grant of use) model for public housing, the city's main contribution to the provision of housing is to provide the land on which the building is constructed at low or no cost.⁹ Barcelona issued a long-term lease of land to the cooperative as a collectivity; each cooperative member is guaranteed the use of their home for the rest of their life but cannot rent or sell it. But La Borda's construction was directly financed by investments from cooperative banks and down payments from the cooperative's residents, and residents used a participatory architecture process to co-design the building. While Can Batlló and La Borda began as unique experiments in creating new relationships

⁹ While this was Barcelona's first experiment with a public co-housing model based on the legal grant of land use to organized tenants, the model is not brand new. Denmark hosts 125,000 cooperative housing developments through a grant of use legal structure, while Uruguay is home to 20,000 such cooperatives.

between residents and the city government, they have each inspired imitator projects: in 2017 the city of Barcelona awarded vacant lots to five additional cooperative housing projects within the “grant of use” framework; while Can Batlló is more an inspiration than a model for other social centers, I often heard the phrase “we want to be like Can Batlló” in grassroots spaces in other parts of Barcelona.

In 2019, eight years after activists seeking to reclaim Can Batlló as a community space were first granted use of the site by the city government, some of the associations that are based there remain uneasy with the presence of “the state” at Can Batlló and seek to limit further state involvement in the social center. Some groups have a strict policy of rejecting any public funding or any funding that they can trace back to public funding. For instance, one of these groups allowed an organization that was located in another part of Sants to hold a workshop in the warehouse they operated at Can Batlló. The workshop had received state funding. Afterward, the workshop’s organizers offered the group at Can Batlló an honorarium of several hundred euros. Members of the Can Batlló-based group refused the honorarium, arguing that it came directly from the workshop’s state funding and that furthermore, they were not in the practice of “charging rent.” In another case, an organization that planned to apply for municipal grants applied to formally join Can Batlló and to organize activities at one of Can Batlló’s unused warehouses. At a contentious and sharply divided general assembly meeting, organizations that were suspicious of the new organization’s plan to seek public funding blocked its admission into Can Batlló.

Depending on who you asked, these strategies for managing Can Batlló’s relationship with city and regional governments were rooted either in an unreasonable pursuit of ideological purity or in a strategic effort to minimize the extent to which Can Batlló’s

continued existence will depend on fickle and control-seeking state funding. On the other side, activists and residents who sought out state funding and support were rarely motivated solely by the need for economic resources. Instead, they were pursuing the political project of “reclaiming the public” after years of cuts and austerity.

More systematic efforts to bring residents into new types of place-making relationships with publicly owned space include the *Pla BUIITS* (*Pla de Buits Urbans amb Implicació Territorial i Social*, or the Plan for Vacant Urban Lots with Territorial and Social Involvement), where grassroots organizations temporarily carry out their own projects in municipal-owned vacant lots. For instance, Espai Germanetes, a community garden, meeting, and event space, is co-administered through the *Pla BUIITS* by the Neighbors’ Association of the l’Esquerra de l’Eixample neighborhood and *Recreant Cruïlles* (Recreating Crossings), a grassroots organization that got its start during the 15-M movement. I will reproduce residents’ written statements about the purpose of Espai Germanetes at some length because they convey what is at stake for grassroots activists in the *autogestió* of new kinds of public spaces alongside the city government.

On its webpage in the “*Pla BUIITS*” section of the municipal government’s website, Espai Germanetes is described as “a meeting-place to dialogue about the neighborhood and its problems, and to build innovative solutions through innovative processes of active citizenship” (Ecologia n.d.). The description of the lot’s current use emphasizes that residents took over the lot’s management only after waiting for years for the municipal government to do something with the space:

The project consists of the elaboration of a plan for neighborly *autogestió* of a lot that was out of use for 12 years, waiting for the construction of municipal facilities and green spaces demanded by the citizenry. It is proposed as a temporary alternative for the organization of activities, in order to achieve

the reactivation of the lot and of the public space around it, where traffic calming measures are necessary. (Ecologia n.d.)

The space's administrators are very clear that they consider this use of the lot to be temporary and that they are still awaiting the public provision of services—but in the meantime, “active citizenship” practices can help solve some of the neighborhood's problems. While this description of Espai Germanetes highlights the government's failure to provide services, it does not mention gentrification nor present residents' seizure of public space as an end in itself. By contrast, the description of Espai Germanetes that appears on *Recreant Cruïlles'* website is far more explicit about activists' political goals for the space. In that description, Espai Germanetes “represents an opportunity to reappropriate urban public space and for a form of *autogestió* that is collective and non-mercantilist” (“Recreant Cruïlles” n.d.). In addition to pushing back against the continuous privatization of public space, the activists write, they want to “transcend the physical limits of Espai Germanetes to achieve a more humane urban planning, in a fledgling citizens' collective action that reclaims democratic improvements to urban problems, both physical and social—an exercise of the ‘right to the city’” (“Recreant Cruïlles” n.d.).

I first visited Espai Germanetes In October 2015. I had been invited there by Oriol, an architect and activist who had helped occupy the vacant lot that would become Espai Germanetes in 2011 after the 15-M movement left *Plaça Catalunya* to focus on neighborhood-based work. I knew Oriol through his work in a town outside Barcelona, where he was facilitating a publicly-funded participatory architecture workshop. Yet Oriol owed that job to his unpaid activist labor at Espai Germanetes. Because he no longer lived near Espai Germanetes, Oriol now traveled across the city several evenings each week and nearly every weekend in order to spend time there. He reassured me

that despite the economic pressures on the neighborhood, Espai Germanetes would be a success. “*Mientras resistamos, venceremos*” (while we resist, we will win). Oriol’s statement paraphrased the famous words of Juan Negrín, the final President of the Second Spanish Republic: *resistir es vencer* (to resist is to win). Clearly, both the space and the building project that was underway there mattered deeply. Espai Germanetes was a space of resistance and victory both despite and because of its connections to the public sector. And now, as Oriol took on freelance contracts in a still-precarious economy, he was carrying the participatory techniques for collective *autogestió* that he had honed at Espai Germanetes to other parts of Barcelona and its surrounding towns. If “being there” and working on empty lots were themselves practices of resistance that the resourceful environments of Barcelona made possible, then Oriol’s knowledge would not only travel through his own person and expertise. How, I wondered, could democratic relationships and collective resistance travel the city through its participatory design practices and its collectively built spaces?

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation moves, roughly speaking, from a sustained examination of participatory architecture in Chapters 1 and 2 to a closer investigation of collective construction in Chapters 3 and 4. I have tried to convey the most essential bits of the economic and political context in which all of these activities took place—as well as how residents made sense of the “big picture” on and within which they were acting—in Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 1 examines how broad questions about the nature of autonomy, democracy, and self-determination in Barcelona and Catalonia come to animate and perhaps be worked out in small-scale building projects. I suggest that the intimacy of collective construction and participatory architecture undergirds these activities' political potency. However, this poses a problem: if co-laboring on the city forges new relationships that seem to offer a means of reworking democratic relationships and making residents accountable to one another, then what happens when the bonds of co-laboring cannot be extended widely enough to make a difference?

In Chapter 2, I offer a closer look at the interactions and techniques of participatory architecture in order to examine how residents and facilitators experience and remediate inequality in individual participatory architecture meetings as well as over the longer lifetime of a participatory process. I demonstrate that residents and architects mobilize and reinterpret practices of "working together" to create more equal relationships between people involved in shared design labor.

Chapters 3 and 4 attend to the more immediate contexts of the neighborhood and the working group as locations from which residents made sense of their worlds in slightly different ways. Chapter 3 examines how the collective re-fashioning of empty lots and buildings becomes a means of contesting the cycles of abandonment and speculation that characterize capitalist place-making. I attend to the slippages between residents' and the government's understandings of what empty places are like and investigate the new practices that grow up in these gaps. I argue that by treating empty places as hollows that can shelter care work and convivial relationships, activists and architects foster new habits for interacting with empty places.

Chapter 4 investigates how residents and architects together develop the embodied skills necessary to mobilize their surroundings for alternative political and economic projects. Through a sustained discussion of educational eco-architecture workshops where architects teach residents how to build with local plants, I examine how responsive relationships between people and landscapes are learned and produced. Through their collective encounters with and reworkings of recalcitrant materials, participants fashion new futures both for these building materials and for their economic and political worlds.

My dissertation explores two interconnected practices for making democratic places and for making places democratically: participatory architecture and collective construction. Yet despite their interconnections—which I will discuss at greater length at the end of this overview—in the rest of the dissertation I have tried to distinguish between participatory architecture and collective construction (which I sometimes refer to as grassroots construction), or at least to be explicit about which practice is at issue in any particular interaction that I describe.

I maintain this distinction in part because my interlocutors also distinguished between the two practices. To activists and residents who I learned from and worked alongside in Barcelona, *construir* (to build) was an informal practice that required no special knowledge—one simply needed some building materials, a place to work, and time and patience. But *participar* (to participate) and *arquitectura* (architecture) both depended, in different ways, on expertise—architecture as opposed to building or *autogestió* required the presence of a trained architect, while participating required some familiarity with formal “participatory processes” or at the very least with assembly-based social movement organizing.

I have also found it valuable to maintain something of a conceptual distinction between participatory architecture and collective construction as a means of tracking the social and political qualities of various place-making projects. In addition to residents' distinctions between informal or vernacular practices and formal or expert practices, I have found the following dyads useful: self-management/facilitation, construction/design; grassroots/government-sponsored. These pairs are not intended to be binary oppositions—as should be clear from my discussion of grassroots place-making projects' engagements with city government, place-making allows for the creative recombination and accommodation of seemingly contradictory ways of being and becoming. Nor do I intend to suggest that participatory architecture and collective construction are stable arrangements that fix these qualities to particular forms of practice. Instead, I arrange dialogic relationships between participatory architecture and collective construction to examine how encounters and recombinations of these practices act as hinges through which philosophical, aesthetic, or moral differences might be, and sometimes are, reconciled in practice.

In collective construction, which overlaps with some elements of *autogestió*, people work together to build things within the context of a relatively informal arrangement. The building groups either consist of people who have pre-existing interpersonal relationships with one another, or of people who are part of the same association or assembly-based organization. Collective construction is self-managed; for instance, building plans are discussed at general assembly meetings and construction work is done on working days that multiple group members make a point of being present for. While collective construction often originates in relatively “horizontal” relationships between participants

and helps to reinforce these relationships of equality, creating equal relationships between people who are building together is not usually an explicit goal. Instead, collective construction work is geared toward solving specific problems and addressing material needs, and groups that do collective construction address the problem of making equality through other (usually not construction-based) activities.

Participatory architecture is a more formalized and planned activity. To begin with, participants may have pre-existing relationships with one another, or they may not. A facilitator or facilitators are explicitly tasked with moderating interactions between participants with different perspectives and different kinds of expertise so that certain participants do not overpower or dominate others. In itself, this is not so different from the common social movement practice of moderating and facilitating assemblies. But in participatory architecture, facilitators do not simply moderate participants' speech. They also formulate and lead activities where participants both do design and learn how to interact differently so that the design can be different. And finally, because participatory architecture involves producing plans or designs, facilitators are usually trained architects who draw up formal plans based on participants' contributions.

Participatory architecture and collective construction prioritize design and construction differently. Participatory architecture is explicitly, although not exclusively, oriented toward design: the goal of the vast majority of participatory architecture projects is to collaboratively create an architectural plan rather than to construct a building; during participatory architecture meetings, participants spend most of their time engaged in design work. Only sometimes do residents involved in participatory architecture end up participating in the construction of the structure they have designed. Most of the time, an

outside firm is hired to carry out construction work according to participants' design. Meanwhile in collective construction work, design tends to fade into the background. Design might be performed concurrently with construction as part of the work of building, or it might be a brief preliminary step to the more absorbing task of building. For instance, I attended one general assembly where someone proposed a redesign of the space we were in by making a line drawing on the back of a piece of printer paper. The placement of one feature was briefly debated and resolved some ten minutes later. It later turned out that we were unable to carry out these renovations ourselves because they required more technical interventions that would require an architects' supervision—but if we had been able to do this work as a collective construction process, it is likely that the work would have proceeded from this very basic design.

Collective construction is a very common technique for managing and improving grassroots urban spaces, but government-managed public space seldom makes use of collective construction. Because residents and activists are accustomed to relying on grassroots construction and because hiring architects is an added expense, many grassroots-run spaces do not often fund their own participatory architecture projects. However, it is not infrequent for an architect or team of architects to work collaboratively with residents' grassroots place-making projects out of a sense of solidarity, without billing for this work. Participatory architecture features more frequently in the design of government-run spaces, where it is incorporated alongside other expert and technocratic practices for making and managing the city.

Of course, sometimes users of a space rely on both participatory architecture and collective construction techniques to make improvements to the space or solve problems.

For instance, at Can Batlló the architecture firm LaCol facilitated a participatory architecture process in which neighborhood residents who were already involved in using and rebuilding the compound co-designed the central meeting-places that would be shared between all of Can Batlló's users, working groups, and associations. But to perform day-to-day repair and maintenance tasks such as installing an electric motor to raise and lower a metal shutter, resurfacing floors, and painting walls, Can Batlló's users engage in collective construction. Meanwhile, because the whole compound is owned by the city government, larger-scale construction projects such as installing an elevator can only be performed by an outside construction firm hired by the municipal government—a process that Can Batlló's users often complained was too drawn out.

And there are also architecture studios whose modes of practice bring elements of participatory architecture and collective construction together. For instance, the architecture studio Voltes facilitates public participatory workshops where participants learn how to collectively build temporary structures using river reeds. The workshops focus on collective construction and do not include a collective design component—the architects create the designs for the temporary structures in-studio using specialized software. Yet a great deal of informal design work takes place in public workshops as participants and architects alike experiment with new building materials from one workshop to the next. Furthermore, even though the dominant mode of activity is construction-focused and not design-focused, architects play an active role as facilitators of the workshops—instead of leaving participants to manage their relationships to one another and to the construction process. The architects work to ensure the educational component of the workshops not only trains participants to do eco-architecture with an unorthodox building material, but

also fosters participants' critical awareness of their environmental surround and of their working relationships with other participants.

But the most fascinating recombinations of participatory architecture and collective construction occur when residents of Barcelona move between different parts of the city, instead of in self-contained places or activities. Barcelona swirls with experiments that use architectural practices to create a new politics, and interventions that disrupt architecture's traditional economic and aesthetic alignments by bringing questions of politics into the framework of design. To be active in even a small corner of this experimental scene is to come into contact with a variety of place-making and design practices, each with their own political valences and social and spatial affiliations. A story of an encounter with interlocutors new and old:

In Gràcia, I ran into a fellow Fulbright scholar as he and other members of Food Not Bombs were wrapping up a meeting. One of the other members was a young architect who had recently returned from working abroad (when she graduated a few years earlier, she had had to leave the country to find employment—but now, she felt more optimistic about her chances of finding work). We went together to a workshop at her former architecture school in Sant Cugat del Vallès, where she introduced me to a friend who was teaching eco-architecture workshops at an *Aula Ambiental* (a municipal-funded environmental classroom) in Vallcarca. I signed up for emails from the workshop series, and a few weeks later I attended one of these workshops (taught by the architects from the Voltes studio with whom I would later develop a fruitful working relationship). Although I had not known their plans in advance, I ran into both architects from the university workshop at this workshop. At the workshop I also met two women whose interest in the topic had

been inspired by their work together in the communal garden of Can Batlló. After meeting one another at a workshop on the opposite side of the city, it seemed like our paths began to cross constantly at Can Batlló. Later, I would learn that architects from Voltes often crossed the city to attend events at Can Batlló; and in 2017 they began a project to build an outdoor structure at Can Batlló.

Experiments at the intersection of design and political action are not limited to Barcelona but are instead part of international circuits that come to matter in unexpected ways. Two more encounters:

1. One night while I was at Can Batlló having a drink with a friend, another user of Can Batlló came over to our table, somewhat concerned. These visitors from the U.S., he said, gesturing, had come for a tour. But the English speaker who was supposed to guide them was not going to be able to give the tour after all. My friend and I gave the tour together; he acted as primary guide and I translated. The visitors were members of Cooperation Jackson, which some six months later would help elect Chokwe Antar Lumumba as mayor of Jackson, MS—one of the earliest electoral bright spots for the U.S.-based left in 2017. Shortly after Lumumba's election, Jackson joined the Fearless Cities Network—a global municipalist movement for radical democracy whose first summit took place in Barcelona in the summer of 2017.

2. In 2018 Catalonia was one of two nations featured at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. There, I met a young expert in dry stone masonry who had been flown in from rural Catalonia to demonstrate this vernacular Catalan construction technique. As we talked, we discovered that one of his friends from the scouting troop in the village where he

had grown up worked as an architect at one of the participatory architecture firms with which I had conducted fieldwork.

Although all these experiments in architecture, city-making, and politics differ from one another, they share a common set of concerns and reference points. Participatory architecture and collective construction are connected through the life experiences of the people—residents and architects alike—who practice them. These domains of activity continuously inform one another despite their seemingly divided institutional settings, approaches to expertise, and proximity to formal or vernacular design. They do so not only conceptually, but also through how practitioners make sense of their own experiences. And practitioners' experiences and itineraries bring together not only disparate architectural practices, but also learning, cultivating friendships, drinking, and dancing—along with the economic and political worlds on which these practices seek to gain purchase. Participatory architecture and collective construction are carefully designed interventions, but they are also sites of joyful encounters that move practitioners toward the pursuit of a world where the political and material facets of lived experience are coterminous.

CHAPTER 1

ASSEMBLING DIFFERENCE

To do anthropology is to always be anxious about getting things wrong. It is not just by making mistakes, but rather by anxiously repairing our mistakes, that anthropologists acculturate ourselves into unfamiliar repertoires of speech, thought, and action. The discipline's re-orientation toward questions of representation has been motivated in part by our intimate awareness of the gap between what is knowable and what is speakable—as well as by how power reproduces itself in the exchanges between those who know and those who speak. While conducting dissertation fieldwork in Barcelona, I was especially anxious about the danger of getting things wrong by focusing too microscopically on those topics that I had been awarded research funding to investigate. If to someone with a hammer everything looks like a nail, then to an anthropologist with a “research design,” every experience looks like evidence.

After about a year of field research, I learned how feminist architects enlisted hammers and their users as a strategy for redistributing power within collective construction settings. In educational construction workshops, Júlia explained to me, it is easy to identify over-eager participants, usually male, who want more than anything to use manly-looking construction tools. But of course, in these educational workshops it is important for all the participants to be able to share and use tools and, in doing so, learn new skills. So Júlia and her colleagues pull out hammers and small saws early on in a workshop, and inevitably a handful of men surge forward, offer to complete the tasks that involve these tools, and are

given free rein to do so. Only then do the architects reach back into their tote bags and pull out the power tools. These are given to the remaining participants, usually disproportionately women, who had hung back at first.

By beginning this chapter by discussing an event that does not fall squarely within the confines of either grassroots collective construction nor formally facilitated participatory architecture, I seek to highlight a form of constructive political sociality that was illuminating to me precisely because it had for a long time hung back beyond my noticing. I hope to get things a little bit less wrong by acknowledging the wide world of political activity beyond the realm of architectural interventions into urban politics and experiments with territorial autonomy. And yet, I fear that by describing a form of political activity that was emotionally compelling to me, I will end up repeating the old anthropological trick of turning complex experiences into evidence that I can bash my hammer into. I hold this scene out, then, not to imply that it is commensurable with the forms of meaning-making and community-building that I explore elsewhere in the dissertation—but rather to introduce my readers to political activism in Barcelona by sharing with them a moment of unplanned-for illumination that helped me make sense of my research-oriented activities precisely because it had hung back, just beyond the scope of my carefully constructed inquiries. My work examines the range of conditions within which democratic politics, participation, design, and building all unfold—and these conditions span and scale almost infinitely.

In March of 2016, I accompanied Marina, who I volunteered with at the Center for the Documentation of Social Movements, to a demonstration against a new E.U. policy which sought to “fix” the refugee crisis by sending migrants who entered Greece through Turkey

back to Turkey. After several decades of living abroad in another part of the E.U., Marina had recently returned to Sants. But upon returning to the neighborhood where she had grown up, Marina was frustrated at what she saw as a lack of concern or urgency regarding the refugee crisis. She pointed out that even in Barcelona’s activist community, refugees were an object of pity and despair but very little in the way of real activism—a sharp contrast with how activists in the country where she had lived for decades were then approaching the refugee crisis. This demonstration, Marina hoped, would be a turning point or at the very least a way to do something.

About 15,000 protestors (according to organizers’ estimates) carried signs demanding “*Prou Racisme*” (“Stop Racism”), #RefugeesWelcome, “*Vies Segures*” (“Safe Routes”), and “*Puigdemont, Colau: volem els refugiats aquí i ara!*” (“Puigdemont [the President of the Government of Catalonia], Colau [the Mayor of Barcelona]: we want refugees here and now!”). The protest, which had been convened by the platform *Unitat contra el feixisme i el racisme* (Unity Against Fascism and Racism), was well-attended by politicians from many of Catalonia’s political parties. Delegations from the CUP, ERC, and PSC parties marched alongside protestors.¹⁰ Leaders of the Catalan nationalist movement—all of whom are now imprisoned—also participated in the demonstration: both Jordi Turull, president of the Junts pel Si political coalition in the Catalan Parliament, and Jordi Cuixart, the president of the Catalan civil society organization Òmnium Cultural, attended the protest; Carme Forcadell, President of the Parliament of Catalonia, did not attend but issued a statement in support of the demonstration. Turull offered that “people should feel ashamed about what’s

¹⁰ These are all parties on the left side of the political spectrum. The CUP (the Candidacy for Popular Unity) and ERC (Catalan Republican Left) parties favor Catalan independence, while the PSC (Socialist Party of Catalonia—a regional party affiliated with PSOE) does not.

happening, that they're putting obstacles to solidarity in our way." Meanwhile Alfred Bosch, municipal leader of the ERC, stated that "It's a shame that the European governments are washing their hands of the tragedy of the refugees. In Catalonia, we want to be in solidarity." The refugee crisis had become a point of conflict between the Spanish government and the governments of Catalonia and Barcelona because under Mariano Rajoy, who was at that time the Prime Minister, Spain had committed to receiving far fewer refugees than other large E.U. countries. Meanwhile the governments of Barcelona and Catalonia asserted that both the city and the region could successfully welcome larger numbers of refugees. Politicians were so well-represented at the demonstration that Marina made a game of spotting them and pointing them out to me. After we marched from the *Estació de França* train station to the beach in the Barceloneta neighborhood, speakers took the stage to highlight the plight of refugees crossing the Mediterranean.

As the speeches were wrapping up and the sun began to set, demonstrators laid out a welcome mat on the beach. The wooden boardwalk of the *Passeig Marítim* separated the beach from the paved plaza where protestors had gathered. Tourists on Segways occasionally blundered off the boardwalk and into the demonstration. But for the most part, on that day city residents' advocacy on behalf of refugees made Barceloneta into a public space for a different kind of international traveler. On the beach, large baskets filled with red and gold fabric squares in the colors of the Catalan flag lay on the sand. Each protestor made their way to the beach in relative silence, took one square from the basket, and placed it on the sand. By sunset the patchworked red-and-gold carpet stretched from the shore of the Mediterranean to the boardwalk. Although no refugees emerged from the sea to walk this fabric path—more than 3,740 refugees drowned in the Mediterranean that

year as they tried to reach the E.U.—the route into the city that we had imagined that day was both practical (gently drying wet feet and protecting them from the sand) and political (only through direct action and mass mobilizations of residents would refugees be made welcome in Europe).

Beyond its symbolic uses as protest iconography, why did protestors find it important to collectively construct a welcome mat at a demonstration in favor of admitting more refugees? At the demonstration, protestors near me commented on, but did not directly contest, the welcome mat's relationship to Catalan nationalism. While some demonstrators felt proud of the association between Catalan nationalism and welcome for refugees [some protestors held placards that read "*tots som migrants*" ("we are all migrants")], others deplored what they saw as a co-optation of the pro-refugee movement by Catalan nationalists.

But I would like to direct our attention to the welcome mat's uncontested elements: its participatory and only lightly planned construction; and its assembly from small fragments by the hands of hundreds. Someone—neither I nor Marina knew who—had designed the joint assembly of the welcome mat as the demonstration's cathartic conclusion, and had made its construction possible by cutting out the fabric squares that were its constituent parts. Yet for participants who lined up to take squares from the baskets, it felt natural and meaningful to place the fabric on the sand so that together its squares formed a carpeted path. The welcome mat had many of the hallmarks of successful collective architecture: participants' main focus was on coordinating their actions to build something; and even though guidance, preparation, and design had made it possible for activists to participate in this building project, these elements receded into the background as participants'

enthusiasm, desires, and ideas took center stage. Through its affective and political dimensions, this shared building task acquired a life beyond its ephemeral appearance at a protest. Assembling the welcome mat was also an opportunity for Barcelona residents to strengthen their bonds as a community that fought on behalf of refugees' rights.

Of course, this ephemeral protest-oriented assembly—whose performance sits at the intersection of art, protest, and architecture—differs in significant ways from most participatory architecture projects that take place in Barcelona, and participants would not have categorized their activity as construction-oriented. But the welcome mat hints at both participatory construction's political potential and at its easy incorporation into Barcelona's political culture. Whether or not its practitioners acknowledge their activity as “participatory” or as a type of “architecture”, collective construction plays an important role in how Barcelona's diverse social movements come together and enact practical change.

In this chapter, I will explore how residents of Barcelona use collective construction to assemble and differentiate both social relations and material worlds and, in doing so, grapple with the political projects of autonomy and democracy. I begin by examining how residents' work on an *autogestionat* social center in the neighborhood of Sants became a location from which they encountered and contested neighborhood change. I analyze residents' engagements with their neighborhood's histories and former inhabitants as forms of alternative world-making. I also explore how relocating from other parts of Sants to the social center became important to grassroots activists' varied political projects.

Next, I investigate connections between place-making and the politics of autonomy in Barcelona and Catalonia. I argue that particularly in the wake of post-financial crisis social movements that have revitalized *Barcelonin* and Catalan traditions of participatory

democracy and of assembly-based community, participatory architecture affords new channels for transforming place-based relationships and place-making labor into political power. The recognition and recruitment of difference into participatory processes is foundational to this transformation because participation gains legitimacy as a form of democratic practice both from whom it includes and excludes as well as from how effectively it horizontalizes unequal relationships.

The final section of this chapter traces a participatory architecture project in a municipality on Barcelona's outskirts from a surprising participatory conclusion to a perhaps less-surprising betrayal of the principles of participatory governance. I examine the role design techniques played in giving residents a new repertoire both for political contestation and for saving the building whose reconstruction was being negotiated. Then, I investigate the aftermath of a major conflict in this construction project. I ask what we can learn about the nature of governance relationships from residents' insistence on returning government officials to participatory design space.

Convivial Presences: Contesting Neighborhood Change by Gathering Strength

Sants, the neighborhood where I lived while conducting my dissertation research, has since the 1990s been undergoing changes that feel dramatic to its long-term residents. In this, it is quite similar to many of Barcelona's other neighborhoods. Barcelona officially announced itself as a European tourism destination with the 1992 Olympics—although long-term observers of Barcelona's urban planning priorities have argued that the Olympics should not be understood as the start of a period of transition, but instead marks the culmination of a process of change that began in the 1980s (Mónica Degen and García 2012;

Marshall 2000). Long an industrial and economic engine of Spain and a magnet for internal migration, in the 1990s Barcelona became an international destination for tourists and for multinational corporations looking for real estate—both as investments and as Spanish or European corporate headquarters. Barcelona’s transformation was accelerated by Spain’s adoption of the euro in 1999, by the Spanish housing, construction and banking bubble from 1998-2008, and by the subsequent financial crisis, each of which facilitated the movement of foreign investment capital and foreign tourists into Barcelona.

While some parts of Sants retain their original inhabitants, buildings, and street layouts, the neighborhood increasingly plays host to new buildings that house hotels, hostels, AirBnB rental units for tourists and business travelers, and condominiums meant for a wealthier set of Barcelona residents. Even the way residents are able to see and circulate through the neighborhood has been altered through the construction of a high-speed train track that bisects the neighborhood. Subsequently an elevated park was built atop the train tracks; this change “reunited” the neighborhood by facilitating movement, but not sight, across the tracks.

The rate of neighborhood change remains quite high. For instance, in 2014, a friend named Pol who is a lifelong resident of La Bordeta (a neighborhood in the municipal district of Sants-Montjuïc that shares a border with Sants) asserted to me that the reason he had never been mugged was because he spent most of his time in Sants and La Bordeta, where he knew most people. Pol pointed out that he still lived down the street from his parents and that even though he was in his late twenties, he still regularly ran into friends from high school while walking around the neighborhood. Unlike in other parts of Barcelona, he said, there were few tourists in Sants. But in 2014 Pol was already beginning

to anticipate the wave of tourists that would soon engulf his neighborhood. The tourists he occasionally saw in Sants, Pol laughed, “have probably gotten lost” on their way from the high-speed train station to a luxury hotel. But he knew that this situation wouldn’t last for long. An *okupa* (squat) that he had once lived in had recently been turned into an expensive hotel after the *okupas* (squatters) who were still living there had been evicted. A few other *okupas* had also recently been turned into high-end buildings, and tourists were also renting apartments in Sants.

Two years later, in the summer of 2016, AirBnB had made substantial inroads into Sants. Tourists wheeling bags through working-class residential streets were by then a common sight, and neighborhood activists were organizing against AirBnB, speculative real estate investments, and both tourism-related and residential gentrification. That same year I started to hear enthusiastic comments about the *Sindicat de Llogaters* (Renters’ Union) as activists from around Barcelona began to organize themselves city-wide as renters, instead of on the basis of their neighborhood affiliations. And in 2018, at *carrer de la Constitució* 114 (Constitution Street) in La Bordeta, a developer broke ground on the construction of Barcelona’s first so-called *pisos rusc* (“hive floors”)—micro-apartments of 2.6 square meters that rent for 200 euros per month. The municipal government halted the construction, claiming that the developers’ permit was not sufficient for the types of structural renovations that were being performed. In response, the *Grup d’Habitatge de Sants* (Housing Group of Sants) staged a demonstration at the construction site. By marking out the dimensions of one of the *pisos rusc* in the middle of the street and offering “apartment tours” to passers-by, the demonstrators argued that all people should have the

right to live in dignity and that the *pisos rusc* did not offer housing dignity (on dignity as a site of social movement mobilization in post-crisis Spain, see Narotzky 2016).

Amidst these changes, residents, many of whose families have lived in Sants for multiple generations, lament the loss of the neighborhood's character and worry about being pushed out of the neighborhood by rising prices and decreasing quality of life. But in the aftermath of the financial crisis, Sants has also experienced a resurgence of cooperative economic projects and, through grassroots activism, gained two large historic architectural installations¹¹ as community-run public spaces. One of them, Can Batlló, is a mere two blocks away from where the *pisos rusc* are being built. The municipal government ceded control of Can Batlló to residents in the wake of the 2011 15-M movement, but this followed more than 30 years of demands from grassroots activists that something be done with the old industrial complex—whether its rehabilitation or its replacement by green space and parks. These gains of public and community space even in the face of skyrocketing rents and rising development are the result of intergenerational work to create neighborhood-based relationships and organized groups that support a variety of novel social, political, and economic projects. In Sants, activism has a track record of producing “wins” in the form of concessions from the municipal government. But Sants also experienced several days of intense and violent policing in 2014, following the eviction of a squatted house owned by the municipal government. Residents explained to me that the crisis has made new things possible in the neighborhood, but many also observed that the crisis has made the

¹¹ In June of 2011, less than a month after the 15-M movement occupied Barcelona's central plaza, the municipal government acceded to longstanding demands from grassroots activists in Sants for two unused municipal-owned buildings to be transformed into community-run public facilities. These were: the Lleialtat Santsenca, a large 19th-century building that had originally housed a consumers' cooperative; and Can Batlló.

possibility of life in Sants much more precarious. Things are in play and depend on what people will make of them.

Collective construction and participatory architecture are part of these struggles. For example, Can Batlló is described as *un espai veïnal i autogestionat*, or a neighborly and democratically self-managed space, by residents who spend time there as well as on signage at the entrance to the compound and on its website. When Can Batlló first came under residents' control architects from LaCol, which has its studio in Sants, led the community center's users in a series of participatory design and collective construction tasks. Through a collective construction process that lasted two years, they rebuilt a warehouse block and turned it into the most communal of Can Batlló's many shared spaces. This space, *Bloc 11* (Block Eleven), contains a library, an auditorium, a bar, a rock-climbing gym, and many multi-use rooms. *Bloc 11* is the heart of Can Batlló—where general assemblies are held every month, but also where friends meet up with one another and where hundreds of Can Batlló's users gather each June 11, the community center's anniversary, to toast their successes.

One hot and humid evening in the summer of 2016, other volunteers at Can Batlló's *Centre de Documentació de Moviments Socials* (the Center for the Documentation of Social Movements, which I will refer to throughout this text as the Archive) and I ended our work shift early and went to the bar. We had been working for several hours in our warehouse, which the archivists had themselves turned into a functional archive through a year of work on everything from basic cleaning to electrical wiring to painting. A three-minute walk led us to the bar and then to an unoccupied patch of brick alley where we could drink our beers undisturbed. The bar and the passageway both buzzed with activity. Children and dogs

darted among the people clustered outside, receiving snacks and caresses from strangers. As the sun began to set, the scene became idyllic.

In other parts of Sants, even being at a bar is effortful. At Can Batlló, we were able to rest after a tiring day because we were able to sit still there; in other parts of Sants, drinking often requires being in motion. Drinking outdoors in public is illegal in Barcelona unless you are on a *terrassa* (literally a “terrace,” but in practice a paved outdoor space furnished with tables and chairs; in Barcelona *terrassas* are often segments of public *plaças* that have been roped off for exclusive use by restaurants that are located on the four street fronts that surround the *plaza*) owned by a restaurant.¹² My Catalan friends often circumvented the law by buying 50-cent cans of beer at convenience stores, and then taking these drinks to parks or the public benches at *plaças*. Usually, this kind of “civil disobedience” involved moving from one part of a *plaza* to another if the proprietor of a restaurant became worried that we were too close to that restaurant’s *terrassa*, or alternatively walking through parks as we drank. Drinking in public “legally” is far more expensive: 2 euros for a small glass of beer or up to 10 euros for a cocktail; there might be a 5-10% “terrace fee” on top of that. Very often, even after deciding to spend more to drink at a *terrassa*, we would find that all of the tables at *terrassas* were already occupied (by locals, but usually also by a fair number of tourists) and our only option was to crowd into a bar without outdoor access. In practice, drinking in public requires constant movement.

¹² This law is very unevenly enforced. Tourists, my friends claimed, were never told not to drink in public; Catalan people were often simply told to throw away or finish their beers; and Latin American and African immigrants were the most likely to be fined or confronted by the police in an adversarial way. One friend theorized that the flexible enforcement of the law has to do with managing the anger that residents of post-crisis Barcelona feel: if the city can create a situation where unemployed people can still afford to have a drink with their friends, then this makes the day-to-day effects of economic malaise less severe and thereby contains some of the anger city residents feel about their precarious economic situations.

But at Can Batlló we were at ease. Marina mused,

This is exactly what this neighborhood would have been like before the Civil War: people drinking near the workshops and warehouses after finishing their work for the day. Over there, past that street, my father says there would have been only farmland, but here it would have been full of workers relaxing while drinking a beer.

“It’s true,” Mònica agreed. “The same kinds of people would have been here, doing the types of things that we do.”

To me, our activity felt utterly innocuous, and nothing about the social or spatial situation suggested a historical connection. But Marina and Mònica knew the history of workers’ movements in Barcelona and working-class people in Sants intimately—not just through school and books but also through their families and community. Sants, and Can Batlló in particular, had played host to anarchist political organizers and trade unionists along with feminist activists and production and consumer cooperatives. To Marina and Mònica this history was sensible in our built environment, and therefore repeatable.

After all of the labor and effort that we daily put into making the archive and maintaining Can Batlló, it was the simple act of drinking beers and hanging out in the street that finally brought us close to the complex’s history as a neighborhood node for working-class organizing. The intimacy of what we were doing with strangers and acquaintances allowed us to share a similar convivial intimacy with people who had stood there 80 years ago. No one would have said we were like those ancestors had we been walking down the street instead of sitting still and drinking. Our conviviality created a temporary—but real and reproducible—connection to Can Batlló’s historical occupants and, through them, the historically significant activities that were carried out there. It was our presence—the act of

being here together—that made us like the residents of Sants who had worked at Can Batlló back when it was a textile factory.

These intimate convivial activities were not just a connection to the working-class politics of Sants but were instead themselves a form of political action. If we were workers relaxing like workers at Can Batlló once did, and if those workers fought for a working-class future for the city, then our work at Can Batlló (though behind us now that the day was done) participated in this tradition by defending and creating working-class space and culture. But more than that, the simple act of being at Can Batlló and claiming this activity, this space, and this community for ourselves was already the first step in a politics of solidarity and trust.

I wondered: where could we take this next? What Can Batlló used to be like was an inspiration, but it was also a form of reassurance. What the residents of Sants and La Bordeta had possessed 80-90 years ago was also ours; and what they had achieved was still possible. This felt true to me in that moment although the question of whether the pre-Civil War project of a workers' democracy was still achievable was the subject of much debate among activists in Sants and La Bordeta.

After some thirty seconds of contented silence, Marina continued, “but if you go back up to the main street, so much has changed since the 90s! It isn’t the same neighborhood.” All of a sudden, I could hear anger, resentment, and frustration in her voice.

We came back to earth as we remembered that down the street, past Can Batlló’s gates, the neighborhood feels different even though it’s technically still the same neighborhood. We were not surrounded by farmland as our predecessors had been. This not-quite-the-same neighborhood that lay in wait for us down the street was not just different from Can

Batló, but different from what the neighborhood used to be when my interlocutors were coming into adulthood. It was different even from the specific streets on which we lived—multiple decades of development seem to exist in pockets of the same neighborhood. The hyper-developed blocks contrast so sharply with Can Batlló that they make it look abandoned. Remembering what was happening “back up...the main street” made me feel both angry and frightened. There was so much more to this fight; we would have more work to do than our Can Batlló ancestors did when there were only fields “out there.”

Moreover, we all shared a sneaking suspicion that the changes to the political and economic prospects of Can Batlló and to the neighborhood were interrelated. Grassroots activists had reclaimed Can Batlló; people in the 1990s could not have anticipated either the rehabilitation of the compound or the rebirth of Sants as the hotbed of cooperativism it had also been in the 1920s. But most people also had not seen the gentrification of Sants coming.¹³ These developments felt like two sides of the same coin: resurgent working-class culture over here; accelerating gentrification over there. The stakes were high and we didn’t know who would win, which part of the neighborhood would grow tendrils and overtake the other parts. But that night, we were unable to do much except notice the contradiction and what was at stake, make plans for the future, and savor our brief sensory link to the past of this place.

In Sants, the sense that traditional ways of living, working, and making relationships are under threat combines with certain (generally left-leaning) residents’ acute awareness of Sants’ working-class, unionist, anarchist character for several decades in the early 20th

¹³ Mònica actually did anticipate the changes Sants would undergo in the 2000s. She was arrested after climbing to the top of a piece of machinery used to build the high-speed rail line in Sants and refusing to come down.

century to generate a fear that changes to the neighborhood will erase, occlude, or block access to these histories. But at the same time, residents insisted that these histories suffuse Sants's buildings and streets even in the face of all these changes. Both the materiality of the neighborhood and the ongoing activist projects unfolding there (of cooperativist, anarchist, nationalist, or grassroots progressive character) provide some reassurance that the economic changes Sants is experiencing are not totalizing. They can be resisted or, at least, made livable. Moreover, these territorial links to activism both past and present function as a call to action that is consistently extensible and sensible in the neighborhood's geography. This geography primarily comprises political projects, economic relationships, and social practices. Buildings and streets might be containers and channels for these realities, but they matter in an indexical, archaeological kind of way—as evidence for, aftermath of, or prelude to a different kind of life, rather than for what they symbolize, prefigure, or explicitly permit.

The neighborhood's future as a shelter and vehicle for working-class autonomy is therefore at stake in residents' place-making work. Can Batlló, for instance, has become central to how many residents of Sants conceive of political possibility. Following the municipal government's designation of Can Batlló as a community space to be self-managed by residents in 2011, Can Batlló gradually became a magnet for other grassroots economic and political projects in Sants. It has incubated a number of new initiatives, including a food bank and a cooperative apartment building. The apartment building was a pilot program for the municipal government's efforts to create more affordable housing by issuing long-term low-cost leases of publicly held land to groups of future residents who would themselves participate in the design and self-management of the building. It was

deliberately conceived of as a project that should be developed within the larger footprint of Can Batlló in order to take advantage of the social and political “synergies” or “economies of scale” generated by the presence of many cooperatives and social initiatives in the area.

In addition, grassroots initiatives based in other parts of Sants have uprooted themselves to move to Can Batlló, inspired by the social center’s vibrancy and a desire to create something larger than the sum of its parts. As the Can Batlló website explains, “we want to be thousands.” By 2013, 25 organizations were involved in co-managing Can Batlló, each hosting its own (often highly idiosyncratic) activities in a sector of the compound that has been specifically allocated to and refurbished by that group. That same year, the Archive began preparations to move to Can Batlló from a rented space on *carrer de l’Autonomia* (Autonomy Street) that it shared with a leftist newspaper, right next door to *La Ciutat Invisible*. The Archive’s volunteers expected the move to take two months, but it ended up taking two years. Coordinating the move required that members of the Archive attend innumerable meetings and negotiate conflicts (sometimes unsuccessfully) with other users of Can Batlló. After they had been assigned space in a warehouse,¹⁴ members of the Archive entered a months-long process of preparing to move in: they cleaned out the rat-infested warehouse; worked with members of Can Batlló’s architecture commission to make the space structurally sound; performed their own construction work; and scavenged furniture

¹⁴ This was actually the second space that the Archive was assigned by the commission at Can Batlló that bears responsibility for matching initiatives seeking to move into Can Batlló with available space. The first warehouse that the Archive was assigned turned out, when they visited it, to be in use by a small business that claimed to be paying rent to use the space. The commission concluded that the small business was not paying rent to the municipal government, but instead to someone who had misrepresented themselves to the tenant as the owner of the warehouse. The commission determined that it was the municipal government’s responsibility to manage tenancy at Can Batlló. Neither the commission nor the Archive felt comfortable evicting the tenants from their workplace—whether directly or by bringing the case to the attention of the municipal government. Instead the commission assigned the Archive a different warehouse.

from other warehouses at Can Batlló to use in the Archive. Despite the longer-than-expected timeline, the Archive's members remained committed to the move. They were excited to gain more space, which would both allow them to add materials to the archive and permit visitors to more easily consult the archive. But just as importantly, the Archive's members hoped to "add strength" to the neighborhood project at Can Batlló by moving their own organization there. This dynamic continues. LaCol, the cooperative architecture studio that was instrumental in the two-year collective reconstruction of *Bloc 11*, began construction on the Coòpolis project at Can Batlló in 2018. Coòpolis will be a hybrid space: both an incubator of new cooperatives; and a "cooperative city" to which several of Sants' most prominent cooperative businesses expect to relocate from other parts of the neighborhood.

Can Batlló matters to this struggle to define and defend economic and political alternatives in Sants and La Bordeta because different neighborhood-based initiatives can come together at the factory complex to build relationships with one another. This space for relationship-building—which is a function of Can Batlló's large scale (8 hectares) as well as its highly collective nature as both a construction project and a political project—holds more attraction for neighborhood-based projects that relocate to Can Batlló than does the compound's offer of warehouse space for their individual organizations and businesses. Through Can Batlló's material affordances, its users come into contact with unexpected slivers of the lives of neighbors both past and present. These encounters make Can Batlló's differences with the neighborhood that surrounds it politically (rather than just economically or spatially) significant. It is precisely Can Batlló's long-term assembly from

multiple relationships and points of contact that makes it a powerful force for alternative community-, economy-, and politics-making in the neighborhoods of Sants and La Bordeta.

Place-Making, Autonomy, and Democracy

In Barcelona, political place-making is central both to the contestation of formal state structures and to the iteration of alternative forms of democratic sociality outside the state. In both formal and informal democratic projects, the question of autonomy is key. As Escobar defines it,

autonomía describes situations in which communities relate to each other and to others (say, the State) through structural coupling while preserving the community's autopoiesis. It tends to occur in communities that continue to have a place-based (not place-bound), relational foundation to their existence, such as indigenous and peasant communities, but it could apply to many other communities worldwide, including those in cities who are struggling to organize alternative life projects. (Escobar 2018, 173)

Barcelona residents who are involved in efforts to build cooperatives as complementary alternatives to capitalism as well as *autogestió* as a complementary alternative to state rule¹⁵ understand themselves to be creating autonomy in their everyday lives. One grassroots activist explained this to me as an effort to build “*el mundo en paralelo*” (a world in parallel); one of Barcelona’s many anarchist organizations organized a campaign around the slogan *portem un nou món als nostres cors* (we carry a new world in our hearts). In the political spheres of Barcelona and Catalonia, autonomy shows up at a number of different scales and with a vast array of meanings—some of these meanings resonate with Escobar’s

¹⁵ And indeed, as Escobar suggests, many of these residents seek to learn from autonomous projects in Latin America—particularly Mexico, Venezuela, and Argentina—, whose practitioners they consider to be political kindred.

definition, and others adhere more closely to the concept of territorial autonomy as defined in the Spanish constitution.

However, because the production of territorial autonomy involves both organized and everyday resistance, autonomy by necessity exceeds formal political channels and folds commitments to place into what at first glance appear as cultural or political claims. June Nash, for instance, has argued that as globalization and its concomitant deterritorializations gain force, residents' efforts to reassert their commitments to their culture are intimately bound up with autonomy projects that strengthen their attachments and claims to place (2004). These practices of autonomy are at once legibly political because they concern claims with and oppositions to the state, and grounded in everyday understandings of land, culture, and identity (Hoffmann 1999; J. Nash 2004; Christen 2006; Brown and Pickerill 2009).

Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain, with its own autonomous police force (the *Mossos d'Esquadra*) but without, for instance, the ability to determine its own policies for admitting refugees into Catalan territories—an ability that a fully independent Catalonia would possess. This meaning of autonomy is linked to diversity and difference because the 1978 Constitution's recognition of Spain's autonomous communities was an effort to grant limited power to Spain's many distinct nations as a means of maintaining a unified Spanish state during the upheavals of the Transition (Quiroga 2011).

Notwithstanding Catalan national imaginaries that link life in rural Catalonia to conceptions of Catalan identity, Barcelona has been foundational both to Catalan identity (especially since the *Renaixença*, which associated Catalan identity with the cosmopolitan, literary, and

artistic) and to Catalonia's economic power. Catalonia is responsible for 20% of Spain's GDP, and Barcelona generates the lion's share of that income.

Following the 1978 Constitution's recognition of the rights of 17 autonomous communities, including Catalonia, Barcelona's development as a cultural and economic center of both Spain and the E.U. has strengthened Catalonia's claims to not only political, but also cultural, autonomy. During the Transition, Barcelona's renewal as a tourism destination incorporated Catalan culture into the city's economic futures. This helped the city "to consolidate itself, politically and symbolically, as the capital of a Catalan nation without a state" (Balibrea 2001, 195–96). Planning and the politics of urban governance have been central to Barcelona's emergence as what Donald McNeill describes an imagined community that is capable of playing host to a broader territorial politics (2001). McNeill argues that these urban community-making and planning projects have generated a territorially-rooted politics of scale in which Barcelona can be a national capital city with international cachet despite the fact that it is not the capital of a nation-state (2001). Meanwhile, urban planning and place-making projects that seek to unify residents of Barcelona around their shared cosmopolitanism instead of around a shared ethnic culture have historically allowed Barcelona to function for Catalan nationalist leaders as a "cultural crucible" for a form of nationalism that is place-based instead of ethnic (Bollens 2007, 237). In particular, residents of both Barcelona and other parts of Catalonia have united over claims for resources, autonomy, and place-based rights, a nationalist strategy facilitated by the Spanish constitutional structure of regional autonomy. Both urban planning and the design of small-scale projects have allowed residents of the city to identify and pursue

these types of collective interests, thereby generating “the urban terrain upon which a multinational democracy has grown” (Bollens 2007, 238).

After the interrupted 2017 independence referendum and the Catalan Parliament’s subsequent efforts to declare independence from Spain, the possibility of a Catalan nation-state—instead of a Catalan nation without a state—is less remote than it once was. As a result, the status of contemporary Barcelona as the capital of a Catalan nation is now far more contested than these historical and retrospective accounts would suggest. In elections throughout the 2010s where some parties have run on pro-independence platforms, the municipality of Barcelona—which is home to fewer Catalan-born residents than many other parts of Catalonia—has tended to vote for pro-independence platforms in smaller numbers than other parts of Catalonia. However, in municipal elections on May 26, 2019, the pro-independence ERC party seems to have eked out a narrow win over Barcelona en Comú (a gap of about 4,800 votes). Catalan nationalists had particularly set their sights on a victory in Barcelona because Ada Colau, who has been mayor of Barcelona since 2015 and is a self-proclaimed “municipalist”, has declared her personal opposition to Catalan independence.

Notwithstanding Barcelona’s important role in Catalonia, from the perspective of the city of Barcelona the powers of the *Generalitat* (the government of the Catalan autonomous community) loom large. In particular, because Barcelona does not possess the same degree of legislative power as the *Generalitat*, during Colau’s mayoralty the city was blocked from taking a number of steps, such as implementing more stringent rent controls, that the Barcelona en Comú party asserted they would have taken if they had full legislative control. And Barcelona en Comú is one of the founders of Fearless Cities, which calls itself “the

global municipalist movement”. This network seeks to “stand...up to defend human rights, democracy and the common good” by “radicalizing democracy, feminizing politics and standing up to the far right” (“About Fearless Cities” n.d.). Its existence is at once evidence of the non-legislative avenues that municipal governments tactically exploit in order to effect the changes that urban voters demand, and a display of enthusiasm for the political potential of municipalist maneuvers that work in the interstitial yet central political and governance spaces that national and regional powers cannot suitably address. Moreover, the member parties of Fearless Cities, which include not only municipal governments but also municipal opposition parties and “countermunicipalist (platform working outside institutions)” organizations, make for a rich display of the varied and often ambivalent relationships that leftist social movements have forged with the institutions of municipal governance around the world.

At the scale of the politics of everyday life, Barcelona has long been home to an autonomous political tradition. In the early 20th century residents’ place-making in peripheral neighborhoods became a means of organizing labor and anarchist mobilizations against a hostile government (Ealham 2010). And as I explored in the Introduction, neighborhood associations’ mobilizations were central both in bringing about the Transition and in the production of public space throughout the 1980s (Radcliff 2011; Blakeley 2004; McNeill 1999). Because the distribution of people and injustices in urban space is political, Barcelona residents’ insistence on self-construction and autonomy is also a way of resisting place-based marginality (Anguelovski 2013).

All of these currents of autonomy share—whether out of an ideological commitment or practical necessity—an interest in the question of how to organize democracy beyond

formal political institutions and electoral channels, both as a means of creating political belonging and as a collective strategy for achieving practical objectives. At all of these scales, building and making have been offered up as solutions that addresses the twin democratic problems of making collective belonging from difference and overcoming collective action problems. For instance, under the leadership of Jordi Pujol, who was President of the *Generalitat* for a remarkable 23 years from 1980-2003, *fer país* (making a country) was the organizing principle of Catalan autonomy. For many years after the Transition, this was “the primary tool of Catalan nationalism without a state...This cultural and politically autonomous nationalism sought to create institutions to reproduce itself, to strengthen itself” (Giori 2015, 4013). And today the CUP (*Candidatura d’Unitat Popular*, the Popular Unity Candidacy), a leftist Catalan nationalist political party, uses the slogan *construïm república* (building a republic) to refer to its project of remaking the post-1978 democratic system.

At the scale of grassroots activism and everyday life, the *Associació de Veïns*, which have been a dominant force in municipal politics since the Transition, use place-making as a political tactic and routinely insist that municipal officials acknowledge the myriad connections between place and politics. The *Associació de Veïns de Montjuïc* recently sold a tongue-in-cheek t-shirt that read: KEEP CALM AND FEM BARRI (KEEP CALM AND WE MAKE NEIGHBORHOOD). And grassroots activists spoke to me in casual conversations about the role that individual community centers or cooperative apartment buildings play in the broader project of *construir ciutat* (building the city).

In 2011, the 15-M movement used the strategy of occupying plazas to develop an assembly-based form of horizontal democracy across Spain that several months later, after

being evicted by state police, left the plazas and began the work of making neighborhoods into horizontalizing political technologies (Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2013a). In Barcelona, this work was not so much a beginning as a continuation of historical experiments with anarchist place-making during the Civil War and democratic place-making during the Transition. As the 15-M movement's intensity faded in Barcelona, this work at the intersection of remaking the city and remaking political selves and collectivities began to focus on *autogestió*.¹⁶ Activists experimented with autonomy in individual lots, buildings, and eventually larger-scale projects like factory compounds or even villages (LaCol 2013; Hancox 2014). By bringing together building with horizontal direct democracy, these activists emphasized the role that shared participation plays in place-making's efficacy as a political practice. In experimentally autonomous or *autogestionat* spaces, they imagined and enacted how politics, economy, social life, and democracy might be otherwise than they appear to be in the neighborhoods and cities that surrounded these sites of experimentation.

Participatory architecture is, among other things, a more formalized effort to transform relationships that revolve around place-based contestation into political power, and to make the shared labor of place-making into a form of democratic conviviality. In Barcelona participatory architecture, along with other innovative modifications to established government-sponsored techniques of participatory governance, sits at an uneasy intersection between governmental institutions' formal democratic channels and social movements' practices of direct democracy. On one hand, Barcelona has had a plethora of

¹⁶ From the perspective of activists who had already been politically active in Barcelona throughout the 1990s and 2000s, this post-15-M shift was not a new focus but rather a return to the work that had preceded, and in their perspective made possible, the 15-M movement (see also Flesher Fominaya 2014).

formally regulated practices for incorporating residents' participation into government decision-making at the municipal scale since 1986 (Blakeley 2005). On the other hand, from 2015-2017 many of Barcelona's residents—distanced from these institutional forms of participation both by the expertise and time that mastering and fully participating in them requires, and by the *Associacions de Veïns*' domination of these institutional participatory mechanisms—, experienced “participatory democracy” as a relatively new feature of the political landscape. These residents located the rise of participatory democracy within the assembly-based 15-M movement and attributed its newfound prominence to the generally left-leaning political parties, such as Barcelona en Comú and the CUP, that took up the mantle of participatory democracy following the 15-M movement.

For instance, Laia, who I met at a participatory architecture workshop in the Ciutat Vella district, first became involved in activism during the 15-M movement. This was her first participatory process, and she saw it as “a seed. It's veryyy is, they're doing it. It's beginning.” Laia had been vocal in demanding that the municipal government implement a participatory process despite her own lack of firsthand experience with them. She explained that she had supported the demand for a participatory process because “there are people there [in her neighborhood-based activist group] who had a clear idea that a participatory process was necessary...People who are more used to it than I am—I haven't been very much a part of social activism in my life.” For Laia, participation was linked with the “activist world” and with the change of government to Barcelona en Com. In other words, she associated participation primarily with social movement assemblies. Laia was

not aware of participation's rather longer history of being incorporated in municipal governance in Barcelona.

Laia is correct to associate new kinds of participation with the “activist world” that arose in Barcelona following the financial crisis. Many of the social movements that arose in Barcelona's post-crisis political landscape, including not only the 15-M but also the PAH (*Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*, the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages) and the ANC (*Assemblea Nacional Catalana*, the Catalan National Assembly), structured encounters between activists through horizontal popular assemblies. For a number of architects who became experts in participatory architecture, the financial crisis was a turning point that encouraged them to think critically about architecture's historical relationship to capitalism while also requiring that they find work outside of the traditional architecture studio system. And as mayor, Ada Colau frequently highlighted her experiences as an activist in the PAH in her discussions of the municipal government's expanded commitment to participatory democracy. In their successful platform for the 2015 municipal elections, Barcelona en Comú campaigned on the promise of incorporating more participatory democracy into municipal governance. As a governing party, Barcelona en Comú threw serious resources into strengthening participatory democracy. For instance, their *Pla d'Actuació Municipal* (Municipal Action Plan) was elaborated through a participatory process that included a participatory web platform and over 200 public meetings.¹⁷

¹⁷ Upon entering City Hall, Barcelona's mayors are required to produce a Municipal Action Plan that lays out the planning agenda for the rest of their 4-year term.

Of course, these forms of innovation are only possible because of the legal and political space for participation that has long existed in Barcelona's governance structures. These long-standing engagements with participatory decision-making have made residents, facilitators (including architects and urban planners in the case of participatory decision-making that involves the use and development of urban space), and politicians into experts on participation. And thanks to Catalonia's strong associationist culture, many residents of Barcelona are experts at participating in assembly-based or horizontal modes of community-making outside of state structures (Weig 2015; Vaczi 2016).

Because new forms of participatory democracy introduced by social movements are encountering older forms of participation that were already part of the governance structure of Barcelona, participatory democracy (at least within formal governmental institutions) is not easily categorized as a straight-forward exercise in self-liberation, horizontalism, and prefigurative politics—as it has been in other, primarily Latin American, political contexts (M. A. Sitrin 2012; Moreno-Caballud 2015; Minuchin 2016). But residents', activists', and experts' shared optimism about these “new” (at the very least, new to government) forms of participation means that neither can we easily interpret this participatory turn as a defanging of political opposition that transforms serious disagreements into mere differences of opinion, as skeptics of participatory governance suggest (Beaumont and Loopmans 2008; Mouffe 2005).

One point of agreement between those who embrace participation as a force for radical democracy and skeptics who see in participation a vehicle for the suppression of true political difference is that democracy must be made to engage with the conditions and desires of everyday life. The disagreement concerns whether participation is capable of

gaining sufficient purchase on lived politics, or instead merely rebrands the tendency of formal democratic politics to confine people to a meaningless exercise of choice between a bound and limited set of alternatives. For Chantal Mouffe (2005), participatory democracy is merely a consensus-seeking dialogue that, by insisting on a shared liberal communicative rationality between all participants, subsumes residents' unruly desires.

Democratic politics cannot be limited to establishing compromises among interests or values or to deliberation about the common good; it needs to have a real purchase on people's desires and fantasies. To be able to mobilize passions towards democratic designs, democratic politics must have a partisan character. (Mouffe 2005, 6)

But for participatory democracy's supporters, activists' embrace of participatory democracy is itself sufficient evidence that participation's engagements with the problems of everyday liberation are real. As Ian Angus puts it, if democracy has become "the fundamental term of an activist, left-wing political language," this is because the fragmented social movements that comprise the contemporary left share "an ethical and political vision" of "the politicization of everyday life and democracy as a way of life" (2010, 15). As Sitrin and Azzellini explain, in the direct democratic movements that arose in Latin America in the 1990s and 2000s and in Europe and North America in the 2010s, thanks to horizontalist politics "the political, economic, and social spheres are no longer separated...The new movements do not look to others to solve their problems, but together are finding new ways to take back–recuperate–what they consider to be theirs" (2014, 10).

In other words, if people's desires are to have purchase on democracy, then the power structures that define what a democratic collectivity is and what it is capable of doing must be reconfigured. Because institutional democracy is currently incapable of accounting for

or accommodating these desires, the practice of democracy must be remade in the territories of everyday life.¹⁸

During my time in Barcelona, I observed what happens when these redesigned democratic practices begin to travel between the territories of everyday life and the institutional territory of sympathetic governments. As these practices travel, they do so thanks to the labor and expertise not only of government officials, but also of architects, professional facilitators, and residents and activists. But just as importantly, these visions for the reconfiguration of democracy travel alongside practical efforts to redesign shared space and the convivial activities that shared spaces can shelter.

As participatory democracy moves between the horizontal assembly-based political practices of grassroots activism and the formal democratic institutions of the municipal government, it mutates. For instance, participatory architecture projects intentionally bring together a range of participants who differ from one another—both in expertise and political power, and in terms of the identity-based communities to which they belong. But precisely because participatory architecture processes tend to be drawn out and involve multiple rambunctious meetings, their very structure tends to exclude interest groups who are accustomed to influencing government decision-making through more direct channels.

As Carme, a grassroots education activist who had been instrumental in the creation of a participatory architecture process in Ciutat Vella, explained,

The hoteliers! That is to say, here they are, right? ‘Lobbies,’ and people who have a lot of influence and a lot of capacity to exert influence. And they are the ones who have always participated, let’s say, in the requests. So it’s like, ok, those people are going to go to ask and demand, right? Or going to try to put conditions on public decisions, when we are on the other side. [We are]

¹⁸ Following Sitrin and Azzellini, I approach activists’ territorial commitments as both conceptual and physical (2014, 11).

a hundred, doing the same thing. It's opening up, right? It's space of of participation for—there's some who always participate...What happens is that that [the hotel lobbies' participation] is not citizens' participation! That is to say, it isn't from the citizenry. It's from...a private sector with clear interests. So it [participation] comes from the school! It comes from the family and it comes from the neighbors.

For residents—even those who are accustomed to the horizontal democracy of popular assemblies—participatory architecture is meaningful as a democratic practice both because it brings together diverse residents in a shared space and decision-making process, *and* because it demarcates a participatory space is that not, in practice, equally open to everyone. This play of inclusion and exclusion is not present in grassroots versions of participation, where in order for a participatory meeting to be a legitimate exercise in governance either all community members should be present or diverse participants who are in some way “representative” of the diverse communities served by the participatory democratic exercise should be present (Morton 2014; Graeber 2009; Ganuza, Nez, and Morales 2013). But when practiced in government-affiliated settings in Barcelona, participatory architecture gains legitimacy (in at least some residents' view) from its promise to open up political space for citizens who have not always participated in public decision-making—and to temporarily ignore “some who always participate”. Because its structures of participation offer the opportunity for “a hundred” to “do the same thing” in a coordinated fashion, participatory architecture presents grassroots activists with the possibility of creating a counterweight to monied interests and lobbies with higher degrees of informal access to the levers of municipal government. And finally, as Carme suggests, when it is self-evident both to residents and to elected decision-makers that no one sector is dominating participation and instead multiple overlapping urban communities are involved, this strengthens participation's democratic valences and perceived openness—

particularly in contrast to avenues that do not allow large numbers of people to take part in democratic decision-making simultaneously.

Some Assembly Required: Design as a Practice for Disaggregating Buildings and Binding Politics

In this section, I will explore how residents and architects use participatory architecture to disaggregate situations that, in purely political realms of contestation, appear to offer only binary oppositions. I begin by examining how and why a participatory process led the residents of a small municipality on the outskirts of Barcelona to change their minds regarding a central objective of the grassroots activism that launched this participatory process. After exploring how residents used participatory architecture techniques to reconfigure both their relationship to the municipal government and their options for rehabilitating a shared space, I investigate why participatory architecture meetings became a site of repair for fragmented relationships between residents and the government.

In 2015 in the municipality of Sant Boi de Llobregat on the outskirts of Barcelona, I observed the latest participatory architecture “capsule” in an ongoing participatory process that had started in the previous year. This participatory process was rooted in a conflict between the municipal government and the users of a historic *ateneu* (athenaeum or cultural association) located across the street from City Hall.¹⁹ The *ateneu* “is a set of large

¹⁹ Chris Ealham explains that “between 1877 and 1914, seventy-five [*ateneus*] were formed in Barcelona. Each *ateneu* provided its members with a range of urban services and facilities, and some of the larger ones had a cooperative shop, offering foodstuffs at reduced prices. During a time when there were very few affordable forms of leisure, the *ateneus* organized a wide choice of leisure activities, such as theatre, choral and musical groups. Sociability and entertainment were always combined with social agitation, and the plays performed in the *ateneus* were normally of a radical, leftist or anti-clerical persuasion” (2010, 45).

buildings in poor condition” (Carnicer and Prieto 2016) which span some 4500 square meters, and includes a 1500-seat theater as well as a ballroom. The *ateneu* association dates to 1899, but the *ateneu* building (today, when residents of Sant Boi speak of “the *ateneu*” they are referring to the building rather than to the association) is actually older—starting in 1895, it was in use by the choral association that later became the *ateneu* (“Ateneu Santboià: Història” n.d.). In 2011, the municipal government announced its plans to demolish the theater. The groups who regularly used the existing buildings banded together as the “Friends of the *Ateneu*” and led a protest-based campaign to save the *ateneu*—and in particular its historic theater—from demolition. As a result of widespread grassroots opposition to its original plan, the municipal government proposed a participatory process.

Residents (including but not limited to the theater’s users) would identify their own needs for the *ateneu* and determine alternatives to its demolition. A team of architects from two participatory architecture studios in Barcelona was brought in to facilitate a series of “capsules” within the framework of the participatory process. Through these participatory capsules, residents first determined what uses they would like a rehabilitated *ateneu* to facilitate, and then made plans for how the *ateneu* would be managed. Following these earlier capsules, during the participatory capsule that I observed from September through November of 2015, residents worked on the overall architecture plan for the theater. By the end of this capsule, the plan would comprise some very general architectural blueprints of the planned spatial reconfiguration of the Ateneu paired with a timeline of the “phases” of architectural intervention that would, step by step, produce the planned reconstruction of the space.

By the end of the participatory capsule—and somewhat to the surprise of everyone involved—the participants decided that the best way forward would be to deconstruct most of the *ateneu*, including the theater, while preserving and rehabilitating the ballroom. Participants had come to support the manual deconstruction of the theater and not the demolition that the municipal government had originally proposed. But this was nevertheless a dramatic about-face: the same users whose opposition to demolishing the theater had launched the participatory process had decided, on their own terms, that the best path forward for the theater involved dismantling most of it. Having concluded that the theater should be dismantled did not permanently resolve the varied participants' many tensions with the municipal government. But it did allow conversations and plans for the theater's future to move forward.

But even though participants and the team of architects facilitating the sessions reacted to this decision with some degree of surprise, at the same time they asserted that the outcome had grown naturally from the conversations and dynamics involved in the participatory capsules that had taken place earlier in 2015. Carles, one of the architects who had facilitated the participatory architecture process, felt that this was an apt demonstration of how participatory architecture—when done well—could be made to offer a different set of possibilities for working out how to share space. “It’s the most I think it is like shocking and and impactful and that it helps us, right? Like to to to exemplify many things...The change of position in terms of the theater. Which is what gave rise to our assignment, that they wanted to protect the theater, in other words that City Hall not knock down the theater.” Carles hypothesized that participants’ change in perspective had been accomplished through their concrete engagements with the theater as a built space that

they were now responsible for caring for. He reflected, “[Deconstruction] was the final decision in this, in this capsule, but it’s something that comes from the whole process in general...The fact of working on how the theater is, and the possibilities that it had, right? And of seeing how people have changed is what I’ve liked best, really. Because it’s one of the most difficult things.”

Participatory architecture transformed the entrenched dynamic between the municipal government and residents who sought to save the theater from demolition precisely because as a space and method for interacting, it offered something more than the possibility for government officials and residents to share information and deliberate about the best options for the *ateneu*’s future. Sedimented and conflict-filled oppositions between users of the *ateneu* and the municipal government became infinitely more flexible differences in design approaches. Through participatory architecture, residents and the municipal government were able to work together through the intermediary of the *ateneu*, which became for a time a shared project to whose rehabilitation all could contribute.

Becoming participants in a collective design process did not cause the theater’s users and defenders to forget the political stakes of their participation. But by participating in design work, they acquired new tools for shaping the theater’s future. Protesting, for instance, had not offered residents a means of addressing or acting on the *ateneu*’s diverse spaces in a way that individuated them. And even in the first decade of the 2000s, when some of the *ateneu*’s users had first entered the buildings as *okupas*, their DIY repairs to the space had not been capable of the granular interventions that a project overseen by architects would make possible. Participants changed their minds about the *ateneu*’s future because they were given the opportunity to do new-to-them things with this information.

They were able to act on publicly held knowledge by combining it with their own positional knowledge (held individually by participants but also within communities of participants) to create both structural and social plans for saving the theater.

In their participatory workshops, residents explored how the theater's spatial forms—along with the communities and uses of space that clustered around them—could both survive and be made more functional, beautiful, and structurally sound. In the process of comparing futures that were at odds with one another, the participants reached a new understanding of what exactly they wanted to save. While their engagement in the participatory architecture project began as a desire to “save the theater”, it turned out that in practice, residents were primarily concerned with saving the theater's role as an infrastructure for building political and artistic community. While they were very attached to the original building and particularly to its facades, participants concluded that the theater would be more likely to continue to bring together city residents for grassroots play, music, and performance if they stepped away from their initial goal of preserving the theater building.

In the case of the *ateneu*, deconstruction could become the first step in an effort to “save the theater” both because its users had transformed the meanings associated with the physical loss of the *ateneu* buildings through their design work, and because this work had revealed alternative building and place-making strategies that would contribute meaningfully toward saving the theater as a practical and activity-oriented achievement. In other words, by engaging in participatory architecture, participants began to associate deconstruction not only with the theater's destruction but also with tactical interventions to save it. In this way they created a space for intervention that was far larger than the gap

between having and not-having an *ateneu*. Participatory architecture allowed residents to access a policy-making space and set of design techniques that they used to elaborate strategies for saving the theater over and beyond its preservation and rehabilitation.

During the participatory process, activists paused their work of saving the theater by engaging in political struggle (occupations and demonstrations) on its behalf. Instead they worked to save the theater by shoring it up, both structurally and socially. In this shoring-up work, participants sought to imagine whether the theater could best be made socially vibrant and structurally sound through restoration, a partial demolition combined with restoration work and new construction, or demolition and replacement of the historic site. They encountered the budgets, legal and urban planning codes, and construction timelines that had caused the municipal government to opt for demolishing the theater. Some, but not all, of these limiting factors had previously been known to the theater's defenders and other city residents from the municipal government's claims and communications. Through the participatory architecture process, participants encountered the contours of these limits in more specific and concrete ways. But more importantly, residents encountered these limitations not as external forces that City Hall insisted must overrule any arguments in favor of saving the theater (that is, as rhetorical cudgels deployed by City Hall), but rather as design constraints that would help the participants determine the most effective ways to shore up the theater.

Crucially, even though participants were working within the same set of constraints and happened to reach the same conclusion as the municipal government, the participants' point of departure for their design work had been their own priorities, perspectives, and needs. Participatory architecture allowed city residents to identify the myriad design

decisions that remained to be made within a situation that at first glance appeared to have been overdetermined by the municipal government. When residents became involved with architecting the *ateneu*'s future, they gained a type of expertise that permitted them to approach the future as something other than a binary decision between the *ateneu*'s demolition and its preservation. In particular, as participants they were able to transform the deconstruction process into a space that offered many possibilities for intervention.

Participants were able to back away from their earlier commitment to the theater's preservation because the participatory architecture project laminated a new dynamic onto the *ateneu* users' existing confrontation with the municipal government over the fate of the theater. While the theater's users still had moments of tension with the municipal government—sometimes these concerned the theater, and at other times they concerned other points of disagreement—direct negotiation or conflict with the municipal government was now no longer the only channel available to the theater's users for saving it. The participatory dynamic of reimagining the theater did not supplant the protest-based dynamic of saving the theater. Instead, they coexisted.

The fact that the participatory architecture project at the *ateneu* was open to residents' creative interventions instead of merely offering residents a consultative or rubber-stamping role was itself a joint achievement reached by resident-participants, architect-facilitators, and government officials. Not all participatory architecture projects are equally successful in achieving meaningful participation. This success does not flow automatically from the design and speech practices that are considered central to participatory architecture. If residents are able to do design work that strikes them as substantial and to deliberate about place-based questions that feel important, these capacities are the result

of residents' previous engagements with government officials and of how these interactions have shaped the outlines of the participatory project. At the same time, the participatory architecture process can itself become a space where residents and government officials are able to interact differently and to reshape the contours of relationships that might otherwise appear to be fixed.

In February 2017—15 months after residents had created and approved an architectural plan for the *ateneu* that included a deconstruction phase but not demolition—the *ateneu*'s supporters learned that the municipal government had hired a company to demolish it. The architectural plan that had been developed through the participatory process specified that the *ateneu* was to be deconstructed by hand so that a small portion of the original theater could be preserved and so that the activities that were still taking place regularly within the *ateneu*'s footprint could continue with minimal interruptions. Demolition threatened both of these goals, which together comprised “phase 0” of the architectural plan for the *ateneu*'s future development. Not only had the municipal government decided to ignore the architectural plan that had been worked out through the participatory process—it hadn't even officially notified the participants of the upcoming demolition. They only became aware of the planned demolition through informal backchannels.

The *ateneu*'s defenders were skilled in planning protests and alternative cultural events in their city, and on previous occasions they had entered and occupied the theater. But now, in response to the government's renewed embrace of demolition, they neither protested nor resumed squatting in the building. Instead, they held a face-to-face meeting with municipal officials. In this meeting, they made two requests: first, that the municipal government return to the binding participatory process that they had earlier supported;

second, that politicians and political appointees from the municipal government attend future participatory meetings.

Why did residents intensify their commitments to this participatory planning and architecture process in the face of the municipal government's bad faith? Why did residents and activists opt to repair a ruptured participatory process instead of pursuing their goals by other means? What is so valuable about participatory processes? I propose answering these questions by examining what it means for participatory processes to be "binding"—a solution often offered up as a way to repair participatory processes that appear to have failed residents.

Residents of Barcelona and the smaller cities that surround it often demand participatory processes from their local governments. They do so both as a means of creating an institutional setting in which to advocate for specific solutions to a problem, and as a means of bringing together people who might not agree and might not be used to encountering one another. In the case of the *ateneu* both factors were at work. On one hand, the Friends of the *Ateneu* thought that they were more likely to achieve its restoration and preservation through a participatory process than through direct and adversarial discussions with a municipal government that repeatedly tried to dodge them. And on the other hand, the *ateneu*'s users did not have the strongest of relationships with the city residents who lived closest to the site and sought to build bridges to these neighbors through the participatory process. Meanwhile, these neighbors attended the meetings to advocate for their own preferred uses of the space, but over time and as they attended more meetings, they came to see value in the *ateneu* project as well as in their own ideas of what the land the building occupied could become.

Residents can make strategic use of participatory processes to make community, advocate for their interests, and engage in a mode of political action that feels more substantial than voting. But at the same time, residents are wary of participatory processes that take up time and energy but then go nowhere, or in which participants seem to have no power over the final result. To guard against this, residents informally create structures of accountability for participatory processes. They insist that it's not enough for the municipal government to organize participatory processes. Instead, governments must incorporate and respond to participatory processes in their own work.

In formal meetings between municipal governments and residents as well as in grassroots spaces, a critique of participation in municipal governance emerges. Participatory processes are worth participating in, residents argue, only if they are spaces where "true" participation can be practiced. But "false" participation cynically takes advantage of residents' participation in order to legitimate government goals, without offering residents anything in return.

These delineations between "true" and "false" participation are at the heart of residents' efforts to create their own accountability structures for participatory governance. Residents often highlighted two qualities of participatory processes when discussing the difference between true and false participation. Truly participatory processes are deliberative, residents told me, as opposed to consultative. I will discuss the difference between consultation and participation in more depth in the following chapter. Second, true participation is binding (*vinculant*). At first glance, this seems like a simple criterion: the municipal government should adhere to the outcomes of the participatory process. In other words, the government should act on these results by building the design

generated by a participatory process, or by creating a plan that corresponds with or reflects its outcomes.

But it is very difficult to establish a one-to-one relationship between the deliberative results of a participatory process and what government can do when building a public space or creating a Metropolitan Plan—as is perhaps clear from the awkward phrases in the previous paragraph. Participatory processes do not always produce blueprints or strategic plans as their endpoints—although sometimes they do. But they are just as likely to conclude with a “return” (*retorn*) workshop where key ideas that emerged over the course of a series of workshops are presented, discussed, and receive further elaboration, or with no formal conclusion beyond a summary document that highlights the major areas of analysis and creative paths followed by the participants. There can never be a relationship of perfect correspondence between the interactional “results” of participatory deliberation and its adaptation into design or plan; the two are at best slightly misaligned with one another. As a result, evidence that a participatory process has been binding cannot readily be identified by looking for government activities that directly mirror what happened in a participatory process. And indeed, when residents are happy with how participatory processes turned out, they tend not to comment on the question of “binding”-ness at all.

The binding nature of a participatory process only becomes a concern when participatory processes go wrong—either after a particular participatory process seems to have strayed from its original place-making or governance purpose, or when residents and activists are generalizing as they try to identify commonalities between failed participatory processes, in the forward-looking task of improving the structures and starting premises of future participatory processes. Residents’ desire for binding participation is not a rubric for

evaluating the success or failure of existing participatory processes. Instead, residents offer the ideal of binding participation as a solution for repairing participatory processes that have gone or could go wrong.

In pointing out participatory processes that failed to be binding, residents verbally highlight the lack of fit between the conclusions of a participatory process and the materialities or other realities of the design that this participation generated. But in practice, when residents discuss binding, they are also implicitly evaluating the extent to which the relationship between participating residents and government decision-makers exhibits responsiveness. Binding-ness is a last-ditch effort to extricate something of value from participatory processes when relationships between participants and the government have reached a breaking point. At least, the thinking is, the frustrations and time spent will not have been wasted if participants can directly perceive their ideas and contributions in the finished design or plan.

There are other words that could be used to describe a government's responsiveness and commitment to a participatory process. Yet binding was the term that I observed residents and activists return to repeatedly, both in private discussions and in their communications with government officials about participatory governance. If we look beyond binding as a synonym for the correspondence between residents' deliberation and government actions, I believe that this term can also help us reflect on the relationships that are developed over the course of participating—as well as how these relationships might be repaired when residents and their government become unbound from one another.

In most municipal-sponsored participatory architecture processes, individual government officials do not participate directly in the work of design, nor do they experience the shifting relationships and alchemies of agreement that participants experiment with in public workshops. Government officials organize and fund participation, but within the meticulously planned structures of formal participatory decision-making, their primary role is to receive these participatory inputs and act on them. Requesting that government officials actually attend and participate in participatory architecture meetings, as the Friends of the *Ateneu* did, is therefore an effort to change how participatory architecture is practiced in order to make politicians more accountable to its “democratic designs” (Mouffe 2005, 6). In trying to revive the participatory architecture project as a way to bind the municipal government to residents’ plans for the *ateneu*, the Friends of the *Ateneu* sought to commit government officials not only to a particular architectural plan, but also to a set of horizontalizing democratic relationships and modes of interacting that government officials would usually not take part in.

When the supporters of the *ateneu* insisted that politicians join them as participants in the theater’s design, they suggested new possibilities for the activities and relationships that would determine the theater’s future. A participatory process might not change anyone’s mind or completely transform a politician’s perspective. But it just might bind government officials and institutions to residents in ways that can make a difference to a shared future.

Conclusion

As they engage in shared building processes, residents of Barcelona become accountable to one another—the first step in the relational *autonomía* that Escobar proposes. The intimacy of collective construction and participatory architecture undergirds these activities' political potency. For example, residents of Sants and La Bordeta add strength to Can Batlló by layering more social ties into the web of accountability that operates there. If Can Batlló can pose a challenge or offer resistance to the gentrifying version of the neighborhood that threatens to overtake it and its users, it will do so by transmuting the intimate relationships that develop between people who co-labor at the compound into bonds of solidarity that extend beyond Can Batlló's footprint.

Over the past decade, as the municipal governments of Barcelona and some of its Metropolitan-area neighbors have experimented with governance forms that foster autonomy at multiple scales, their embrace of participatory architecture has made co-laboring on the city into a form of democratic practice. As they seek to scale up and gain formal political power, grassroots experiments in building as political practice struggle to create a more widely shared version of the accountability that emerges from intimate construction-based activism. How can people be bound together and made accountable to one another in the absence of an all-encompassing city-wide participatory process? Are there other place-based forms of co-laboring that might serve as channels for creating autonomy from intimacy? What would this more expansive vision of a city whose materiality and politics are built and rebuilt by co-laboring residents look like? The rest of the dissertation offers some preliminary answers to these questions.

CHAPTER 2

DESIGNING TOGETHER?

Architects who work in the field of participatory architecture try to structure participatory design meetings so that their very form recognizes residents' expertise about their homes and neighborhoods and ensures that this expertise is incorporated into design alongside architects' more technical knowledge. But notwithstanding this attempt to redistribute design's means of production to residents, participatory architecture is still organized and made possible through various forms of inequality. For a start, inequality is foundational to the very existence of participatory architecture as an equality-seeking way of doing design. In urban planning, for instance, participatory architecture techniques are used to give residents a say in decisions that are usually made by technocrats who exercising forms of expertise that are unavailable to most residents. And within the architecture profession, participatory architecture is embraced as a means of pushing back against architects' tendencies to perceive themselves as solitary aesthetic arbiters defending "good design" from clients. Among the younger generation of Barcelona architects who trained during and after the financial crisis, participatory architecture challenges architects' traditional alliances and solidarities with real estate developers, industry, and commerce. Moreover, despite the fact that participatory architecture positions residents as collaborators in design work, residents' capacity to act as collaborators outside the setting of individual design meetings is more limited.

This chapter examines how residents and facilitators experience and remediate inequality in participatory architecture. It also investigates how residents and architects mobilize and reinterpret practices of “working together” to create more equal relationships between people involved in shared design labor. The first section explores how architects structure participatory processes to heighten participants’ degree of involvement in deliberating and designing. The second section examines a participatory workshop where residents repeatedly sought to discuss problems outside the scope of the design project in order to better understand what design-centered deliberation can and cannot offer residents. The third section explores the barriers that residents in this participatory process encountered when trying to become more active collaborators in design work, and the final section discusses residents’ efforts to relocate design-focused collaboration from the participatory architecture setting to their future engagements with the design’s management and built form.

Many critiques of participatory governance highlight the myriad ways that co-participants continue to be unequal to one another even after they have entered participatory settings. In Barcelona, this was not the most salient axis of inequality. Both facilitators and participants were far more concerned with how to deconstruct inequalities that were generated by residents’ and architects’ different roles in the design process and their different levels of expertise. While residents and architects developed a number of strategies for creating more equal relationships within participatory meetings, they faced a much steeper climb when confronting unequal relationships between residents and the state. Over the course of publicly funded participatory processes, the municipal government played a central role in determining which types of urban problems could be

addressed through participatory architecture and in creating the budgetary and temporal structures within which deliberation and design unfolded. Participants and facilitators struggled to change these constraining factors from within participatory spaces that were designed to bring residents together with one another and with trained facilitators, but not necessarily to bring residents into direct contact with government officials.

“In the End We Also Don't Know”: Designing for and with Participation

In an early meeting for the participatory re-design of the *ateneu*, the senior architect on the project mused aloud about the ethics involved in participatory design. While three other architects listened quietly, Rubèn described a project he had worked on with a group of architecture students. Somehow, the students ended up reaching the same conclusion about how to design the space that he had previously reached on his own. Rubèn said, “I know that it’s a little bit trick-sy, but it turned out that way. We act as conductors and that’s the trap, in and of itself. We’re prestidigitators—but at least we’re good prestidigitators.” A younger architect named Jaume agreed, adding that wielding this power responsibly is even more important when working with people who are not trained in architecture—the architects, Jaume said, have an ethical obligation to help guide people.

For architects, facilitating community participation in design involves managing the spatial, temporal, and interactional frames of design work, while simultaneously leaving decision-making to the participants. Architects and community participants need to reach a delicate balance where both architectural plans and design processes develop collaboratively. From the perspective of the architects charged with making the design process for the *ateneu* participatory, years of joint work came down to the following

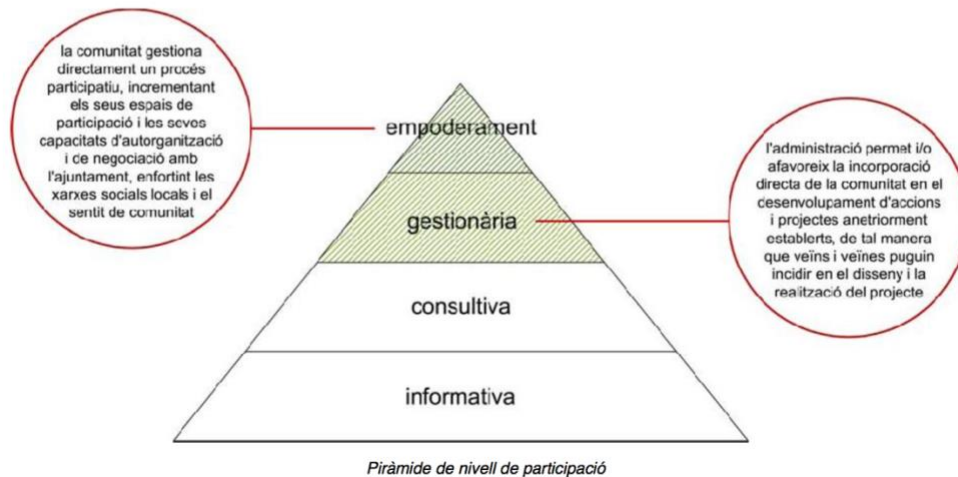
question: how could architects and participants ensure that the collaborative community work of creating, structuring and directing the design process would feed back into the designs themselves?

Participatory architecture in Barcelona, with its emphasis on deliberation and empowerment, taps into broader currents of grassroots democracy in Catalonia. The architects I worked with were deeply anxious about whether their practices live up to their ethical and political commitments—as their use of terminology drawn from stage magic and words like “trap” and “trick” suggests. In this section, I examine how architects bring together deliberation and anticipation to create design processes that feel participatory. Through this work, architects temporarily quiet their epistemic and ethical concerns—or at least defer them to another design project. I return to the participatory architecture process for the *ateneu* that I discussed in the previous chapter. First, I examine how deliberative design interactions were structured to resonate with political questions regarding community decision-making and control. Second, I explore how anticipation combined with deliberation to intensify or strengthen the design qualities of participatory design. This allowed stakeholders to experience participation as more than merely an illusion or parlor trick.

I encountered the “pyramid of levels of participation,” for the first time in the architects’ published diagnosis of community needs for the *ateneu* (“Conclusions i Propostes Del Procés Participatiu Nou Ateneu” 2014, 34). Figure 1 reproduces the participation pyramid and its accompanying text as they appeared in this diagnosis document. When they couldn’t remember the pyramid’s formal name or its author, my interlocutors referred to the pyramid as “the Maslow-ish hierarchy of participation.”

Figure 2.1: The Pyramid of Levels of Participation

Es voldria remarcar la idea que el procés participatiu Nou Ateneu ha estat fins al moment del tipus **gestionari**. S'ha donat lloc als participants a incidir en el disseny i la realització del projecte del nou edifici, recollint les seves idees i propostes durant sessions de treball en forma de tallers. El fet d'incorporar membres dinamitzadors externs als processos, dissenyant els tallers i agafant les regnes de la situació, ha donat lloc a una baixada d'intensitat dels Amics de l'Ateneu. Aquest fet ens fa pensar en la importància de treballar conjuntament, en sumar esforços i forces amb un objectiu comú. El fet que la mateixa comunitat detecti unes necessitats i busqui vies per treballar-les i trobar solucions de manera comunitària, fa créixer el projecte i les persones que estan involucrades. Per aquest motiu que a aquest tipus de participació se l'anomena **d'empoderament**.



This pyramid came up frequently in my conversations with architects across Barcelona, especially when we were reflecting on participation as a political project. The participation pyramid proliferated within just a few years—which speaks to how urgent the politics of empowerment felt during this time period. The pyramid is depicted as a diagnostic tool, but in practice it is prescriptive rather than descriptive. As with Maslow's hierarchy, participatory architects' goal was to reach the top of the pyramid.

The pyramid classifies how non-experts interact with the design process. At the bottom half, there are informational and consultation meetings—these are named to contrast with the deliberative interactional structures of the highest and second-highest levels. In the *gestionària* (management) level, community members are incorporated as participants into

existing design projects. In the highest level, *empoderament* (empowerment), the community itself manages the participatory process by creating spaces of participation and initiating rather than responding to designs and plans. The architects felt that in the earlier participatory capsules of this project, their work with the community had fallen into the management level. They were looking for ways to make the work for this capsule, which was still in its early stages, more consistent with the empowerment level.

Rubèn suggested they present different designs to the group, and further develop those designs that participants seem most interested in. Another architect, Rosa, compared this process to how consultation and feedback would work when designing a private house—the client doesn't need to work on the specifics of the design, but their understandings of their own needs are paramount.

Rosa's response reveals how central the two-party, feedback-based interactions that are common to architects' work with individual clients remains, even when in practice architects work with large groups of stakeholders. Of course, because clients fund architects' work, they wield veto power over architectural plans. The power dynamics of working with the public are different. But the turn to a feedback-based model suggests that architects have a great deal of confidence in the potential of back-and-forth, two-party deliberation to equalize many of these power dynamics. This resonates strongly with liberal democratic ideologies about the deliberative public sphere as a space where power differentials can be counteracted through speech—a theory that felt increasingly impotent in Barcelona.

Taking up Rubèn's idea, the *ateneu's* design process consisted of a series of public meetings where participants discussed and did design work on the entirety of the floor

plan for the building, as well as its outdoor and street-level spaces. These public meetings were punctuated by studio sessions where the architects re-designed the plans according to decisions and suggestions from the public meetings. If participatory architecture should ideally resemble the two-party dialogue that an architect would have with an individual client, then the public meetings and architects' meetings operate as a large-scale version of this conversational back-and-forth. They also help to situate design and deliberation within a time stream. Creating a conversation between architects and participants that unfolds over an extended period of time helps mitigate the feeling that participants are intervening in previously established designs. Instead, the back-and-forth produces a design that evolves and transforms as it moves between community spaces and the architects' studio.

Playing into this conversational model, the architects produced their designs in iterations across multiple meetings. In the studio, they made several designs, working to differentiate the plans from one another so that the possibilities at stake would immediately be visible to non-expert participants. In workshops, the architects facilitated conversations where the participants discussed their reactions to the different proposed designs, manipulated the designs on paper and with scissors, and distilled their different reactions into concrete suggestions for what should be modified in each of the plans going forward. The architects then further developed the designs and presented the new designs at the next public meeting so that they could undergo a similar workshopping process. The whole design process took about two months and repeated this iterative movement between the workshop and the studio several times.

While planning the design process in one of the architects' in-studio meetings, Carles drew a distinction between deliberative and consultative design. He argued that in order to

move the public meetings from consultation to deliberation, “there needs to be a stronger design element.” The difference between deliberation and consultation concerns *when* participants are able to intervene in design rather than simply *how* they intervene. In consultations, architects present finished designs to community stakeholders, who decide which of the designs they like best. Deliberation gives participants a voice in the design process while the blueprints are being drawn up, rather than afterward.

As Gemma, who participated in a different participatory architecture project facilitated by LaCol explained to me, “either we’re working together, or doing together—or they consult me, right? Me, if you consult me, I wait for [sing-song voice] someone to call me, to ask me a question, then go away, and continue working.” The difference between being consulted and working together lies in how residents expect their contributions to make a difference—or not. When residents are consulted, they share their ideas but no one else responds directly. Instead, whoever solicited residents’ input will “go away, and continue working.” In a more deliberative design process where people find themselves “working together” with architects, design work does not disappear to be done elsewhere by someone else. Instead design work takes place (at least partly) in public spaces in residents’ own communities, and residents are collaborators in this work. Residents have a concrete role to play as co-designers; instead of pitching in ideas for others to use, they participate by working and doing alongside experts.

The iterative work on the *ateneu* demonstrates what “a stronger design element” with more back-and-forth between architects and community stakeholders looks like. But it’s not immediately obvious why more deliberation should automatically lead to a more empowering kind of participation—the kinds of transformations described in the

“empowerment” level of the participation pyramid seem like heavy lifting for deliberative design to accomplish on its own. At first glance one might assume that the pyramid model encourages architects to think of design additively: if a certain amount of deliberation and design gets a design process to the management level, then adding more design and deliberation can help “top off” the pyramid so that the process can reach the empowerment level. But—while I do not discount this possibility—there is more to this particular story.

Thanks to the feedback-based iterative process, community members directly managed the *ateneu*’s design. The structured back-and-forth between public work and architects’ work made it so that the architects could not move forward with certain kinds of design work on their own even if they wanted to. Instead they had to wait for the next public meeting, where stakeholders would make decisions that would govern what would happen next. The public meetings, in turn, revealed plans that were still being worked out. Even relatively fundamental decisions remained to be made, including what parts of the site should be indoor space or outdoor space; what kinds of functions the rooms in the interior of the building should have; and whether the building would be new construction or a rehabilitation of the existing structure.

By the end of this participatory design capsule, participants were using the words “deliberative” and “empowering” to describe the design process, thus taking up the same terminology that the architects had used both in their facilitation of the participatory workshops and in their published materials about the participatory process—or, more optimistically, suggesting that the architects had achieved their goal. The dialogic meeting structure gave the design process a more deliberative quality, as expected. But more significantly, a key component of this deliberation was the feeling that unexpected things

could happen with the design process. For both architects and community participants, this unexpectedness and indeterminacy manifested as anticipation: architects worked to anticipate the needs and concerns participants might express at the next public meeting; and participants talked between meetings about what direction the previously-displayed plans might take at the next meeting. The quality of still-becoming that was present in this design process allowed participants to do something other than simply settle the questions about public space that the municipal government had laid before them. Thus anticipation, and the drawn-out dialogic meeting structure that generated it, helped transform the design process into a process that community members controlled.

Anticipation brings deliberation and design together. Through the expectation-setting work of anticipation, architects and laypeople repair apparent contradictions between deliberation and expertise. Anticipation adds more design elements to collective projects. These design elements move non-expert deliberation from the edges and interstices of design work to its very center.

Architects working with participatory techniques—who have heavily theorized their public-facing work—tend not to examine their private meetings too closely. But these in-studio meetings were not just places to plan public workshops and coordinate individual design work. As a counter-point to the public workshops, they are crucial to anticipating future design and deliberative needs.

At public meetings, architects work very hard to not disclose their opinions about what should happen in the design process—lest they unintentionally manipulate or prejudge participants' choices. But at architect-only meetings, they speak freely about their own thoughts on design. Architects characterized these conversations alternately as a means of

blowing off steam, and as a way to strategize about bringing their expertise to bear on public discussions without overdetermining these discussions.

But as I observed more of these private meetings, it became clear to me that by bringing up their preferred designs and ideas for what *should* happen, architects were able to anticipate where their own desires did and did not line up with participants' desires. In articulating these gaps, the architects often ended up encountering ways to make the designs they had been working on more flexible than before. Anticipatory labor made design itself more deliberative.

In one meeting, Jaume and Carles were drawing a floor plan. Carles started to draw some "ears"—two semi-circles that the architects thought would work well as additions to the main concert space. They had the following exchange.

JAUME: Ok. Do we want to get into mmm adding shapes and extraneous things? Because since in the end we also don't *know*, you know? Those are supplements.

CARLES: Ya, no no.

JAUME: Maybe if you get into-

CARLES: We could add to the schematic, but, of course, these things don't affect it so much. It's true. That part [pointing to an area of the design] it's clear that it does affect it [the schematic], but here [pointing at a different area of the design, near the "ears"] maybe some ears or something else would grow, but it's not so bad.

When Jaume pointed out that "in the end we also don't know," it was like a switch had flipped for Carles. His voice sped up, he started gesturing more, and he became more energetic. Jaume's statement was a reminder that the architects did not know what would happen at the next public workshop. More importantly, it clarified for both architects which part of the schematic that they were working on needed to be fully diagrammed in order for collective work to happen at the next public meeting—and which parts represented only their own desires. Not every part of the design needed to have a determinate shape at that

particular moment, so it was not necessary for Carles to add “ears” to the structure before the next meeting. And if the participants did decide to add “ears” later on, the design and the architects could easily accommodate this—it would not be “so bad.”

After this conversation, Jaume and Carles ended up erasing several of the “shapes” and “extraneous things” they had previously been adding to the schematic, and instead left some empty floor space and square meters in the plan for whatever additions participants ended up suggesting at the next meeting. They limited their own decision-making as they designed the *ateneu*’s plan. The new design instead held space open for the many types of add-on structures that participants might end up wanting to build.

Anticipation in participatory architecture does not consist exclusively of planning for the public interactions of the design process. In the most successful participatory architecture projects—that is, those that rise, in architects’ and participants’ estimation, to the “empowerment” level of the pyramid—, architects also create anticipation in the designs themselves. They create space that can be filled by the labor of the participants. This design space leads both architects and participants to expect that participants will be able to make grounded yet creative interventions in architectural plans.

Anticipation thus operates as a key mediating term between design and deliberation. “A stronger design element” does not necessarily mean adding more things to a design for the sake of creating more opportunities for participants to deliberate about design. Instead, a sensibility for design as a joint, future-oriented creative process creates openings in design as well as deliberation. This is true even at design meetings that are not open to the public. Such design gaps are then filled in with participation in public design meetings. These gaps are important because they allow public discussions to enter into the design

itself *as* design—rather than as ancillary conversations that get attached to the design but do not directly influence it. By doing the anticipatory work that is necessary for coping with open-endedness, architects and participants transpose the deliberative qualities that had previously occurred around and about design work into the designs themselves.

What We Talk About When We Talk About the *Plaça*

In late 2015, the city of Barcelona organized a participatory process for creating the city's first hybrid school playground and public *plaça* (plaza) in a recently demolished empty lot. Years earlier, following the demolition of a building that was adjacent to an elementary school in the Ciutat Vella district, the parents' association and local activists had decided that they needed to "go for it" by occupying the lot and demanding that the municipal government turn it into a play area for the schoolchildren next door. In the midst of the participatory process, a local parent named Gemma reflected on how the empty lot at Tinent Puig Street²⁰ had become an object of activism.

We started from a school, right? With clear necessities, let's say, for the school itself, its characteristics, right? And on the other hand, from some, I think two or three, years—yes, three years. Ah, at the level of the AMPA [parents' association] there starts to emerge—well, certain families start to mobilize themselves on more POLITICAL issues, and of relationships to the territory, right? In other words, problems that don't only affect the school, but rather concern the neighborhood. And this [the empty lot] is where both things overlap. On one hand, a school that doesn't have a playground...and on the other hand a neighborhood, right? With a brutal tourism problem. So the children need—boys and girls need—a space to go out and play, and an and where they can be well, and the neighborhood also needs a space for for families and neighbors...to also have a space, right?

²⁰ This street name is a pseudonym. The name of the street where the plaza/playground would be built became the metonym by which the facilitator team consistently referred to the participatory process for designing the plaza/playground.

Shortly after she became mayor, Ada Colau, herself a former anti-gentrification and anti-eviction activist, added the playground/plaza²¹ to the city's construction commitments. Residents' pro-education and pro-public space activism had paid off.

At the second of three participatory meetings for the hybrid space's design, residents broke out into working groups following a presentation by the lead architect on the project. Two architects from LaCol, the studio charged with facilitating the participatory process, stayed with the adults in the main meeting space; meanwhile, a third architect led the children in attendance—all of them current, past, or future students at the school adjacent to the plaza—to another room.

Each working group received a large-scale, architectural plan-sized piece of paper.²² The buildings and street that bordered the empty lot were depicted as line drawings in black and white, while the lot itself showed up as a blank space. The only drawn-in details were the archaeological remains of the Roman city wall. These archaeological remains were responsible for some of the tensions regarding how the lot's hybridity as both a public plaza and a school playground would play out. The municipal government's plan was for the new plaza to become part of an archaeological promenade that would link several free-standing segments of the city's historical defenses into one coherent walking itinerary. When the remnants of the Roman wall were first discovered, a representative of the organized

²¹ The design process concerned a hybrid space that was intended to eventually become both a playground and a plaza. When discussing the space's future, some residents used the word *plaça* while others used the word *pati* (playground). The word *pati* implies a space that is used exclusively by a school (and is often physically contained by the school, either in a courtyard or in a fenced enclosure to one side of the main school building). A *plaça*, on the other hand, can include play structures. From here forward I will refer to the site as "the plaza" in an effort to streamline the reading experience—but readers should keep the playground-like elements of the space's design as well.

²² The adults self-sorted themselves into three working groups, or *taules* (tables)—named metonymically for the tables around which the participants gathered to carry out their work. Meanwhile, the architect facilitating the children's working group (which carried out the same activity as the adults' groups) worked with the children in one unified group.

neighbors had a meeting about the lot's future with the team of archaeologists who were managing the lot as they investigated its remains. A resident named Raquel recounted to me what had happened at the meeting, based on what she had heard afterward:

RAQUEL: It was a bit like, forget about the playground.

MG: Huh!

RAQUEL: [speaking English] Forget it. Forget it.

MG: Like, this will be a place for-

RAQUEL: [speaking English] No way!

MG: Archaeology, and stop asking for anything else

RAQUEL: [speaking English] No way. [speaking Spanish] Like that.

The team of archaeologists was local to Barcelona. Raquel's words here are a paraphrase rather than direct quotation, and certainly the archaeologists would not have spoken in English at the meeting. Raquel's caricature instead works to recreate just how unmovable their position had been.²³ Ultimately the design of the plaza at Tinent Puig Street was incorporated into the larger design project of the architectural promenade. The fact that the municipal government eventually agreed to design the plaza with residents' and students' needs in mind, rather than with the exclusive aim of making the remains of the Roman wall accessible in the most aesthetically pleasing way, was interpreted by local activists as a concession.

In proposing that the lot be made into a hybrid space—both school playground and public plaza—the municipal government sought to reconcile local activists' demands for a playground for children and a plaza for residents with a larger-scale effort to highlight more of Barcelona's archaeological heritage. The empty lot had appeared from its demolition onward as both “an opportunity and a threat”, in Gemma's words, because of the risk that—

²³ This caricature of English as a language suited for declaring one's inflexible and dismissive positions has its roots in residents' encounters with English-speaking tourists in their neighborhood.

to quote Raquel—it would “end up being one more place for tourists. Especially because the Roman wall is there... We can already see how it ends.” The space’s proposed hybridity over the course of the participatory design process simply continued this dualism. Instead of the question of whether the lot would become an opportunity or a threat being resolved in the determination of who would develop the space or for what purpose, this question would now be determined by what the design for a hybrid space would look like, what kinds of activity and access the design would allow, and who it would welcome or exclude.

The lead architect, the LaCol architects facilitating the participatory process, residents, and government officials alike expected that the lead architect would adapt the overarching design criteria for the architectural promenade to better suit a hybrid plaza and playground. But questions regarding what kinds of adaptations would be necessary to accommodate residents’ needs as well as what parts of the overall design the lead architect was willing to change were left open, to be determined over the course of the participatory process. Thus, at the second participatory meeting, the lead architect presented some ideas for the plaza’s design that included a curving exterior line between the street and the plaza and a series of terraced steps leading from the street to the lower-down level where the archaeological remains of the Roman wall were visible. In the question-and-answer discussion that followed this presentation, residents immediately began to trouble some of the lead architect’s assumptions. They expressed a desire not to have any terraced steps on the plaza, inquired whether the street adjacent to the plaza could be closed off to car traffic, and declared that the design discussions for the plaza needed to also address the dynamic of gentrification that was enveloping the neighborhood. During this workshop, the answers residents received from the lead architect and the facilitator team from LaCol were less

than satisfying. Architects told residents that the terraced steps had to remain in the design for the plaza because they were part of the master design for the archeological promenade, that they would look into the question of blocking cars' street access but could make no guarantees, and that while gentrification was indeed a problem it was outside the scope of this design process.

The decisions that residents wished to address most urgently were excluded from the realm of design. This happened because architects, who were more fluent in design language and logics, were able to rule the topics that the residents wished to address as being "out of bounds". Over the course of several participatory workshops the residents would become more adept at articulating their concerns as design interventions, which made it more difficult for architects to declare that residents' concerns were outside the scope of the design process. But while residents did eventually develop this skill, in the first few participatory meetings they often encountered design as a barrier to their own plans for the plaza rather than as a resource.

During the participatory component of the second public meeting, each working group received three more large pieces of paper along with the large-scale map of the lot. These papers held color drawings, scaled to the line drawing of the "empty" plaza, of a variety of features one might encounter in a plaza or a playground: trees; terraced steps; slides; benches. At each table, participants were asked to work with their own set of printed pages to decide which elements should be included and how they should be distributed within the space. We were given scissors with which to cut out the elements and sticky-tack with which to affix them to the drawing of the plaza.

At my table, only one participant made contact with the scissors. Other participants did move the cut-out shapes of some terraced stairs around on the plan for a brief moment while they discussed the terraced stairs' ideal placement to lead people down from the street to the ruins of the Roman wall. But in general, a woman with a leadership role in the local school and a woman who held a leadership role in the local neighborhood association steered our table's conversation. The school leader held onto the scissors throughout our conversation, nudging my notebook aside to create more space for the cut-out shapes she arrayed in front of both of us. In general, our conversation did not deal with the various elements that we might place in the plaza. Instead we grappled with the more abstract problem of whether guaranteeing the safety of children in the plaza required that we close off access to the plaza by building a wall or fence—a discussion that one of the facilitators later classified as one of the most *chunga* (difficult and bad) of the whole project. The school staff and the neighbors' association disagreed sharply on this question, and our table found itself in the middle of this discussion, both spatially and ideologically. As the school leader and neighborhood' association leader squared off at our working group, they each spoke much more often than any of the other participants did. Each woman was seated near two allies, and our table's discussion ended up fracturing as each of these two "camps" conducted its own conversations along paths that did not often intersect, and that did not coalesce around either the same hypotheses or a shared set of concerns.

After the participants had left, the two architects who had been in the meeting room to facilitate the adults' working groups commiserated with me, saying that I had had the bad luck of being placed at the most "difficult" of the three tables. To them, what had made this table difficult was not the fact that a few people had dominated the discussion, but rather

that there had been intense disagreement between the participants. Architects and residents alike were very concerned with the question of who the plaza would be accessible to and how this differentiated use would be achieved spatially. It was inevitable that this discussion would be central to the participatory process. But the architects disagreed about whether the specific way that this discussion had played out at my table had been helpful. One architect thought that even though the discussions had been a bit abstract, the participants had made real progress on questions that were important to them. These kinds of abstract discussions about safety and access were necessary, he felt, if residents were going to collectively manage the shift from disagreeing about the *concept* of the plaza to working on designs that would support their visions for the plaza's future. The other architect said that people had been "too abstract in their thinking" and worried that with only one participatory meeting to go, residents were still not very actively engaged in the work of designing the plaza. She lamented that the activity they had planned for this workshop had not succeeded in helping residents think more concretely—although the children stood out as an exception. As we walked to the bus stop, we talked excitedly about the proposals the children had made for the plaza's future.

At the meeting, all the breakout groups eventually came back together and took turns presenting the results of their work to the rest of the participants. The adults' presentations were process-oriented; they addressed how the park would be designed, defended, and administered. For instance, one group imagined a design for the plaza where the street that ran alongside it was no longer accessible to cars. After presenting this idea, the residents asked the facilitators whether the city would be open to blocking car access to the street;

the facilitators agreed to confer with the relevant municipal departments and get an answer to this question.

By contrast, the children's presentation centered on what physical and play features the plaza would have. Their working group had made extensive use of their sheets of paper cut-outs, and their presentation traced their reasoning for including each of these elements. The two young girls who presented on behalf of the children's working group began by highlighting spaces for communal play that they would like to see: a basketball court; an area for doing gymnastics; and a space big enough for singing and dancing games that are played in a circle. Next, they pointed out where they would place a slide and a nearby bench to be used while people wait in line for the slide. Finally, they suggested planting "a tree that gives shade and a bench for reading" because there are some people for whom a park is "a space of tranquility." The presentation stood out both because it engaged specifically with the plaza's design features and because it was socially attuned to the different kinds of people who would make use of the plaza. At the adults' tables, participants repeatedly insisted that "the children are neighbors too." In their presentation, the children had proved their neighborliness not by claiming rights or status, but instead by creating a design that attended to residents' varied needs.

Where the adults at my table had debated who the plaza was for and how to materially support these social demarcations of space, the children had used the plaza's possible architectural elements to work out how to share the plaza. There are a number of possible explanations for the difference between children's and adults' approach to the problems the plaza posed: schoolchildren are socialized to follow the instructions of an assignment (in this case, the facilitators' "assignment" was for participants to approach the paper cut-outs

as potential elements of the plaza) and are generally more comfortable working with scissors and paper; children are taught to share and to consider others' needs; and for the children, the plaza's future is as their school playground, not as a front in the larger battle between resident-focused and investment- or tourism-focused development in the neighborhood.

But here I wish to simply emphasize the radical divergence between the approaches taken by the children's working group and my own table. These differences suggest that neither the specific activities planned for a particular participatory architecture process nor the "genre conventions" of participatory architecture (e.g., efforts to address participants' inequalities outside of the meeting space by creating meeting-specific speech norms where participants interact with one another as equals; the emphasis on architecture and design questions over abstract political questions) were able to fully determine the kinds of interactions, debates, and designing practices that took place at this participatory architecture meeting—let alone the conclusions that different participants drew from the activity.

As I will discuss in the following sections of this chapter, the adult participants were frustrated at not having been able to work on the more practical elements of the plaza's design over the course of the participatory process. But as the diverging proposals that the various working groups developed over the course of a shared participatory activity demonstrate, this is not because the planned activities did not afford the possibility of practical design work. Even where design-centered engagements are possible, these ways of working together are often crowded out by the (sometimes urgent) need to address relationship dynamics and neighborhood problems that do not have a clear connection to

design or might not be able to be resolved through design. Nevertheless, when people gather to do participatory architecture together, they are understandably frustrated if individual meetings “feel like a waste of time” where residents are unable to make progress on design.

By the time we walked to the bus stop after the second participatory meeting, the architects’ team was exhausted. Within the space of a single week they had facilitated the first of the participatory meetings for this project and analyzed participants’ contributions from the meeting to generate digestible “results” that would help make the residents’ design labor clear to them (in the form, for instance, of photographs of individual participants’ ideas and word clouds summarizing the frequency with which the residents prioritized various kinds of interventions). Simultaneously they had prepared the next meeting, including a slide presentation of possible design directions for the plaza, a participatory activity, and a strategy for linking the lead architects’ presentation of his design ideas with the participatory elements of the meeting. Exactly a week after the first participatory meeting, they facilitated the second. By the second meeting, the architects were working to manage their own exhaustion alongside participants’ sense that they were now being rushed through a design process in the space of a few months after years of demanding to be included. Every meeting had to “count” by achieving real forward design momentum: if, to residents, a participatory process that was scheduled to last two months felt scant, for the facilitators the more worrying corollary was that only three participatory meetings were scheduled as part of this process.

I met with Carles, who was the lead facilitator on this participatory process, during the interval between the second and third meetings—an interval that spanned several weeks as

Barcelona celebrated Christmas and the New Year. It was cold at LaCol's studio, and even in the small conference room, we huddled near the space heater. Carles brewed tea for us in a cast iron teapot. He explained the residents' palpable frustration with how the process had gone so far as a function of the small size of the empty lot and the interrelated problem of a relatively limited architectural intervention. "The topic of, like the scale of intervention, I don't know at Tinent Puig, the other day I started to feel a little bad about it, right? But even though it's a very small thing, I mean, the thing is—" Carles gestured to the teapot that stood on the table beside us.

In in this teapot there is a lot of design! You know? And there are lots of design decisions, and it's a really small thing, but there are lots of decisions, right? And in a public space, also! And in, in, let's say inside that scope [of the new project], right? The space we had for things to decide, even though it looked like a little, there was a lot, right? And and because of that from that space and from those four things we could have decided, you can get thousands of different projects, with different consequences, right? And and that was a little bit what I tried what we try umm to transmit, but also in the end what happened was that people started to talk [laughs quietly] about things that were outside of the scope [of the project].

If people could not see all the design decisions that Carles could see, Carles felt that this was because he had not been able to "transmit" his own awareness of the many design possibilities to the workshop's participants. In this interpretation, the problem stemmed from how the participatory workshops had been facilitated. But as Carles observed, participants returned repeatedly in the design process to "things that were outside the scope." In other words, the choices that participants would have found meaningful were unavailable to them. These decisions were the domain of the municipal government, while the scope of residents' participation was more limited. The mismatch between the participatory process's scope and the kinds of design choices that residents would have

found politically and socially meaningful was difficult for residents to address from within the participatory architecture process in which they were now engaged.

Despite the facilitators' efforts to remind participants that wider-ranging discussions of gentrification in their neighborhood were not the purpose of this participatory process, the economic shifts that enfold the whole neighborhood animated and set the conditions of interpretation for how participants made sense of what it meant to talk about and design the plaza. Furthermore, the dynamics of participants' pre-existing relationships with one another were incorporated into the design-focused and deliberative work that took place over the course of the meetings. Interactions that appeared to be about design in fact tugged at the threads of their pre-existing relationships with one another—as became obvious at my table, where representatives from the school and the neighbors' association communicated with one another about design, but not necessarily through design. Sometimes, as in the children's working group, these were face-to-face relationships between individuals. But at other times residents' relationships were mediated by the crowded neighborhood blocks that they shared with one another. Packed densely together and dealing with the same everyday challenges, each resident nevertheless developed their own positional knowledge about what was happening in the neighborhood and how this situation might be changed. As they threaded these relationships through their joint design work, participants endowed their architectural decisions with political valences that exceeded those that developed inside the iterations of the participatory architecture process itself.

Encountering Power and Constraints in Design Work

In this section, I return to the participatory process I explored in the previous section in order to investigate how residents who were participating in the project explained and sought to remedy its frustrations and shortcomings. To make sense of their less than complete ability to collectively participate in design work over the course of this participatory process, residents did not limit their analysis to the interactions and reasoning involved in their design work with other residents or with the facilitators. Instead they also began to examine the constellation of unequal relationships—involving residents, but also government officials and bureaucrats, tourists, hotel lobbies, and architects—that are both the animating force for and constitutive outside to horizontalizing, democracy-seeking participatory architecture.

When Barcelona en Comú won the May 2015 municipal elections, neighborhood activists began to feel that they could now expect more of a say in what would happen to the empty lot adjacent to the elementary school. An activist named Blanca remembered,

With the change of government, I think we put more pressure on our expectations. Well, we knew that our interlocutor was more thoughtful, ok? That was clear to us since before the elections, because clearly its sensitivity to these subjects is VERYYY different—at the antipodes! —to that of the previous government. This as a proposal before it was the government, before it was a city council, right? Already already it had a different sensibility. Aaand yes, it changed, it changed. And participatory processes, [that changed] too.

Neighborhood activists who had led the process of reclaiming the empty lot now demanded a participatory process to decide its future. They were very aware that residents disagreed strongly regarding what kind of “public” space should be built near the school and believed that these differences of opinion could be reconciled or worked out in a participatory process. An expert group, one activist explained to me, could play “the neutral technical

role”—a role that the activists themselves had neither the time nor the expertise to fill.

Gemma, the education activist, explained to me that “our request was precisely for a participatory process—this isn’t a demand that we have only because we’re families. We’re neighbors. This is a question for the whole neighborhood, and so all the neighbors should be involved.” Activists affiliated with the elementary school saw the participatory process as a means of bridging divisions between “families” and “neighbors”—which, as Gemma pointed out, were overlapping rather than separate groups.

After the new City Council took office, things started to move quickly—possibly too quickly. Blanca remembered,

the participatory process began to be done super quickly. In other words when I heard it was in December I said, no—not in December! We started going like crazy, right? How fast! Because we’re talking about—the change in government was in May, until June or something like that they hadn’t formed a government. And then we were on school vacation, with which, there’s nothing [to do]. September, we started the school year, and immediately we started working on this issue and it was like, fuck! Already?!

But this sudden speed contrasted sharply with the several years of waiting that had preceded it. Although the new government had launched a participatory process shortly after taking office, the activists came to that participatory process only after pressuring the previous municipal government for two years. Blanca assured me that “if they had let us, we from the [parents’] association would have started MUCH earlier.” For activists like Blanca, who was affiliated with the *Comissió Groga* (Yellow Committee), both rushing to carry out the participatory process and waiting to be allowed to act were unnatural rhythms imposed by the municipal government.

Residents disagreed in their interpretation of specific attributes of the participatory process that they were by then involved in—but their different interpretations tended to

return repeatedly to anxieties over whether their participation would mean anything to the larger design project. For instance, even though she was overwhelmed at how quickly things were proceeding, Blanca understood the municipal government's rapid initiation of a participatory process as evidence of its commitment to residents' participation. By contrast Gemma interpreted the government's insistence on squeezing the participatory process into such a short amount of time as a sign that the government was not truly prioritizing residents' participation.

With more time surely it would have been possible to do something more or something different. But well. Of course, in the end the conditions are always those that are given to you or that you have, in that moment, and that's what you play with. But if—no, no. A month and a half, after two years, right? It's—let's see—sorry! Right? They come to you with terms, with I don't know what, with plans, with stories, that is, fine. But in the end, right? What is it that is given priority?

From what Gemma could see, the participatory process and the residents who expected to participate in it had been “portioned out the leftovers.” Yet Blanca and Gemma shared a concern that the compressed timeline for the participatory process would end up squeezing residents' participation out of the design process altogether.

For Blanca, this concern manifested as a worry that the lead architect on the project would not find the time to modify his blueprints while the participatory process was still ongoing. This time period was crucial because it was during the participatory process that residents would most easily be able to give feedback on the designs and furthermore expect that their feedback be taken seriously. And indeed, looking back on the participatory process a few months later, Blanca reflected,

From the point of view of the *Comissió Grogà* we haven't been disappointed. On the contrary. Well. Let's see. There was disappointment on the last day [the day of the third participatory meeting] because we were waiting for [the lead architect] to show up with concrete plans. But that was obvious, after

that session you say, what has happened. Hm, hm. [The architect] has paid for a fucking great Christmas vacation, and he's still eating turrón. Because this was in January, right? It was, hey, he's still eating turróns, this man. No! Clearly he didn't have time to redo the blueprints...And if we really wanted the architectural plan to be modified, it's clear that the architect needs his time.

Blanca liaises with artists in her professional life, and she complained to me with a joking familiarity about architects' tendency to take their time in order to ensure that a design meets both practical and aesthetic standards. By joking about the lead architect eating candy, Blanca signaled that her own impatience to see the blueprints did not necessarily line up in helpful ways with the amount of time the architect might reasonably need—particularly because the residents were hoping to see substantive rather than cosmetic changes to the architectural plan.

Residents' impatience to see a plan had to do not only with their desire to see their own contributions reflected in the plans, but also with the fact that up to this point, they had not seen any plan at all. At the second participatory meeting, the lead architect had presented a slide show that featured maps of the neighborhood and 3-D renders of how the plaza and the street could be made into a visually continuous space. He emphasized that “this isn't a proposal”—just a series of “ideas” that he had presented to the municipal government. From the perspective of the architects who had organized the participatory meetings, working from ideas instead of blueprints was a strategic move intended to free residents' creativity and allow them to participate in design work despite their lack of architectural training. The lack of specifics allowed residents who were encountering the plaza and the conundrums it posed for the first time to participate in more abstract but still vital conversations about the nature of public space in their neighborhood and how it intersected with dynamics of gentrification, neighborliness, and safety.

Activists who had long been involved with the empty lot interpreted the lack of concrete plans during the participatory process as an effort to give them an unrestrained imaginative space in which to work out the plaza's future. But they disagreed that this strategy was appropriate to the particular neighborhood and activist relationships involved in designing the plaza. They suspected that the lack of specificity was a strategy for either hiding something or excluding residents and activists from the more serious and more permanently binding design work. Blanca framed these concerns in the rhetoric of transparency.

I think that a participatory process—concretely this one HERE, I don't know about others, but about this one, if the City Council had been a transparent City Council, they would have said. The advance—the preliminary design—I don't know how this works, but I imagine, preliminary design, it has three options. In my opinion, right? If they had published online, three options so that the people would know, these were the three options that existed before in the preliminary design, right? I say. And that and that and what were what were the numbers, the budgets, for these three options, and why was it decided, from whoever it is that decides these things, in other words, THIS will be like this. Ok. We decided that this is the architect. And this is the design. We're going to speak with him. From the beginning. Mr. Architect.

Amidst her uncertainty about the correct architectural terms for the different stages of the design process, Blanca insisted that the municipal government had already made a number of decisions about the design: what the budget would be; what the different design possibilities were; who the lead architect would be. In expressing a desire for more transparency, Blanca assumed that a clear choice between a series of preliminary designs that are internally differentiated from one another already existed and was being kept out of residents' view. But as I explored in the first section of this chapter, in participatory architecture settings just as in many kinds of design work, the labor of designing together

itself consists of generating a series of design choices and of internally differentiating one design from another (Murphy 2012; Corsín Jiménez 2014).

Gemma echoed both Blanca's uncertainty about the phases of work involved in design and her conviction that surely there must have been other working materials available for residents to interact with. "Most of all, is there a proposal that we can tackle, right? And work on—or is there not one, right? I mean a little bit the City Council on that basis, is key. What it works on. On a blank paper, right? A blank spaaaaace? Or on a proposal, and what are the limits?" She was certain that in its internal discussions City Hall had worked with plans and proposals instead of with blank space and blank papers. To Gemma, knowing the limits that the government had placed on its own work was essential to residents' capacity to intervene effectively in the plaza's design.

Gemma and Blanca, like many of the other residents involved in the participatory process, wanted to do design work—but they wished to tailor their designs to the practical constraints of municipal budgets as well as the needs of other city departments such as sanitation and mobility. Without knowing these constraints, they asserted that their design work was "not practical," and perhaps not realistically achievable. Blanca clarified,

It's FINE that they give free rein and allow the children to participate and that we can DRAW slides and we can draw rock climbing walls, that's great! For me this would have been a point of departure, ok? To let the imagination fly! Without restraints, but then the next would be have been, ok. Now we're going to come back here, here [taps on table] in ooon the ground, with our feet [knocks on table] on the ground, I am very pragmatic. Very pragmatic. And we're go going to stop flying, and we're going to say what the technical restraints are. That I don't know them. And I've been part of this project since the beginning. And maybe I'm asking for something that even if the politicians and LaCol and [the lead architect] agree, in any case the man from the depart from the police stops you, eh, right? I've worked with City Hall. If the police tell you no, you can be, you can be the Virgin Mary. It's a no [brings hand down softly on table].

Blanca wanted residents' choices in the participatory process to be rooted in their knowledge of the real constraints on the overarching project. In professional design work, constraints are often productive because they enable design creativity to proceed within a more narrow set of parameters and therefore reveal unthought-of alternatives (Star and Ruhleder 1996; Luck 2012; Schwittay 2014). Blanca was seeking the outer limits of these government-imposed constraints because she hoped that this would in the end allow residents' design work to proceed in a way that would avoid a hard "no" from, for instance, the police.

Exploring constraints is central to the iterative movements that characterize all works of world-making, but that are especially prominent in design. As Barad argues, identifying and living with constraints and conditions is itself a practice of becoming.

Material conditions matter, not because they "support" particular discourses that are the actual generative factors in the formation of bodies, but because matter comes to matter through the iterative intra-activity of the world in its becoming. The point is not merely that there are important material factors in addition to discursive ones; rather, the issue is the conjoined material-discursive nature of constraints, conditions, and practices. (Barad 2007, 152)

In design work, these iterations encompass not only a movement between drafts, but also movements between different interactional modalities for working out the next iteration of a design and movements between different social worlds as a design is elaborated (Kelty 2008; Murphy 2012; Corsín Jiménez 2014). In most design practices, the same set of practitioners is involved in every phase of design work and these practitioners jointly participate in all of the design's iterations.

By contrast, as participatory architecture designs move through a series of iterations, they also move through multiple settings and through the hands of practitioners who differ from one another not only in terms of their role in the design process, but also in terms of

their expertise and affiliation with particular communities. Shifts in the meaning, form, and social reality of the designed object that normally occur as designs move from one iteration to the next are intensified in participatory architecture because as designs are iterated, they also travel between social worlds and these worlds' particular practices for jointly creating forms and contesting meanings. Here, the "generative contrapuntal elaboration" (Murphy 2012, 1966) that is produced when design work is iterated with and through social interactions is both transmodal and transsocial. The iterative work of participatory architecture brings the very different social worlds of residents' urban everyday and architects' and municipal officials' strategic visioning of urban planning are temporarily brought into the same interactional framework. This is not to say that these modes of sociality are reconciled or made the same as one another, but rather that they are provisionally brought into relation with one another. But despite their different areas of expertise, neither resident-activists nor architect-facilitators can achieve this provisional unity if designs and their various iterations are blocked from traveling between social worlds.

In the participatory architecture process for the plaza, this is exactly what happened: not all constraints were made visible to all the collaborators in the design work; sometimes preliminary designs did not reach the residents; other times there were only "ideas" and not a "proposal" for a design, but residents were convinced that a proposal did exist but was hidden from them; and the compressed timeline for the participatory process prevented both residents and architects from spending as much time as they would have liked working out the implications of designs and their possible next iterations outside of formal participatory meetings. The result was that residents and activists were deeply

frustrated by how their relationship with the municipal government played out in the course of this participatory process—even to the point of feeling that they had not been offered a clear role in the design work around which participation was organized.

Designing After Participatory Architecture

Architects and residents alike hold up participatory architecture as a process by which people can work out how to live together—not just alongside one another, but also within challenging macropolitical situations such as gentrification. When participants and facilitators insist on treating participatory architecture as a series of processual and iterative engagements, this helps to disrupt some of the expertise-laden hierarchies that often exclude residents from design work. Throughout this process, residents become more skilled at design thinking; but more importantly, the line between design and the social world becomes blurrier. The result is that residents are more easily able to assert that their expertise matters to the project of “good” design. In the case of the plaza, the finished plans were themselves held up as evidence that collaboration in the design process had generated a new type of urban coexistence—either despite or because of the frustrations that residents experienced during the participatory process. In this section I suggest that to the extent that this participatory process succeeded at recalibrating urban citizenship practices, this success was the result of residents’ work to relocate the iterative parts of design practice from the time and space of the workshop to the plaza, the wider neighborhood, and residents’ future lives. During the design process, residents consistently framed designs as unfinished. Even after extended work to nail down details and make plans concrete, both residents and architects juxtaposed the finished design to the many

possible versions of the plaza this design might generate. As a consequence, the plaza would still be shapeable by future users' collaborative efforts long after the blueprints had been finalized.

I argue that by insisting that finished plans are open-ended and by framing plans as abstractions or ideals, participants create an interstitial time and space between plans and built forms. By engaging in practices of co-habiting and co-building that follow planning but precede the use of built space, participants shape the multiple possibilities a plan offers into actually existing urban space. Through this transformation, building—as a verb and becoming-state between plans and structures—takes on the role of a tool for conviviality that de-centers expertise and embraces creativity and autonomy.

In analyzing how non-experts build relationships to urban space that use but exceed the design and building tools provided by architecture and urban planning, I have found Ivan Illich's concept of tools for conviviality to be helpful (1973). While some theorists have proposed conviviality as a means to a "lighter-touch" urban politics based on "assembling intimacy" (Thrift 2008, 216; Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2013a), it is unclear how this work of assembly actually unfolds. Illich offers us one possibility: conviviality is made when people use their practical knowledge, autonomous work, and creativity to build new relationships with one another, outside of hierarchies and learned behaviors (1973). Illich called these tools "convivial" to echo the Spanish *convivir*: to live in company with others, to cohabit a place with them (1973, 12). That resonance and its importance to reproductive projects in urban space will become evident through what remains of this chapter. Over the course of the participatory process that centered on the plaza/playground, convivial future-

making was a fulcrum for reclaiming a role for residents as expert collaborators in design work.

By the time the third public meeting to design the plaza/playground took place in January 2016, all parties involved had come to feel that the participatory process had been too rushed. LaCol announced to the gathered participants that the participatory process would be extended by at least one meeting. Gala Pin Ferrando, who attended this meeting in her capacity as city councilwoman responsible for the Ciutat Vella district and for the governance area of Participation and Territory, reminded the participants that it was important to *construir en plegades* (build “in pleats”) with the overlapping involvement of teachers, students, parents, and neighbors. She affirmed that after the official meetings for the project were over, they would “follow up and execute the project among all of us,” even if the “structural work” was to be performed by City Hall. Pin also noted that “the idea of this process was to do a *process*”—if this meant that there needed to be two or three additional sessions, those would be scheduled. But some residents worried that extending the number of sessions would dilute their power. One participant declared that she did not want to have a longer participatory process because “what comes out of here needs to be binding.” Ultimately, the participatory process was extended by only one session: a *taller de retorn* (return workshop) with limited participatory elements where the facilitator team would present residents’ shared conclusions from the participatory process and the lead architect would present residents with his designs for the plaza.

In the end, Gemma was satisfied that the City Council had met its “responsibilities” by providing the technical means and spaces for a participatory process. But, she clarified, “it’s a matter of relations, right? Of what is the role of each person.” She put herself in the

position of a representative from the municipal government or the outside facilitator team, arriving at a participatory meeting in her neighborhood. “I go there with my mm my my technicians and my expert brand, and others do not.” From Gemma’s perspective, this “expert brand” automatically generated inequalities in participatory spaces because other participants could not access a similar “brand.” But the bigger problem was that neither the municipal government nor the facilitator team had cultivated relationships with the residents that worked to de-emphasize these differences.

Blanca pointed out that the structural exclusion of residents’ expertise made design worse because other types of experts were missing knowledge that was important to their work.

Citizens’ involvement is important (.) for a good government. Not even for it to be more democratic and more just, but for it to be good! Because the technician gentlemen from the police and from public lighting and from waterworks and from parks and gardens—they have NO idea what is happening here! We do. Not even out of selfishness, nor because because I want the space to be made my way. Or because I think this decision will benefit ME. But rather simply because to reach this decision, I CAN contribute! Knowledge. Right?...Now in the media they criticize it a lot: “These are a band of hippies that never stop holding assemblies!”

I admitted that there were a lot of assemblies. But Blanca refuted these critics by framing participation as the way of the future. “‘Battle of wills, I want to say something too.’ But I think that that in any case, fifty years from now every city will have its formulas for participation, right? The the young people do not understand a government that does not do this.” To her, participation was a technology whose contributions to good governance would soon become self-evident.

But in this particular participatory process, residents had struggled to participate as collaborators in doing design work, instead of as merely as people who opined on extant

designs after being consulted. From Gemma's perspective, the capabilities and expertise of residents who had been involved with the empty lot over the long term were abruptly supplanted by City Hall's and an outside architecture studio's knowledge and power practices. She remembered,

There was a moment, when the participatory process starts, and it already seems like uhhh it's like it's taken away, right? From a process that has been *motor* and that has been a proposal from families and such, uh well now City Hall takes charge, an outside group comes—and it might be that they do it really well, huh? In other words, this isn't a question of criticism of the methodologies or whatever...But it is a question of, fuck, keep us informed! Right? I mean. We bring, we proposed a space like as a *grup motor*, and of being able to set out a plan, right? What are the sessions, and building, but collectively! In other words, think about how the process should be, how we were going to communicate it, how to do it. But well, they come to you already in the first session, with a calendar of three days, with a series of things where you say, ok, well fine. But when there's a problem.... well, take advantage of the fact that you have the families. Right? Who have been an important part of this, and and it would have been possible maybe to work more closely.

Activists were primarily included in the participatory process as “participants,” alongside other residents. While some grassroots activists were incorporated into a *grup motor* along with representatives from the school administration and from the neighbors' association, this group primarily worked to communicate information about upcoming meetings to fellow residents. Gemma felt that the members of the *grup motor* had not been treated like true partners in collective building. Her remarks point to a desire for residents and their expertise to be included in participatory architecture not only as communications specialists nor as participants in pre-planned meetings, but also as collaborators in planning the whole social and political process that generates design.

Blanca argued that the roadblocks that the residents had encountered over the course of the participatory process were “almost metaphysical” instead of merely political. They

had to do not only with inequality, but also with connections between individualism, the raw exercise of authority, and male genius.

It's true that the the politician is not very open to to—now it's changed a little bit. But when, until now, they weren't very open to our to what we proposed, because of an issue of, 'the one who decides is me and the one who gives the orders is me, and how can you tell me now how I have to make the city'—right? And architects aren't very open because of an issue that's more, eh, aesthetic or artistic, right? Because of an issue of design, right? Of 'MY design, no one will come you can't come to say how MY design is.'

From this perspective, collective decision-making was the true challenge to existing authority structures. It implied that there could be a version of “making the city” that would turn on something other than the individual exercise of authority or individual aesthetic passions.

Participatory architecture threatens individual political authority and individual artistic genius because the iterations involved in collaborative design transform both people's positions and the design options available to them. By the end of this process there is no guarantee that the design options will resemble those put forward at the beginning, nor that participants will still hold to their original opinions. As Blanca exclaimed, “When four people start thinking and focusing their energy, things emerge that make you say, Christ, and this is something we thought of?! How good we are when we set ourselves to thinking!” In a sense, participatory architecture is alchemical. Design and deliberations take on unexpected and unlooked-for qualities as they not only mediate between but also transform participants' desires.

Participatory architecture guide participants through a series of collaborative interactions in which they uncover their own capacities to generate not only design ideas, but also novel and more convivial relationships with others. As I have already noted,

security was a central problem in the design of the plaza/playground. Along with some parents, teachers who would have to monitor their students on the playground asked for a fence to be built around it; meanwhile other parents and residents without school-aged children worried that the park wouldn't feel inviting or accessible to non-students if it were behind a gate. At one meeting, a participant stated that she wasn't sure how this could be decided. She concluded her remarks by adding in an offhand way, "perhaps we can decide it by majorities."

Her suggestion prompted an immediate response from another participant, who I'll call Montse: "I don't believe in majorities, I believe in minorities—not in confrontation. And voting isn't the solution." This rebuke landed sharply. At the time, residents of Barcelona were learning that no configuration of a referendum on Catalan independence would be considered legal by the Spanish government. This was still over a year before the 2017 referendum and the violent police crackdown that followed it. Meanwhile in the absence of an official referendum, every single national and regional election had morphed into a referendum on Catalan independence. Voting, then, was suspect—and so was the idea of majority rule, which many residents of Barcelona believed had been used to deny people living in Catalonia their democratic "right to decide." By asserting her commitment to minorities instead of to voting or confrontation, Montse linked what was going on in the participatory meeting with relations between minorities in the diverse neighborhood where the play area in question was located, as well as to regional and national debates regarding how to preserve the rights and decision-making power of minorities.

In a more conciliatory tone, Montse offered that everyone at the meeting had the same fundamental goals and should be able to reach a compromise. "I believe that all of us agree

deep down—it's important to find ways to agree." Participatory processes do not take pre-existing agreements as their starting point; they are instead elaborate mechanisms for, as Montse put it, "finding ways to agree."

As they search for ways to agree, participants encounter shared desires for the future amidst the many situations where they find themselves at odds with one another. In participatory processes, planning means finding desires for the future that participants hold in common and building a map that will allow participants to arrive at this future together. This project of imagining, building, and arriving at a shared future that binds participants together not in spite of, but alongside, their differences.

When it came to deciding whether the empty lot should be fenced off as part of its transformation into a plaza/playground, the plan's irresolution and its capacity to be transformed through residents' action turned out to be crucial resources for finding ways to agree. Desires that would have been incompatible if they had to be resolved through a design that served some purposes but not others would instead be reconciled through how different residents would live together in a shared space. One participant suggested that "we should see if we can solve this with people instead of with fences." The facilitators reminded residents that in addition to an architectural solution to the problem of securing the plaza, they could consider how "the management of the space" might become a force for guaranteeing safety. In other words, people could together inhabit the space in a way that would make it safer for children. Of course, there were disagreements here too: some residents highlighted "drunk *guiris*" (a pejorative term for tourists who come to Spain in search of "sun and sangria"), "skateboarders", and "drug users" as people they would like to exclude from the park—through design elements rather than the interpersonal

management of the plaza; meanwhile other residents (including some parents) argued that only by encountering “all kinds of people” would the schoolchildren “become neighbors.” But shifting some of the burden of security from the plaza’s design to how the plaza would be cared for allowed these disagreements to be deferred to a time period outside of the participatory process, after the design had been built.

When the facilitators of the participatory process presented the final design for the plaza at the *taller de retorn*, they framed it as an “abstract imagination” that could still produce “multiple possible realities” depending on how it was built and who was involved in making these decisions. The plan called for an “unaggressive enclosure” around the perimeter of the space but did not guarantee what would be built. The lead architect suggested that the entire enclosure could be made of plant walls. Even after consensus had been reached and rendered coherent in a building plan, contingency and flexibility—and their mobilization by users—remained part of the plan.

In the plaza that was built two years later and opened in late 2018, the fence only rises to waist height and does not include a closing gate. Instead there is a gap in the fence. During the six hours each day that the plaza is set aside for students’ exclusive use, teachers will move a portable plant wall into the gap to seal it. This solution not only invites neighbors to manage their relationships with one another—the designs would simply not work as intended without residents’ continual work to share and care for a small and contested space.

The design of the plaza did not necessarily represent the residents’ current desires, but instead what they hoped they would come to desire *after* beginning to care for the plaza as both a social and built environment. This move—from what people want when given a

choice, to what they hope to want after a prolonged period of building relationships with their neighbors in shared spaces—is essential. If participatory design merely gathered together future users’ opinions in order to generate a sort of checklist for what to build, then it would be no different from the public consultations that residents and architects often critique. In seeking consensus, participants recalibrate not just their own desires but also their commitment to shaping these desires in concert with others—even after the work of designing has ended.

By constantly reminding one another that multiple realities can be made from the same plan, participants transform a what seems like a conclusive statement of relations between people and place into a starting point for additional work. In doing so they create an intermediary plane where they can collectively transform their anxieties over privacy and security into supports for building radically different desires and engagements into shared space. In this case tools for conviviality are not to be found in participatory design nor even in participants’ capacity to manage their relationships with others differently. Conviviality emerges thanks to an intermediary time and space where residents have already imagined how they will live together but have not yet begun to do so. In this interstice, they work together to transform desires that seem culturally preordained into desires that disrupt these hierarchies.

When new urban spaces emerge, they are the product of neighborly labor that exceeds planning—and this is true even of intentionally and expertly planned spaces. The space in between plans and buildings, where residents work collectively to make livable space emerge from ideals, can be a tool for conviviality. But it’s worth asking how conviviality gets pushed out of design processes that are themselves meant to foster the co-habitation of

urban space. If conviviality seems to most strongly come into play as a hope for what will happen once design work has concluded rather than in design work itself, should we interpret this as a failure of the design process? Or as a tactical shift that amplifies and reproduces the convivial affordances that participants encounter in design collaborations?

Conclusion

When a participatory architecture process lives up to residents' and facilitators' hopes—as it did, for instance, at the *ateneu*—, people engaged in participatory architecture together explore the choices that are available to them and create space for more meaningful choices to be part of their design work. But the participatory process to build the plaza instead revealed the array of meaningful choices that were not in participants' power to make. As Carles had insisted, it is not the case that the small size of a lot or the simplicity of a design brief limits the design decisions available to participants. Instead, participatory architecture succeeds in making design decisions available when participants—government officials, architects, and residents—collaborate to create both practical and imaginative spaces for intervention.

Ultimately, the participatory process that centered on the plaza was successful in residents' perspectives because it offered them new citizenship practices and not necessarily because they were thrilled by the resulting design. Blanca told me, “the mindset shift of participatory processes isn't something we're trained for...We're used to being passive citizens, where everything is given to us already done, and at most we go to the bar and with a beer in hand with our friends, we say, shit! What are they doing? Those in charge. It's true, that's what we're used to.”

From Gemma's perspective, the greatest success of the participatory process lay in the fact that it had guided residents in uncovering their own capacities and using these skills to create a more convivial neighborhood—and in the fact that in the end, the city government had played a role in this achievement. "In the end," Gemma mused,

I think that the best part [of the participatory process] is this has allowed a—in other words, not all the families knew about this, right? Or you doubt if they felt very called, or or or participants. But consciousness, knowledge, concern, and desire—this I think has been something that has been transmitted, right? And that's good because in the end that is what creates, creates, well, the neighborhood. Right? And neighborliness, and the city. In other words, it's that concern, right? We're talking about something for the school but in the end it's also a matter for families and for the neighborhood, right? And in the end, this is what makes the city. More than any of the [chuckle] battles over public policy, or many other things, right? And that's fine, eh? Because I think that City Hall should do, for now, all of it.

Collaboratively designed spaces become convivial not only through their built features, but also through participants' use of design processes as a space for imagining how to manage, share, and maintain a space alongside others—long after the design is complete. Their new relationships and knowledge become the foundations of a changed city.

CHAPTER 3

FILLING HOLLOWS

One winter weeknight in 2017 a fire started in a shuttered unused warehouse in Barcelona. As the fire burned in Sants, there was nothing and everything to worry about. The fire burned in an unoccupied warehouse on a row of other unoccupied buildings. But these empty warehouses were part of Can Batlló, where empty warehouses are gradually being reclaimed by resident-organized groups to shelter grassroots-run projects. Neighborhood residents flocked to the edges of the sealed-off perimeter the firefighters had arranged around the factory complex. Fires happen all the time and go largely unremarked in other deindustrialized parts of Barcelona; by contrast, a fire here was an event.

In the thirty minutes between when I learned of the fire and when I arrived at Can Batlló to see if anything could be learned or done, at least thirty people had already congregated there. Police had blocked off access to the site while they worked to contain the fire, and the closest we watchers could get was a small churchyard park directly across the street from the main entrance. The fire burned far enough away from any in-use or renovated warehouses that firefighters had assured bystanders that it would not spread. Initially, observers pointed out to the firefighters and to each other that people often went in and out of the abandoned warehouses—although this was not extremely common, squatters had periodically lived in the warehouses or informally operated businesses from inside them. But even after the fire department had reassured onlookers that no one had been inside and no one was in danger, the palpable anxiety did not dissipate.

The watchers were unable to protect the factory complex or to even learn more about what was happening. Despite this, their concern for and investment in Can Batlló as a distributed collective space—even the unused parts of it that neither they nor any of the rest of us had had any role in building—kept them there. Dozens of people remained gathered across the street from the fire trucks, murmuring quietly to one another and craning their necks upward at the smoke that was spreading across the darkening sky. Why were people so concerned with the wellbeing of an empty, long-unused warehouse?

Across Barcelona's neighborhoods, residents root their practices of social reproduction in "empty" lots and buildings.²⁴ These life-giving practices are often successful even though they take place in locations whose legal and economic futures are uncertain. The ease with which residents put the constitutive elements of empty places to work suggests that the chosen places' emptiness was illusory to begin with. To neighborhood residents, for instance, an unused warehouse at Can Batlló is replete with potential despite its apparent emptiness and lack of connection to the social life of the in-use parts of Can Batlló. The potency of the warehouse and other sites like it derives from such places' strong connections to longstanding but flexible patterns of economic and social life in the neighborhoods in which they are located.

Empty urban spaces in Barcelona could at any moment be recaptured by investors' and government officials' speculative movements through the city. In fact, this happens continuously; residents active at all of the sites I will discuss in this article also devoted considerable energies to combating the gentrification and touristification of their

²⁴ Community-run spaces thrive under a variety of ownership models. Some, like Can Batlló, have reached agreements with the municipal government to develop long-neglected lots or warehouses; others are *okupa* projects on privately- or state-owned real estate.

neighborhoods. Especially in older industrial areas of Barcelona, the uneven application of regeneration programs associated with the Barcelona Model has created a situation of “planned degradation” (Dalmau i Torva 2014) that fuels cycles of disinvestment and reinvestment (Arbaci and Tapada-Berteli 2012). Among other tactics, residents contest these cycles by participating in formal planning processes, voting, engaging in political protest, and reclaiming (*reivindicar*) lots and buildings for their own uses.

In this chapter, I will examine how community-centered care projects transform abandoned or vacant urban spaces into sites of potential. I begin by tracing how residents’ encounters with abandoned real estate reveal both materials that can be used in new building projects and memories of long-since changed patterns of economic and social life. The residues of unexpected times and unplanned-for resources each contribute to the possibility of novel futures in places that seem scarred by history (Monica Degen 2017; Zee 2017; Rubin 2018).

Next, I discuss activists’ practices for naming, describing, and classifying empty places as a prelude to cultivating them. By categorizing empty places as hollows (*buits* in Catalan; *huecos* in Spanish) that shelter diffuse but activatable resources, grassroots activists and architects bring communal attention and resourcefulness to bear on the social and material potentials of unoccupied and uncared for places. In doing so, they short-circuit both capitalist and utopian projects that seek to conquer the city by claiming its empty spaces as exchangeable raw materials.

Residents’ categorizations of hollow places and government officials’ and real estate developers’ categorizations of empty lots and abandoned buildings are performed in overlapping spaces, within shared timeframes. But, I conclude, these categories are

misaligned. The mismatch creates the possibility for alternative ways of inhabiting the city to develop relatively undisturbed. Precisely because other actors in the city misunderstand residents' category-making, hollows are able to incubate alternative modes of habitation in residents' own lifeworlds rather than in the longer lifetimes of urban development and utopian political change.

Finding Residues, Remnants, and Potentiality

Across a broad array of geographies and scales, the act of building creates or spatializes relationships between places and communities, uses, and futures. Building is thus a means of enacting and inscribing desires in the built environment. Even partially built or unfinished structures “create the possibility of multiple futures in uncertain times” through their very presence (Sandoval-Cervantes 2017, 210).

Built structures slip fluidly between crystallizing plans and aspirations for the future and articulating or providing for concrete embodied needs. As a result of this constant movement between daily practice and imagined potential, the urban everyday appears to many of Barcelona's residents as a self-evidently meaningful field of political contestation. As James Holston observes, buildings “are ‘good to think’ because they channel personal experience into a public idiom, architecture” (1991, 456). Moreover, the incompletely verbalized nature of architecture as a “public idiom” permits designs for dwelling to travel across and between other kinds of established truth.

Over the course of my fieldwork I befriended participants in ten grassroots initiatives based in Barcelona's empty lots and buildings. They included community gardens, community centers, performance spaces, collective dining areas, children's play areas,

workplaces, and experimental architectural and artistic spaces. Consistently, both in interviews and in everyday talk, participants highlighted and referred to the moral and social qualities of the spaces in which they were now playing, performing, eating, and working. These qualities were central to people's collective decisions to incorporate these places rather than any others into their projects.

In other words, the places where residents chose to build had never truly been empty. These sites continued to shelter social ties, ethical meanings, and material affordances despite having fallen out of everyday use. If the remnants of places' once-active lives are occluded by emptiness, then their reactivation is simply a question of knowing how to remove blockages and reinscribe sociality. This question is perfectly suited to the everyday expertise that comes from living in a place and with its particular absences.

In Barcelona, the residues possessed by empty places—or the residues by which places are possessed—are highly salient in residents' imaginaries of how these places can be enrolled in political, economic, and social projects. Following the lead of anthropologists who have explored the semiotic affordances (Nakassis 2016; Keane 2014) that built structures, abandoned objects, and urban plans provide for people's everyday worlds (Hudson 2014; Star 1999; Kim 2016; Corsín Jiménez 2014), I examine residents' attention to and cultivation of residues in empty places. These places' apparent emptiness distracts our attention from the fact that emptiness has a particular and determinate shape to it (Navaro-Yashin 2012). Inside and running through the emptiness of Barcelona's lots, buildings, and alleys, it is possible to trace social, economic, and ecological relationships that undergird and support their current configurations. As with "hollers" in Appalachia

(Stewart 1996), hollows' seemingly unfilled gaps shelter lifeways that would not thrive if they were elsewhere or more exposed to indiscriminate public view.

Residents can mobilize “empty” spaces to make things happen in their neighborhoods precisely because municipal officials and investors have treated them as spaces that contain nothing, or at the very least nothing of value. Empty lots and buildings do not necessitate immediate cleaning, securitization, or inclusion in plans for the city.²⁵ As a result, places' purported emptiness helps protect the residues of earlier economic projects or social worlds by guarding landscapes from intervention.

In the summer of 2014, the Can Batlló community center was beginning to expand from the row of warehouses it had initially occupied to an adjacent row. Someone who was involved in a warehouse-based project at Can Batlló had notified Jordi that a few of the *naves abandonadas* (abandoned warehouses) in more distant parts of the factory complex had old furniture in them. Jordi was part of a collective that had recently been invited to join Can Batlló, and he thought that some of this furniture might be useful for rehabilitating the warehouse that his group would eventually move into. Jordi had already determined that there was some *bon material* (good stuff) in the abandoned warehouses.

A group of four people (Jordi, his collective-mate Mateu, his friend Artur, and me) gathered at Can Batlló to explore the warehouses more fully and make an inventory of items that we would later transport to the mid-rehabilitation warehouse. Our first stop was at Can Batlló's bar, where we drank beers “to build up our strength.” We introduced

²⁵ Empty places' inclusion in municipal plans is premised on future investment and construction; often, by the time these plans are actionable, the master plan for the area has changed and empty areas' futures are once again up for debate. Similarly, private owners often hire security contractors. But these security contractors tend to be visible only after the empty space in question is in use as a community garden, home, or social center.

ourselves to a volunteer worker at the bar and mentioned that we had been given permission to recycle furniture from one of the abandoned warehouses. She gave us a key so we could let ourselves in. As we walked through Can Batlló's eight hectares of industrial space, Mateu recalled that 15 years ago he had worked at a printing press in one of these warehouses.

When we reached the building, which was made up of a series of smaller interconnected workshop spaces scattered over two stories, we could hear a trumpet playing. A group of musicians were practicing for their performance at next month's *Festa Major de Sants*. We walked from the foyer into another room, and Mateu told us that this was the same workshop where he had worked. "It's amazing to see it like this," he told us, "without either machines or workers."

Mateu pointed out where the machines from the workshop used to be positioned; their massive footprints were still visible as darker-colored rectangles of floor that had not been bleached by the sun. Mateu remembered that the workers used to toss stacks of finished paper near the stairwell and entryway—often crowding the space so much that no one could get in or out. As we continued to explore, we found one machine from the old printing press, and Mateu demonstrated how it worked. He was emotional at having found himself in the same place where he used to work, and wistful at seeing the building now that it was no longer being used for this, or any, purpose. Fifteen years ago the printing press was in financial trouble and had decided to fire several of its younger workers; Mateu was one of them, so he was let go. After that the business and its equipment were purchased by another printing press. "Apparently that didn't go so well for them," Jordi said, looking around the abandoned warehouse with amusement in his eyes.

Although valuable machines were removed from the building and this made the warehouse appear “abandoned,” smaller pieces of equipment that had been integral to the press’s work, such as laser negatives and bookcases, remained. As Mateu’s reaction to being in his old workplace demonstrates, the webs of social and affective relations that coalesced around these objects were still present. When buildings are abandoned, and even when they are demolished to leave behind empty lots, debris and objects are freed up for reuse. Relationships, affects, and resources that cohere around buildings are like exoskeletons that form a secondary convivial structure. Their separation from their original economic or social purpose does not necessarily weaken relationships that form in a place’s orbit, and these relationships may still be salvageable.

The memories, affects, and routines that reside in built forms are activated when people return to now-empty places. Buildings’ and lots’ hollowing-out does not empty remnants of relationships from the structures in which they originally resided or developed. If anything, hollowing-out processes leave scars that in turn become resources for new kinds of relationships and creativity. Abandoned and empty places shelter social, economic, and affective infrastructures that are readily available for uptake. These infrastructures and residues lend their potential for political and social meaning-making to ostensibly neutral space. When residents of Barcelona fill hollows with new social arrangements and new buildings they reactivate not only the potentials of empty places, but also the relationships, affects, and resources that reside in and continue to condense around them.

Through acts of naming, mapping, and building that adapt and respond to specific locations, places become co-participants in collective projects (Basso 1996; Corsín Jiménez

and Estalella 2013b; Green 2005). People co-produce and convey meaning with their built environments when they make buildings (Fehérváry 2013; Sandoval-Cervantes 2017), move through cities (Masquelier 2002; Monica Degen and Rose 2012), design plans for buildings, streets, or zones (Caldeira and Holston 2007; Hartblay 2017), make use of the city and its infrastructure (Anand 2011; P. Harvey and Knox 2012), and engage in large-scale planning and policy-making (Valverde 2011; Scott 1998). However, only rarely have anthropologists investigated the contribution of unbuilt space to such collective projects (Gordillo 2014; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Simone 2004; Ingold 2010). Urban landscapes in particular tend to be treated as meaningful contributors to collective projects only insofar as they play host to particular buildings or communities; the urban terrain itself is treated as a uniform stage upon which buildings, infrastructures, and communities interact with one another (Massey 1992). I join my interlocutors in approaching urban terrain as a dynamic, varied, resource-rich participant in these relationships (Pellow and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2014).

The fact that urban space shelters variable meanings, relationships, and resources apart from specific built structures is evident from people's understandings of their urban environments in the moments before they begin to build. Throughout my fieldwork, place-making consistently began with being drawn to, identifying, and identifying with a place, rather than by residents' selection of a specific building, structure, or design that they wished to build. In Barcelona construction is a means of holding space for possibilities that can only be realized in the future because sites have been claimed for them—and rendered meaningful and resourceful—in the present. The work of deciding where to build relies on

communities' successful mobilization of knowledge and intuition regarding what a place and its social and economic resources will and will not allow.

Making Meaning by Categorizing Empty Places

In neighborhood-based activism in Barcelona, possibility-making begins with the baptismal creation of a particular space as a place that is meant for a use, a community, or a symbolically meaningful structure. Residents of Barcelona use a specialized vocabulary to classify and categorize empty or underutilized urban space—albeit a vocabulary drawn from and continuously used in everyday speech. *Solar* (unbuilt or demolished lot), *nau* (industrial warehouse), *buit* (hollow, empty, or vacant, depending on the usage), *abandonat* (abandoned) and *forat* (hole) each emphasize a different degree of emptiness or usability in a given space. These descriptors highlight the resources present in a place and the way social relations are organized around or in response to that place's neglect; they do not categorize places by their ownership model or their economic function. Crucially, residents' descriptions of empty spaces in their neighborhoods do not always line up with the terms preferred by the municipal government or by the private owners of vacant lots. Different communities that share the same physical space may agree or disagree on which word best describes a site.

These variable words for empty places demarcate particular locations in the city as meaningful *to* someone and meant *for* something. Such designations are a necessary prelude to site-specific design and the reconstruction of empty places. They are also essential to the production of political meaning and possibility in the city.

Residents' descriptions of empty places create publicly available collective meanings for these places and bring both places and their emptiness into collective consciousness. This rich vocabulary for describing the different ways in which a place might appear to be empty reflects distinctions between the political or social valences of various "empty" spaces. Perhaps for this reason, descriptions tend not to be interchangeable once they have been assigned to specific sites. Thus a community garden down the street from where I lived was consistently referred to as having filled a *solar abandonat* (abandoned lot), while a community garden a 10-minute walk away at Can Batlló was referred to as being part of a *recinte industrial* (industrial compound) or sometimes the *recinte industrial antic* (old industrial compound). The parts of Can Batlló that were not under community control were referred to as *naus abandonats* (abandoned warehouses), but a similar complex in another neighborhood was primarily referred to as a *nau buit* (empty warehouse). Sometimes these differences in terminology referred to differences in the history or configuration of a site, but more often, they simply reflected a consensus regarding how to name a place. In recognizing the variable political, social, and material potentials of empty places and naming them accordingly, residents articulate their knowledge and recognition of the rich resources these places contain.

Assigning names to places reinforces communities' moral and social commitments by inscribing them in landscapes (Basso 1996; Schreyer 2016). As people move through their everyday landscapes they encounter places' moral and social qualities as external sensorial forces that demand a response (Brink-Danan 2010; Weiss 2011), or as a means of contesting places' pasts and futures (Ganapathy 2013; Lebow 1999). Similarly, the subtle variations in Barcelona residents' descriptions of empty places suggest that the mere fact of

a place's emptiness does not determine how it will be experienced, received, or taken up in collective social life. Widespread consensus within neighborhood communities regarding how to describe specific empty places highlights the degree to which this process of uptake is a shared project. On the other hand, as I will explore later, mismatches in how a place is catalogued and taken up by the different communities that share the city can lead to productive misunderstandings and disjunctures.

Practically speaking, neighborhood residents name and catalogue empty places when making plans for a place, voicing concerns about instabilities in that space, or coordinating action at or around a place. Although they are unoccupied, these terrains are very much a part of residents' daily movements through and ways of being in their neighborhoods. Because of this, empty places are objects of care and concern. Empty lots and buildings have a "texture of intelligibility" (Goodwin 1994, 610) that comes from being part of *el teixit del barri* (the fabric of the neighborhood), but their lack of fixed uses and inhabitants allows for unexpected things to happen. This makes unoccupied buildings and the unbuilt spaces their demolitions leave behind into frequent targets of grassroots interventions.

Residents make plans that are influenced by but seek to gain distance from places' prior lives. As Caroline Humphrey points out (2005), people's engagements with architecture do not necessarily reproduce the ideologies with and for which these structures were built. But the histories, continued presence, and even the quality of impermanence of these buildings often act as an impetus for the formation of shared social commitments to places' material well-being. These types of collective re-production of the built environment at times reproduce and at times distort, alter, or resist the ideologies that

planners, government officials, or residents previously understood to have been architected into a place.

An examination of one often-used word for empty places in Barcelona reveals how naming practices inform places' uses and disclose tensions in the operating logics of urban governance. The term *buit* can be translated as the English words empty, hollow, vacant, and void. A variety of specialized communities in Barcelona regularly use *buit* to refer to parts of the city. Its widespread usage enables slippage not only between different meanings, uses, histories, and future plans, but also between different communities that hold competing and cross-cutting interests in the unbuilt or underutilized parts of the city.

Buit is used by urban planning professionals to refer to vacant properties, particularly those that are being wastefully underutilized and could be reintegrated into the life of the city with the proper investments or mobilizations. Municipalities in Barcelona's greater metropolitan area hire urban planners to carry out "censuses" or "detection" of *habitatges buits* (empty housing) and *solars buits* (empty lots). These cataloguing procedures are a response to speculation on urban real estate at various scales, and they are imagined as a prelude to reusing the newly detected empty urban spaces. However, this long-term process sometimes stalls even before a full census of a given city is carried out; moving from census to concrete plans for citywide reuse has also proved difficult.

The municipality of Barcelona has had more success in fostering the reuse of small numbers of empty places. For instance, the city administers a contest for non-profit community groups to take over the management and construction of empty lots through the *Pla BUIITS* (Plan for Empty Urban Spaces with Territorial and Social Involvement). Community groups present their plans for generating novel "territorial and social

involvement” with a particular empty lot, and the winning organization is permitted to use the lot in question for this purpose for the next three years (the agreement is renewable for another three-year term after that). The last time the city administered this contest, in 2015, 11 lots were newly available for bids, and ultimately the municipality granted use of six of these lots to community groups. The *Pla* BUIITS suggests through both its name and its administrative structure that abandoned lots lack any kind of content or social connections and that “involvements” with empty places must be produced from the ground up through planned and prefigured work. Yet by fostering “respectable” uses for empty places, the plan regulates and renders invisible the often-illicit residues and lifeways that already thrive in these lots (Mansilla 2014). As I will demonstrate later, the *Pla* BUIITS also misunderstands the timelines and social and geographic rootedness of the novel territorial commitments that it seeks to generate.

By contrast to planners’ and municipal officials’ use of *buit* to highlight the sometimes real and sometimes only purported emptiness of lots and buildings, neighborhood residents often use *buit* as a stand-alone name for a place and interchangeably with the Spanish *hueco* (hollow). In contrast with the *Pla* BUIITS’s assumption that empty places are social vacuums, when residents treat empty spaces as hollows, they become containers or vessels for collective social, economic, and political projects. Residents’ informal practices make empty lots live and become functional again. In neighbors’ usages, hollows are able to operate as sheltering places because they are empty and thus often ignored by powerful commercial and governmental players. Their exclusion from the formal political economy of the city makes these empty lots into appealing places.

Speculating on the City

Barcelonins have learned from decades of living in the city that it is only a matter of time before private investors or state administrators seek to re-capture the spaces they have previously de-valued. As a result of the continuous possibility of state capture or capitalist co-optation, residents and architects involved in collaborative building projects understand that none of the spaces in which they operate are firmly and forever outside of the operations of capitalism. Resident-forged transformations of lots and buildings seek to make the territory of the city less commodifiable and therefore less likely to be re-captured by cycles of investment and disinvestment. Neighborhood activists achieve the—always contingent—decommodification of territories by making empty lots and structures’ remnants less fungible and less exchangeable. In doing so, they draw on and amplify the extant properties that remain even when lots are “empty” or the structures that occupy them “abandoned.”

For instance, one day some friends and I stumbled upon a well-tended community garden while walking in a working-class neighborhood on Barcelona’s northern periphery. We met a woman who was working at the garden, and my friends introduced themselves as members of a community garden at Can Batlló (which is owned by the municipal government). The woman replied that hers was an occupied garden, and that none of the community members who gardened there did so with permission.

I wanted a kitchen-garden (*huerto*) where I can decide what grows and what to do—not a garden (*jardín*) and not a place where I have to ask for permission from City Hall to be there, and really you can only get that kind of permission after you’re of retirement age.²⁶ Sometimes there comes a

²⁶ *Jardín* refers most often to flower gardens or ornamental gardens, while *huerto* refers to gardens where comestibles grow.

moment when you want to be the one to decide and participate and do things, and not for someone else to do it.

The functionality of the occupied garden goes hand in hand with its informality. Gardening in an empty lot rather than in a designated area is not only better for growing crops that feed people, but also nourishes the gardener's desire for autonomy. By equating gardens that people obtain permission to cultivate with decoration, the gardener implies that formally permitted gardens are cosmetic rather than responsive to communities' real needs.

Moreover, community gardens and other spatially-oriented grassroots projects specifically seek out and transform the empty lots that are part of residents' everyday itineraries. For instance, the gardener's daily experience of passing an empty lot on her way to and from her home became a guarantee that her gardening work in the lot would become a meaningful practice. Gardening there became an opportunity for her to "do things" to significantly alter her own everyday world, and therefore became a means of deciding something for herself. Such transformations are significant precisely because they offer a possibility of regeneration and care for long-neglected places. As one resident put it when the owner of an empty lot in Sants sought to shut down a community garden on the lot, "Now the owner remembers this place? It wasn't so long ago that the lot was full of rats and crap everywhere. At least now it's clean and they take care of the garden." Self-determined projects respond to the conditions that prevail in empty lots or buildings by bringing together neighbors who feel moved by the physical situation as well as by their own internal desires "to decide and participate." When private land owners or city governments belatedly become interested in newly cleaned up or newly functional empty

places, grassroots activists interpret this interest as evidence of their own success in reanimating once-abandoned potentials.

But the abandoned quality of certain lots and buildings is in fact central to investors' continued operation in urban built environments. As the owners of the empty lot-turned-community garden in Sants discovered, places that have become associated with distinct communities and specific uses are hard to detach from these commitments. Meanwhile "empty" urban space, alternately imagined as nature, unclaimed or untended property, or public space, is easily incorporated into cycles of investment. Investors are more easily able to buy, sell, and build when urban terrain is socially and materially featureless or interchangeable.

Processes of urban accumulation under capitalism both create and come to rely on figures of emptiness. Because devalued physical landscapes have lower fixed capital costs and are more easily taken up within novel economic projects (Marx et al. 1992), designating devalued parts of the city as useless and meaningless sets these parts of the city in motion as exchange objects. Places' "abandoned" status is thus a temporary moment within a larger cycle of investment and disinvestment.

The differential meaning-making projects within which places are enrolled are central to their uptake as exchangeable objects (Munn 2013). But at the same time, the metasemiotic project of making places into exchange objects can only succeed if other meanings do not overpower an object's meaningfulness as an item of exchange (Keane 2003; Nakassis 2012). Objects' movement through circuits of exchange is contingent on their commensurability across contexts. When objects and places take on powerful

meanings over and above their interchangeability, these meanings can disrupt processes of commensuration.

In Barcelona, investors' projects are often troubled by places' longstanding social and economic meanings. These existing relationships frustrate the processes of commensuration that make it possible for investors to build anything, anywhere. The destruction of places' specificity, use, and community relationships is a common investment and urban development practice that accelerates the transformation of distinct locations into abstract urban space (D. Harvey 2000; Searle 2014; G. W. McDonogh 1991). These newly abstracted spaces are more easily open to investment of money and investment with novel meanings.

But urban space is not inherently exchangeable or homogeneous (Lefebvre 2009; Pellow and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2014), and the left-behind use-values contained in "empty" urban space can be mobilized for reproductive ends as well as by investors seeking profits (D. Harvey 1978, 122). Social movements that are organized around the use of space regularly contest urban spaces' forcible conversion to pure exchange value (Lefebvre 2009), and marginal urban residents reincorporate parts of the city that have fallen out of cycles of exchange in their own projects (Anjaria 2011; D. Harvey 2000; Monica Degen 2017; Leontidou 2010).

These strategies of resistance rely on rejecting designations of urban terrain as worthless, empty, or useless. By identifying the residues left behind in cities when capital takes flight and putting them to use outside of circuits of exchange, urban residents make a life from scraps that are "disjointed from their original networks...calling for new uses and impromptu connections" (Laszczkowski 2015, 138). Residents' actions assert that urban

places are not empty, but have merely been incompletely hollowed out by investors hoping to extract value from them.

Resident-led speculative practices act as a counterpoint to investment by insisting on the socially and geographically specific qualities of places. For example, in conversations following the fire at the empty warehouse, users of Can Batlló insisted that the fire mattered because even if the warehouse wasn't part of the community center it was still *nostre* (ours). Some people suspected that arsonists had set the fire. They wondered if the warehouse had become a target because of its current geographic or future social associations with the community center, or alternately suggested that its apparent abandonment had made it an easy target. In either interpretation, the imagined arson seemed like evidence of the long-term vulnerability of both the in-use and unoccupied parts of Can Batlló. The fire quickly became a justification for intensifying existing social and construction-based endeavors in all parts of the factory complex.

Residents' reactions to the fire framed Can Batlló as a place that is not bound by the renovated warehouses that comprise the community center administratively and in people's everyday movements through the site. Instead, any part of the warehouse complex is or can become part of Can Batlló. Users' intuitions about where to draw the boundaries of the Can Batlló community project are supported by the site's history of expansiveness and flexibility. While the community center at Can Batlló began in a single set of warehouses, it has "annexed" other parts of the industrial complex by incorporating new projects and granting these projects the use of previously-unoccupied warehouses.

In people's talk about what might happen "next time," they interacted with the abandoned warehouses as if they were a meaningful part of something larger. To users of

the community center, the abandoned warehouses were not detached from the rest of Can Batlló. The warehouses' emptiness was a temporary quality that brought them into social life: because the warehouses were empty, they could be sites of future expansion; their emptiness also drew troublemakers to the complex. The warehouses are currently unoccupied, but they also play host to past and future movements of people, resources, and political projects in the neighborhood. These histories and potentials, along with the geographically specific social and economic qualities that they enable, connect the abandoned warehouses to other parts of Can Batlló and to the residents who move through them.

Residents' engagement with empty-no-more lots and buildings is a form of labor that helps to prevent the reabsorption of these places into Barcelona's speculative cycles. They care for empty places and build in them despite the risk of co-optation and despite the chance that these sites will ultimately be folded back into speculative landscapes. Barcelona shelters so many empty lots and buildings that "losing" one ongoing project to speculation or government intervention, while painful and significant, does not foreclose other possibilities for grassroots action. As one longtime activist in Sants reassured me, "this will work for a while at least. And after that, if it doesn't, then it's on to the next one."

The Territoriality of Political Encounters

Construction-based neighborhood activism in Barcelona resonates strongly with distinctively Catalan forms of embodied political activity, such as *sardanas* (circular dances that anyone can join in at any time) and *castells* (human towers)²⁷. These practices bridge

²⁷ *Castells* are multi-level towers that practitioners build by standing on one another's shoulders. The load-

performance and politics when they “carry the sense of solidarity beyond the ritual sphere to add force to civic and neighborly virtues” (Erickson 2011, 127). In Barcelona, all of these activities are carried out in the street: people assemble themselves into 4-to-6-tiered *castells* as part of neighborhood festivals; *sardanas* are held in plazas; and construction-based reclamation operates on empty urban areas that are part of people’s everyday movements. The social utopianism of these practices emphasizes affective and sensory experiences (Erickson 2011; Weig 2015; Vaczi 2016); but just as importantly, this utopianism derives its force from people’s intimate relationships to the places in which they perform their activities.

Activists characterize their political commitments as a deliberate choice to “stay” and build something in Barcelona, even as they wonder how much longer they can withstand the city’s challenges and imagine themselves doing politics in other locations. While residents of Sants dreamed of unoccupied land in the countryside that would serve as an expansive blank slate on which to enact their political projects, they instead chose—sometimes resignedly, sometimes enthusiastically—to build in Can Batlló’s urban industrial footprint. Users of Can Batlló define the social center as *veïnal i autogestionat* (neighborly and autogestioned). Activism at Can Batlló is consistent with the newfound political valence of being a *veïn* (neighbor) across Spain since 2011’s 15-M occupations (Narotzky 2016; Corsín Jiménez and Estalella 2013b; Moreno-Caballud 2015), and resonates with a long

bearing people on the bottom of the structure are ringed in concentric circles by a *pinya* made up of dozens of people who push inwards on one another’s backs and shoulders to channel all of their strength toward the people standing at the base of the tower. To build each successive tier of the tower, the people who will comprise that level first climb up the bodies of the people who make up the lower tiers and then balance on the shoulders of the people on the tier immediately below theirs. Human towers can consist of as many as nine, ten, or even eleven levels of participants. For more on *castells* and their relationship to Catalan nationalism as well as to *sardanas*, see Weig 2015 and Vaczi 2016.

tradition of autogestion as a form of urban politics in Mediterranean Europe and the Iberian world (M. A. Sitrin 2012; M. Sitrin and Azzellini 2014; Dinerstein 2015; Mudu 2004; Leontidou 2010). While local activists long to build prefigurative projects in rural places that they imagine to be empty and therefore devoid of government and police presence, in practice they find more potential in a not-quite-empty site that is riven through by social life and historical memory.

Before its reuse as a city-supported hub of social reproduction, industrial barons, some of Franco's most prominent Catalan supporters, and speculative investors successively owned Can Batlló. Proposals to use the industrial compound as a public-serving space date back at least to the transition to democracy in the late 1970s. Transforming this particular industrial complex into a site for community coexistence had a clear moral logic to neighborhood residents whose parents and grandparents had worked at the factory. They experienced the factory shell's continued presence in their neighborhood as a reminder of its longtime owners' political commitments. By putting Can Batlló to new uses and reconceiving the temporality to which the site seemed to belong, activists hope to change what Can Batlló means to the neighborhood. Can Batlló is central to place-making in Sants precisely because it is not like the exchangeable featureless terrains that utopia and capitalism alike demand.

The use of utopias as a starting point for thinking and building experimental political projects has a long history in Europe (Levitas 1979; More 2003; Muehlebach 2011). As the etymology of "utopia" (no-place) makes clear, place or its ironic absence is central to the contradictions of building an ideal society. Utopian projects are deliberately and productively organized around a three-fold tension between: empty or blank space as a

permissive site for experimentation and “starting from scratch”; the impossibility of building the proposed political project in the existing world; and the possibility of the integration of only parts of utopian thought into contemporaneous political projects. Utopian and utopian-adjacent planning and design attend to the material, structural, and formal qualities of the hoped-for utopian space (Fourier 1971; Spiro 2004) but rarely to the interaction between the spatial qualities of utopia and the spatial qualities of the larger geography in which a utopian project is located. The concrete circumstances of everyday life are imagined to pose contradictions and barriers to the implementation of utopia (Popper 1971), and as a result utopian thinking seems to require a shift away from the temporal and spatial of everyday worlds (Mannheim 1979).

At first glance, the countervailing European tradition of conceiving of governance primarily with respect to cities (Corsín Jiménez 2008; Isin 2007; Magnusson 2014), and the centrality of the *Catalunya-ciutat* (Catalonia-city) to post-Transition Spanish nationalism (DiGiacomo 1987; Nogué and Vicente 2004) seem to offer a corrective to the locational ambivalence of utopian thought. But while this tradition attends to urban sociality, urban space appears primarily as a metaphor or blueprint rather than as a material force (Osborne and Rose 1999). The contrast between the foundational texts of the *polis*- and utopia-oriented political traditions is instructive. Where More seeks to build structures for communal living that can modify behavioral and spiritual patterns (2003), Plato builds structures of governance around Athenians’ existing behavioral patterns (2006). But even as Plato incorporates residents’ behaviors into his political projects, he disregards the spatial qualities of Athens itself. In both traditions, place—whether no-place or a real city—

is an empty and undifferentiated container within which person-centered governance projects unfold.

By contrast the ecological, territorial, and material specificities of place play a central role in *Barcelonins'* understandings of the political and social projects with which they are involved. As is common with construction-based prefigurative politics (Minuchin 2016; Sliwinski 2016), places' interactions with their urban surroundings are central in both activists' imaginaries and their everyday practices. Political projects in Barcelona take seriously the possibility that cities can be a means of making a better shared life. But building a better Barcelona involves weaving ideal political forms from and into the unique and uniquely challenging fabric of this city.

One night I sat talking with two former *okupas*²⁸ beside a brick-paved, low-traffic street at Can Batlló. Gabriel said that more and more he thought about leaving Barcelona to live and do activism in a rural community. He was frustrated at the smallness of the physical spaces that we struggled for, and he thought that rural landscapes would offer more room for experimentation. Gabriel reasoned that if a nearby empty lot could become a communal dining space and Can Batlló could become a home to such a large variety of projects, surely the much larger unused terrains of rural Catalonia would offer even more possibilities. For Gabriel, the difference between Barcelona's empty spaces and rural empty spaces was simply a question of size or scale. However, as we spoke, our surroundings seemed to assert that the ways in which Can Batlló was not quite empty mattered.

As we talked, a Barcelona municipal police car drove by slowly with its lights flashing. The group I was with immediately started glaring at the car and asking why it was here, and

²⁸ Squatters who occupy buildings as a prefigurative political project.

one person approached the squad car and exchanged angry words with the driver. The car drove all the way down the dead-end street, looped back around, and finally left. Gabriel said, “The problem is that the municipal police can be here because it’s a public space.”

I agreed, “Yes, we are on the street.”

But Gabriel fumed, “no, it’s not just that. It’s that because Can Batlló is owned by the municipal government, the municipal police can go inside [the buildings] if they want to.” The sudden presence of the police car had rekindled Gabriel’s desire to fight for Can Batlló, as well as his cognizance of its vulnerability and the opportunities for political confrontation that accompanied that vulnerability.

To help dissipate our frustration at the patrol car’s incursion, someone changed the conversation to the tunnels running under Can Batlló.²⁹ We joked that they were really catacombs, and Mònica pointed out that early Christian cults practiced their rites in catacombs to avoid persecution. We concluded wryly that in order to practice our political rituals without police disturbance, the easiest path would be to start the cult of Can Batlló in the tunnels beneath the city.

Both the encounter with the police and the “solution” proposed to limit future encounters hinted at Can Batlló’s ambiguous position in competing visions of the city. The complex operates simultaneously as a municipal-owned community center, a grassroots endeavor for autonomy from or against the state, and a largely empty warehouse compound with little oversight. These overlaps, and the contested uses that accompany them, regularly frustrate the communities that are involved with Can Batlló. But these

²⁹ No-longer-in-use utility tunnels that run beneath the warehouses.

misaligned plans reinforce people's commitments to the compound precisely because they generate tensions.

Everyday encounters allow activists to confront powerful forces through the simple act of remaining in formerly-empty urban spaces, even as they lament the limited scaling possibilities that accompany urban place-making. Activists' motivations for remaining in Barcelona and the frustrations they encounter while carrying out political projects are strongly grounded in site-specific experiences: the interaction and uneasy coexistence of national, autonomous community, and municipal governance and policing; the material remnants of anarchist, dictatorial, and democratic histories; the intimate scales within which political, social, and economic projects unfold; and the signatures that labor exploitation and real estate speculation leave in the bulldozed lots and hollowed-out industrial areas of working-class neighborhoods. Residents mobilize these relationships and remain through collaborative practices of imagining, designing, building, and maintaining shared political spaces. These collaborations bring their visions for Barcelona's future closer to fruition.

“The Meaning of That Situation to People” As a Means of Consolidating Social Life

Grassroots activists encounter the distance between their lived experiences of unused buildings and lots and the claims that investors and government officials make on these sites as politically productive gaps (Anguelovski 2013). As residents' careful naming and cataloguing of empty urban spaces suggests, there are social and moral differences between empty places. But when the municipal government makes inventories of Barcelona's vacant properties, or when investors build luxury condominiums in empty lots of working-class

neighborhoods, emptiness operates as a classificatory scheme that conceals or papers over such differences. This made homogeneity becomes real in some cases. But for neighborhood activists, it is at worst a threat or at best a fiction.

Places' ascribed but not fully realized emptiness directly enables neighborhood projects of reclamation. The labels and descriptors that people apply to their surroundings often contain embedded judgments about space and time. Through collective behaviors that are colored by interpretations of materials and their relationships, "the meaning of th[e] situation to people" (Whorf 1956, 135) has concrete physical effects on how projects of care and survival play out.

For instance, Whorf (1956) described how the addition of the word "empty" to a written label on some gasoline drums dramatically changed workers' behavior near the drums. Whorf attributed this change in behavior to the judgments about the nature of space that were embedded in the word "empty," and to people's expectations about how their interactions with empty drums would play out. While both empty and full gasoline drums are dangerous, the explosiveness of the full gasoline drums was mitigated by workers' careful treatment of these drums. Meanwhile, workers behaved as though containers that were labeled "empty" were devoid of anything at all. But empty gasoline drums are in fact full of explosive vapors that are left behind when liquid gasoline is removed from the drums. Workers' habitual ways of thinking about and interacting with their surroundings were influenced by their categorization of "empty" gasoline drums as not-risky. The behavioral patterns that coalesced around the empty gasoline drums were an essential part of what made the situation dangerous, over and beyond the physical configuration of the gasoline drums.

Through their perceptual qualities and the meanings ascribed to them, places condition patterns of behavior, talk, and sociality without determining them. In the same way that workers' customary definitions of "empty" led them to make implicit judgments about what interacting with empty containers might or might not cause, other such patterns inform how people hypothesize, anticipate, and plan for their futures in and with empty places. When people re-pattern the times and spaces with which empty places are associated, places' potentials can exceed both their physical materiality and the semantic meaning attached to their existence.

In the case of Can Batlló, as in the case Whorf describes, the perceived emptiness of a place or object may have played a role in starting a fire. But Can Batlló's emptiness also permitted neighborhood residents to start survivals for themselves and for the industrial compound. These neighborhood-based political projects rely on the detection of particular situations in urban space and their subsequent activation.

As a means of consolidating spatial gains in the city, residents and architects involved in neighborhood-based activism informally circulate stories about and strategies for bringing community commitments into a built form. These stories hopscotch across neighborhoods, levels of expertise and political connectedness, and legal scenarios. When activists share experiences, the implication is that the meaning of grassroots place-making projects and the relationships required to build them are similar enough across contexts that strategies for confronting speculation, gentrification, and government control can travel across sites. For example at a design meeting held in a peripheral neighborhood of Barcelona for a project that would be carried out in a town in Barcelona's Greater Metropolitan Area, the

architects wound up discussing a relatively new community architecture initiative in the Ciutat Vella district, which is part of Barcelona's heavily-touristed city center:

J: Have you ever seen the BioBui(L)t, have you gone?

C: When I went in, I said, 'what a beautiful structure!' that you have here, and it's a space that's right across from MACBA [the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art], and it's all part of the *Pla* BUIITS too, and it's made using bio-construction.³⁰

J: The *Pla* BUIITS, when the agreement is over, if there's no municipal project inside the lot, in theory if they want to, they can renew [the agreement] for 4 years. And the other day I was at a meeting, and we were talking about the BioBui(L)t, about how the chapel [an empty church chapel that shares BioBui(L)t's lot] belongs to MACBA, and MACBA is a little...

C: They want to expand.

J: Well, it scares them a little bit that all that might consolidate. Because then if that consolidates, or the less precarious the BioBui(L)t folks are...If they don't kick them out...

C: Yeah. Well, but then they should get involved, man!

J: They should take that step through BioBui(L)t?

C: Yes. Which is a, fuck, a super motherfucking initiative.

In moments like this, the different futures that private owners, the municipal government, and activists imagine for empty parts of the city come into sharp relief. The potentials of this empty lot stem not only from the desires and plans that each party brings to it, but also from, as Whorf would have it, "the meaning of that situation to people." This meaning is not determined wholly by competing categorizations of the lot as part of the *Pla* BUIITS, as the home of the BioBui(L)t project, nor as one of several unused properties near a major museum. But the tensions around the lot's use were not the exclusive result of the material configuration of the lot at that particular moment in time, either. The conflict had to do with what the current arrangement of materials inside the lot meant to the different parties that shared it, and what kinds of cause-and-effect relationships between people and place they imagined would be facilitated or made stronger by these materials.

30. Construction using naturally occurring materials.

The architects' use of the word "consolidate" to describe the effects of BioBui(L)t's continued presence in the empty lot suggests a double meaning: spatial consolidation as a practice of fixing things in place; and the consolidation of relations between people and a place. The residents and architects involved in BioBui(L)t have integrated the lot into the lives and geographies of the community that surrounds it. MACBA fears BioBui(L)t's consolidation because the BioBui(L)t project binds residents of the neighborhood surrounding MACBA to the empty lot in ways that would make it difficult for MACBA to bring the chapel back into the museum's orbit as an exhibit space. In "consolidating" the relationship between residents, the lot, and the chapel, BioBui(L)t in turn consolidates itself as a project that makes things happen for and with neighborhood residents in this particular place. The building projects, educational programming, and dance parties hosted at BioBui(L)t are not portable or exchangeable but are instead intimately grounded in this lot. The "territorial and social involvements" called for by the *Plà BUIITS* did come to pass here, but in a way that threatens the municipal government's long-term plan for temporary occupations of empty lots. BioBui(L)t's involvements, while temporary on paper, cannot be easily wiped clean at the end of the *Pla BUIITS*'s fixed term.

The name BioBui(l)t gestures at the malleability involved in projects of reclaiming empty spaces—and hints at how the categorization of empty lots can become a window onto cross-cutting but coexisting commitments. "BioBui(L)t" is a play on words. Inserting an "L" into the Catalan word *buit* transforms it into the English word "built," and therefore highlights the empty lot's transformation into a home for built structures and experimental building techniques. The choice to leave the "L" of "built" in parentheses emphasizes the ambiguity of interpreting what is happening in the lot. For instance, BioBui(l)t's MACBA

neighbors were content for some time to interpret the (L) and the built interventions that it signaled as temporary and ultimately removable additions to the site. Only as the project showed signs of “consolidating” its spatial gains and community relationships over time, and as MACBA began to worry about what that might portend for the lot’s future, did BioBui(L)t itself become an object of concern. Meanwhile for the group that runs BioBui(L)t, the (L) has always stood as a promise of the techniques, communities, and built structures that the organizers planned to bring together at the lot.

The lot is no longer definitively empty; but neither is it built up with any finality. What one chooses to make of BioBui(L)t’s (L) contributes to stakeholders’ expectations about the futurity of the lot. Despite its classification as a *buit*, BioBui(L)t’s organizers and the museum alike recognize that the empty lot in fact holds built structures, social relationships, building materials and expertise for new projects, and plans for the future. They do not disagree on what the lot contains now, but rather on the meaning of this situation and what it might someday cause. Making something of the ways in which the lot is not quite empty in the present involves mobilizing expectations and desires for the lot’s future. It is here that cataloguing and naming enter the picture as ambiguous but nevertheless important practices for making situations meaningful. Just as speculative capitalism and utopian politics rely on figures of futurity to transform empty places, the project of revealing that places’ emptiness is not total mobilizes future use and future plans to emphasize what is present.

Inhabiting Hollowed-Out Places

In this chapter, I have examined how Barcelona's residents reactivate empty or abandoned places as locations for social interaction and political potential. By seeing and identifying such sites as "hollow"—that is, as places with discernible shapes and definable interiors—residents take the first step in inhabiting empty places. Recategorizing empty places as part of everyday worlds allows them to be filled with social ties, rediscovered resources, and rich histories and futures. This transformation in turn has repercussions not only for residents' own interactions with empty places, but also for real estate developers', government officials', and utopian dreamers' plans for them.

Grassroots activists deliberately situate new collective projects in empty lots and buildings not only as a strategy for breathing new life into them, but also as a method for enacting a politics of reclaiming uncared-for public and private territory. Building projects are a particularly effective tactic because they make residents' commitments to a place visible and tactile. Moreover, by giving their commitments an air of material permanence, activists are more easily able to influence places' potentials as future sites of experimentation for investors, government officials, or other neighborhood residents. Barcelona's residents build alternatives to life as usual in places that planners have allowed to lie fallow. These alternative lifeways gain their potency and sense of possibility precisely from their fragility and from their status as pockets of difference within the city. Empty places' long-term neglect is a double opportunity: residents can make changes to buildings and lots that are part of their everyday movements through their neighborhoods; and overlapping ways of conceiving of empty areas' resources, affiliations, and futures create a

murky area for activists to operate outside of the glare of official development plans and investment projects.

While real estate investment and speculation are strong forces in the life of Barcelona, their effects are variegated and do not determine people's experiences of the political potential, material qualities, and social relations embedded in the city. As unoccupied or unbuilt land that is perfectly positioned to become valuable in the future, vacant lots and abandoned buildings do not attract construction and development that would reanimate them; instead speculative investors' priority is to retain their properties' social and economic detachment in the short term. Even as empty places move closer to investors' ideal exchangeable terrain, these places are still too imbricated in neighborhood residents' everyday lives to offer "no-places" of the sort imagined by utopian projects. But the affects and epistemologies that attach to urban blight under regimes of anticipation (Adams 2013) exceed the footprint or interiority of particular buildings, and something tactile and sensible remains even after buildings and lots are made into speculateable terrain. In in-between moments and interstitial places, devalued and left-behind lots and buildings become homes to political and social reclamation projects. Both places' still extant histories and social lives and their ability to travel between competing ways of ordering and classifying the city are central to grassroots activists' choice of empty areas for place-making projects.

Through residents' engagements with the empty lots and abandoned buildings that checkerboard their movement through their neighborhoods, these areas become generative once more. Places contribute to their own rebirth when residents, activists, and architects fold them into alternative speculations. To raze land or empty out a building does not erase

its particular qualities. It would be more accurate to say that places are hollowed out—even after they are emptied, something of their distinctive shape, structural relationships, and supports remains.

CHAPTER 4

GRASPING “MATERIAL WITH DIGNITY”

Barcelona’s city center is a magnet for tourism and development in large part because of the architectural and urban planning legacies of Catalan *Modernisme* and the Olympics-era Barcelona Model. But at the same time, the city’s landscapes are heavily marked by boom and bust cycles that have to do not only with real estate development, but also with Barcelona’s agricultural and industrial pasts. As residents fan out from the city center, pushed by gentrification and pulled by the political and social possibilities offered by unoccupied and abandoned spaces, they encounter the hollowed-out remains of postindustrial buildings and a profusion of river reeds that grow on banks once occupied by light industry. Barcelona is full of objects that at first glance don’t seem like they should be construction materials, and the topographies of its ecology and investment- and tourism-led economy often appear inhospitable to community-based building projects. Yet these places and materials appeal to residents and architects who seek to build another community and another economy precisely because of their lack of obvious (meaning capitalism-friendly) uses.

Autonomy is made when people attend to the desires of other people, objects, and landscapes—and put themselves in a relation of affinity with these desires (Escobar 2018).. Anthropologists have been thinking through how affinity is made between communities that are not alike yet not wholly unlike for a long time (Strathern 2004). In this chapter, I examine the hand-to-hand and hand-to-wood interactions of eco-architectural design and

the storytelling practices that make complex urban environments into archives of activism. Through these practices, unexpected affinities are made to point to an economy, and a politics, otherwise.

I argue that the work of making recalcitrant objects and landscapes into “materials with dignity”—as one architect described the goal of the numerous steps involved in “processing” and then working with reeds— is itself the relational foundation that underlies the political potential of place-making. The collective work of developing the capacity to mobilize surroundings differently, and to respond to changing surroundings becomes (whether intentionally or not) a means of building new relationships and forms of accountability with the collective of human and non-human participants involved with this work. Through these relationships, residents are able to approach the landscapes they encounter in the course of confronting economic and climate change as resources instead of obstacles.

I introduce the analytic of graspability to explore how people who were involved in building particular places learned, as a community of practice, to perceive their surroundings as useful contributions to life projects rather than as passive backdrops or obstacles. This changed perception is not only visual or intellectual, but also tactile. It is developed through and in turn facilitates the materials’ use. Simultaneously, as they are worked, cared for, and noticed, these challenging landscapes undergo physical changes that make them easier for people to manipulate, and thus more likely to be included in life projects.

I begin the chapter by examining the work processes involved in using reeds as construction materials as a window onto the ways that collective struggles with recalcitrant

materials become vectors for enskillment. Then I offer a working definition of graspability as a means of understanding responsive relationships between people and landscapes not as given, but as actively learned and produced. I argue that on both intimate and public scales, graspability relies on collective skills in seeing, touching, and working landscapes that industrial capitalism and urban development positions as debris. Graspability thus offers, not a critique of these systems, but a means of living temporarily in a world where they cease to make sense. The rest of the chapter explores how grasping reeds fosters participants' sense of their capacity to act collectively, along with participants' work to fashion liberatory futures for vernacular construction and anti-capitalist labor from what they have grasped in their encounters with reeds.

Collective Capabilities

The first time I built something with reeds, I was completely unfamiliar with any of its work processes but eager to use naturally occurring materials as resources for building. I made my way to my first *Investigació Canyera* workshop from the Vallcarca metro stop. The station was mobbed by tourists, and as I walked to the classroom, they stopped me to ask for directions every time I so much as looked up. The classroom that hosted the workshop is about a quarter mile away from Parc Güell—the spiraling, swirling folly of organicism that Gaudi designed for wealthy clients who wished to live far from the city center so that they could have better air. Our work, whose aesthetics Gaudi would likely have appreciated but whose social purpose I imagine might have confused him, would culminate in the construction of a proscenium arch for the Environmental Classroom's outdoor amphitheater.

Once the workshop began, none of the instructions made sense to me. The machete I used to peel splintering bark off the reeds felt unwieldy in my hands, and more than once I hit somebody with a reed. After a while I settled into a rhythm with the machete, but soon afterward the architects leading the workshop shifted us from that task to the next. It was important to sort out flexible reeds from brittle reeds, because brittle reeds would break—either slowing us down when we were knotting reeds together with rope or introducing points of weakness if the breakage happened after the reeds had been incorporated into a larger structure. The architects explained that in their first year of life, reeds grow to their full height and circumference. After that, they start to fill out from the outside in, growing more and more cells inside their central stalks. Reeds lose flexibility over time, even as they gain strength. Year-old reeds are very flexible, but not strong enough to be load-bearing. Reeds in their third growing season are too brittle. Two-year-old reeds are just right—pliable, but with thicker walls. When harvesting reeds, it is easy to judge whether a reed is in its first year of growth or not, based on the pattern of growth at the top of the reed. But all mature reeds look the same. Therefore, the best way to distinguish between brittle and flexible reeds was by bending them. We were to discard any reeds that did not bend, or that snapped when we bent them. The complication was that any reed would break if bent too far, no matter how flexible. The architects demonstrated the approximate curvature that we should bend reeds to in order to test them, and instructed us to pay attention to the amount of tension each reed held as we bent it—so as not to snap the reed in two by applying too much force or by bending it too far. Nevertheless, several of the participants broke reeds, making loud snapping noises and sending splinters flying. Others were so afraid of breaking the reeds that they struggled to bend them at all.

I simply could not grasp the reeds. I could neither handle them so as not to break them; nor could I understand what the reeds wanted. As a novice to this work, it was difficult for me to feel when a reed held so much internal tension that it was close to breaking. I remember feeling irritated with the architects for insisting that I stop thinking about or looking at the angle as I bent the reeds, and instead feel the tension this bending produced in the reeds. Later, we were instructed to sort the reeds into groups based on whether their gentle curves pointed in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction. We would then be able to bundle reeds that curved in the same direction together and combine bundles that curved in complementary directions so that they twined around one another for structural support. The architects taught us to “sight” down the central axis of the reed, staring from its base outward to its tip, to determine which type of curve its continued growth might have created. We could not make this determination by looking at reeds in their totality (as discrete objects within a larger plane/field of vision), but only by perceiving them as if our faces were the ground in which their rhizomes had grown. But that first day, I struggled to see the slight curvature that might have become a clockwise or counterclockwise spiral had the reed grown taller.

Because I could not understand the reeds’ innate potentials for and responses to movement, I could not move them successfully—either to accomplish a task or simply not to hurt the people working alongside me. But I could not understand the reeds because I was uncomfortable touching them. Every touch was an opportunity for a splinter, for miscalculating the open space available for maneuvering a reed, or for uncertainty and frustration at being unable to think my way out of the problems reeds posed. Because I

could not get close to the reeds or feel comfortable with them, it was difficult for me to attend closely to what I was supposed to be seeing or feeling in the reeds.

As I worked in tandem with the other workshop participants, most of them first timers like me, I realized that all of us were failing to grasp the activity. At one point I spent five minutes debating with two other participants about whether a particular reed had a clockwise or counterclockwise sense of motion. By this point in the day, the disagreement caused us to laugh—we knew that none of us could really see what we were meant to be seeing.

Our only way forward was to keep glancing down the reeds until we had cultivated a shared way of seeing what the reeds were doing. We understood that these frustrations were necessary steps on the way to expertise. It was clear to us that the skills we needed to accomplish the project were *only* possible through an intimate, convivial relationship with each other and, eventually, with the reeds.

At the end of that day, sweaty and frustrated, I finally understood what we were doing and why—and, frankly, where the beauty in it lay. After knotting bundles of reeds together into a thick and heavy column, it was time to bend the column into an arch that would form part of the roof and supports for the proscenium.

As we held the column horizontally off the ground an architect instructed us,

Now it's important to be really quiet. If we hear a reed starting to snap, we have to get to it right away, so we can either replace it or break it. If we keep going with a reed that's starting to break, the other reeds lean into it and it introduces a point of weakness and instability to the whole structure. So, silence now, ok? And if you hear a reed break near you, shout it out.

We slowly and silently walked forward from the carefully configured starting points where we had positioned ourselves with the architects' help. The only sound was the crunching of

our feet in the gravel. All of a sudden, a snap rang out. There was no need for anyone to yell stop because each of us stopped of our own accord. “Here!” one of the participants shouted. “The break is right by me.”

An architect rushed over to finish breaking the reed, then flattened it with a pair of pliers. This would allow the other reeds to shift within their knotted groups, rearrange themselves around the broken reed, and so equally distribute our force as we bent the reeds. We continued walking, stopping once or twice more at the sound of cracks, holding still and supporting the column while the architects repaired the reeds. Ten minutes later, we had successfully made an arch large enough for a good half-dozen people to shelter under.

This silent work made clear to me that construction with reeds required not just that we master handicraft skills or understand the shapes of individual reeds, but that we attend to the reeds as always-changing, always-moving, unique but ultimately interchangeable parts of a larger whole (both within the structure and, as I would learn later on, as part of a river ecology and labor ecology in Barcelona). And in order to attend to the reeds, we had to craft ourselves into a receptive community. Only in this way could we ensure that the reeds’ movements, resistance, and protestations would be sensible by us, and only through the careful management of our own community would we be able to respond appropriately. This crafted receptivity was most obvious to me when we configured ourselves into a passive position—silent; still—but once acquired, this receptivity could be practiced from any position, with any material, and in the course of completing any activity.

On Graspability

Graspability can help us to better understand the collective efforts, involving both people and landscapes, that make neglected or heretofore inaccessible materials workable. How do materials, places, and work processes become sensorially accessible? If these perceptual skills travel, why can they only travel in limited ways? And if these techniques have limits, then to what extent do they offer an alternative to life as usual?

By introducing the analytic of graspability, I wish to foreground the skill involved in working landscapes. Graspability is a mutually recursive process through which materials become usable in human life projects. It involves two self-reinforcing developments: 1) people cultivate the ability to detect landscapes both conceptually as resources and practically in use; 2) materials acquire the ability to participate in the labor of place-making through their own physical qualities and the transformation of these qualities over time. As graspability is produced and reproduced over time, people learn to detect landscapes and objects as resources, rather than as signs of the absence of care. Simultaneously, materials invite human work and shape the forms, collectivities, and directions of this labor. As materials become usable, they become closely held by people in ways that are both conceptual and practical.

While these different facets of graspability often develop in tandem and are mutually reinforcing, they are not perfectly collapsible to one another. Once materials have become graspable, they can enroll new and different kinds of participants from outside the collectivities that first made them graspable. And communities that have cultivated their graspabilities together can use these work processes and social history to embark on new projects with new materials and/or in new places. Sometimes these histories and

experiences give communities the ability to bring an unwieldy resource into social struggle in heretofore unexpected ways.

Mutually achieved rapport between people and objects is at the heart of graspability. Graspability thus has a kinship with Donna Haraway's response-ability and Tim Ingold's correspondence (Haraway 2008; Ingold 2016). Like these interventions, it attends to the development of relations not as an outcome of human agency, but rather as an ongoing process where things cohere impermanently "through processes of growth and movement" (Ingold 2016, 10). And like these analytics, graspability is a "loving...abstraction" (Haraway 2008, 93) that only some of my interlocutors have explicitly theorized rather than a universal way of being in the world. For my interlocutors in whose experiences working on surroundings and theorizing this work as a political project are one unified effort, these are "understanding[s] that...break down even as we lovingly craft them" (Haraway 2008, 93).

I share an interest with Haraway in how mutual response-ability emerges in the course of living with others, and in how responders are "co-constituted" through these intra-actions (2008, 71). Like Ingold, my work highlights the attentional "doing undergoing" that is at the heart of correspondence (2016, 15). Haraway and Ingold both present models that differ sharply from the volitional, interior, individual model of agency that has ruled the west since before the enlightenment. Both analytic concepts are also positioned as interventions in defense of communities rooted in difference and against models of community and communication that produce unity by making everything and everyone self-similar. But throwing different things together is not a guarantee that they will relate to one another—and both Haraway and Ingold center the problem of relations.

Ingold and Haraway center response in their explanations of how things come into relationship. Response, as imagined by Haraway and Ingold, is largely conversational: while both make reference to the moments when unlike things touch, in both analyses conversation becomes a key metaphor for exploring how humans and nonhumans relate to one another. Ingold and Haraway remind their readers that the relations that result from response are not necessarily symmetrical. But in their work some sort of capacity for response is always available, and response itself assumes some degree of mutual intelligibility. How do we learn to respond, when we inhabit (are habited to and dwell in) a world where other modes of being-knowing-doing are dominant?

I posit that to learn to respond is to grasp. Touch, unlike the idealized models of conversational turn-taking and letter-writing, is always asymmetrical. Not all things are touchable, nor do all things have the ability to touch in the same way (Hayward 2010; Harney and Moten 2013). In my analysis, touch is always ethnographic, but it is only sometimes empirical. Yet even as a metaphor, touch helps us reach different problems than linguistic metaphors do. For instance, grasping allows things to join together in a particular labor or task without requiring the complete merging that understanding would demand.

The root of graspability is “grasp” because handling materials, both conceptually and practically, proves key to developing the capacity to use them. To lay a hand on materials is to pull at whatever corner or thread allows one to make contact with an object that repels thought or touch, and to hold on tight. I refer to these as **graspability** practices rather than **grasping** practices in order to account for the central role materials play in the creation of collaborative rapport—both as objects of human labor and as participants in human relations. Objects and landscapes are not be able to grasp people in the same way that

people grasp them. As Haraway argues, “the capacity to respond, and so to be responsible, should not be expected to take on symmetrical shapes and textures for all the parties. Response cannot emerge within relationships of self-similarity” (2008, 71). Although objects cannot physically grasp people, over time the landscapes and construction materials I discuss here acquire the ability to be grasped. They become graspable through both human effort and objects’ own suggestions and dispositions, which humans respond to. As a result of this continuous work, people become more able to grasp materials than they were previously, and materials take on new formal and social qualities that make them more graspable.

As a human practice, graspability encompasses processes by which people are able to approach materials that formerly repelled their touch and attention in order to understand and use them as resources in their own life projects. These endeavors are collective because both legibility and use—as well as the ability of these strategies to travel—depend on communities of practice. Attending to graspability as it emerges in the conjunctions between particular communities and objects can help us understand both how landscapes become productive, and how responsive and responsible co-production operates.

Being able to be grasped is not a quality that is inherent to or fixed in objects; instead, graspability is often the result of processual engagements and therefore has an incremental-feeling quality to it. Graspability is produced and reproduced over time. The quality of being graspable involves the sedimentation of human labor, but objects also enroll new collectives and work processes through their own material, affective, and historical qualities. Their graspability takes on an existence that is conceptually, practically,

and sometimes socially independent from the work groups that, by refining or reworking materials, made them graspable to begin with.

In my fieldwork, as my interlocutors developed new ways of grasping Barcelona's landscapes they also moved, seemingly inexorably, toward confrontations with larger structural conditions. The work of making things graspable in different ways is by nature oppositional. Landscapes become *newly* graspable in contradistinction to established systems of meaning and practice that position them as detritus. Dynamics including post-industrial disinvestment and gentrification, climate change, and Spain's transition from a two-party to multi-party democracy both made these landscapes initially appear to be abandoned and useless (and that cause them to continue to appear this way to other residents of Barcelona), and later undergirded the economic and political distribution of time, labor, and power that made them newly graspable. Working alongside landscapes to produce mutual graspability thus requires working alongside landscapes *as infrastructures*—that is, as interconnected systems that bring people, materials, power, and communication together.

Working (with) Recalcitrant Materials

When people participate in educational reed construction workshops led by Investigació Canyera, the architects and their students become a temporary work group. As workshop participants join architects to gather materials for and assemble a geodesic dome, they find themselves entangled in and creatively adapting a range of relationships: with owners and administrators of public and private lands; with the landscapes in which

reeds grow and the usually quite different landscapes in which reeds are reworked into architectural structures; with their co-participants in the building process; and with reeds.

Some instructions for making a geodesic dome using reeds: First, find at least one friend, preferably more. You can't build a geodesic dome by yourself. It's a task for at least two sets of hands. Both harvesting and building with reeds require getting together a work group. Then, find a place where reeds grow, ideally on land where the owner is desperate for the reeds to be gone.

Over the years, the architects of Investigació Canyera have learned not only where in Barcelona and its surrounding towns reeds grow, but also in which areas the land owners and administrators are searching for ways to eradicate the reeds. Reeds are a "zero cost material" to Investigació Canyera, but only because the studio has forged partnerships with individual land owners and with the governments of small municipalities in the river basin formed by the Besòs and Llobregat rivers. Reeds were originally planted in this area to protect riverbanks from erosion; but because the climate is favorable to their growth and the reeds are rhizomatic, they are fast-spreading and difficult to permanently uproot. The architects, often joined by people who have registered to participate in an educational workshop in Barcelona within the next week or two, harvest the older reeds. This does not clear the field of all reeds, and in any case the reeds will grow back because they are rhizomatic. But in the meantime, the farmer or the local government—the partners in most of the trades Investigació Canyera organizes—is happy to have some cleared land near the river, because this land can be used to plant crops or can give walkers a clear path to or alongside the riverfront. In return, the land owner allows Investigació to take reeds away without paying for them. Of course, this is not quite the same as getting them "for free"—

the architects and their students spend hours, days, or weeks harvesting reeds, depending on the size of the structure they plan to build. For instance, the design for a small geodesic dome requires 165 reeds; but to build a small dome, Investigació Canyera typically harvests 200 reeds to account for the breakage of reeds during the construction process. In some cases where Investigació Canyera harvests a large number of reeds, the landowner also pays for a truck to transport the harvested reeds to Barcelona. When the harvest is smaller, the reeds can be cut down into shorter lengths and crammed into the trunk and backseat of a small car—sometimes alongside a passenger or two.

Once the reeds are at the building site, you must refine them into what one architect at Investigació Canyera called a *material digno* (a material with dignity). Such a material is predictable, uniform, and stable enough to build with. Making reeds into a *material digno* involves a series of procedures that the architects of Investigació Canyera referred to consistently as “processing” the reeds. Step 1: strip the reeds of their rough bark and of any fronds or leaves still clinging to their tops, usually with a machete. Step 2: Sort the reeds into groups according to their diameter. For this, until you learn to measure the reeds by sight, you can use a sizing tool designed by Investigació Canyera. Step 3: Test the reeds for flexibility. Step 4: Saw them into pre-determined lengths, which vary as a function of diameter. This is the first non-harvesting step in all of the workshops that Investigació Canyera teaches; reeds must always be processed into a *material digno* before they can be used to build anything.

But it is especially important for reeds to be made uniform if they are to be used to build a geodesic dome. Geodesic domes are built according to geometric principles, and they therefore require mathematical regularity in both the measurements of materials and

the ways that they come together. The math and geometry involved in determining which lengths of building materials should be slotted into which parts of the dome is so precise that geodesic domes are typically built using tables of strut lengths that list the exact lengths of the dome's various elements. When newcomers to architecture and design assemble geodesic domes with ready-made construction materials, they usually rely on printed calculation tables and cell phone apps for help performing the mathematical equations used to determine the measurements of a geodesic dome's constituent construction materials based on its overall dimensions. Against this, reeds are irregular in both length and circumference; as a result, there is no similar shortcut for making reeds uniform enough to use in the construction of a geodesic dome. A rough blueprint can be made in advance, but even after being processed into uniform dimensions reeds will not be exactly identical with one another. As hundreds of reeds come together in a shared structure, even minute differences of measurement add up. The final construction phases of a geodesic dome workshop thus almost invariably require participants to physically contort themselves and apply pressure in order to make reeds that "should" fit together actually fit.

After this comes the assembly of the geodesic dome, another multi-step process. But this time, the process resembles what one might do to build a dome using the formerly futuristic materials, such as plastics, that are more common to the geodesic dome tradition. In this phase, you will make what the architects refer to as "polygons": simple geometric figures, made by sliding reed segments into PVC tubes that function as connectors. Teams of at least two people slot reeds of systematically varied lengths and widths into sleeves of PVC pipe, drill holes into them, and finally use butterfly screws to join the reed and PVC units into radiating structures like the spokes of a bicycle wheel. Finally, to build the

curving and climbing walls of the dome, you connect each polygon to several others. You stack the empty ends of the PVC tubes from various polygons together, so that each stack becomes a node from which several polygons radiate. While one or more people hold the polygons still so that their PVC tubes can fully meet one another, drill a hole in the layered PVC and bind all the layers together with a screw. During this final phase of assembly, it would be wise to follow a blueprint in order to determine which shapes should connect to one another in each segment or vertical level of the dome. The dome's geometric design is determined by mathematical equations and not by aesthetic intuition, so it can be difficult to correctly anticipate where patterns will repeat and where they will shift.

This part of the assembly process requires a mix of flexibility and force because despite all the careful measurement work that goes into processing reeds, inevitably they still meet in slightly imperfect ways. Maneuvering the various polygons into position so that they can be screwed together sometimes requires that participants combine the strength of their arms and bodies in coordinated movements. At other times it requires some spatial creativity; for instance, a participant can dangle their body from an upright reed in order to shift a polygon downward to meet others, without exerting a great deal of active force. As participants work to fit the reeds together, the structure that they are in the process of building conveys force from one participant to another. Any given participant can at any moment feel other participants working on another part of the structure, depending on how the force of drilling or turning screws or maneuvering polygons travels between reeds that have already been joined together.

These work processes have a clear design to them: to make naturally occurring materials uniform enough that even newcomers can use them, without being intimately

acquainted with the qualities of reeds or with the adjustments one has to make when the reeds do not move or fit according to plan. Investigació Canyera's architectural designs for structures that incorporate river reeds are made to be replicable by non-experts; and their educational workshops seek to teach participants the skills they will need to use reeds as building materials in their own self-directed construction projects. And indeed, architecture with reeds does travel to communities that do not include eco-architects. For instance, I helped one woman who I had met at a workshop build her own geodesic dome, using reeds she had harvested herself and a cell phone app that showed a blueprint and told us how long each of the geodesic dome's components should be.

Investigació Canyera did not set out to design a construction process that included harvesting, or the meditative and rhythmic task of making reeds smooth. It certainly didn't design the moments of frustration that I experienced when I encountered reeds for the first time, nor the way the tasks involved in building become progressively more collective and cooperative as participants move from harvesting to processing to assembly. Instead, each of these labor processes was "implied" by how the reeds are situated within a landscape and by how reeds and people configure one another. As Albert explained to me, when Investigació Canyera first began to work with reeds, "it's like, you don't know the material, and each material has its characteristics. Reeds imply a harvest. And a project at that scale implied harvesting six thousand reeds. So then you can't fit them in a car, you need a truck." Yet Investigació Canyera embraces these unintended consequences as constitutive elements of design and teaches them as essential parts of the construction process.

There is a difference between using reeds as if they were LEGOs and knowing reeds and their environments well enough to be able to carry out all the steps that make reeds

into *material digno*. The latter form of embodied knowledge is an example of graspability. The sensory capacity to attend to reeds' and co-participants' movements and resistances, the embodied skill of bending reeds just so or of knowing which point of a geodesic dome to press on to bring far-flung reeds together, and social knowledge of not just knowing where reeds grow but also persuading someone to allow you to harvest them—all of these come together when people move reeds from the riverbank to the architecture studio.

Formation

The architects of Investigació Canyera believe that reeds are empowering in their very material and ecological qualities, even aside from the skills participants learn in workshops. Thus, Albert explained to me,

Reeds are a material that's very present in our surroundings, although you might not be aware of them until you start working them. And I think what ends up motivating the people who come to our courses the most is that it gives you empowerment. You have reeds very close by, you can use them easily because you can, let's say, process them easily. And it gives you like, it empowers you, which is to say that you can build this like you can [with] earth. It's something you have right there. Which doesn't have to go through an industrial process that depends on [other] people, but instead you yourself can harvest and use it. This is one of the foundations. I think that this is why reeds are attractive.

Reeds are close by geographically, but they are also close by in terms of the supply chains that make them available. Whereas other materials are part of dense networks of industrial production, reeds have an element of DIY about them: anyone can harvest them, and thereby make them into useful construction materials.

A workshop participant who I'll call Ivan, who found Investigació Canyera through his studies in Fine Arts, felt this closeness as something he would be sad to lose:

I think that wood is warm and transmits a different sensation. Than concrete, or plastic, or things like that...I see it as closer to people. Because you can take a saw and cut yourself some wood. On the other hand, if you want to work in concrete, you have to go to someone who can make you the concrete and bring it to you. Frames, and things like that. It's already something else.

The combination of environmental ability and work processes not only makes it “empowering” to work with reeds, but also makes grasping reeds into a refusal of existing systems for doing architecture. By making the detritus of industrial capitalism workable through new arrangements of people and landscapes, *Investigació Canyera* rejects the abandonments that industrial capitalism seems to demand. At sites like the *ateneu*, Can Batlló, and *Espai Germanetes*, where residents take immense pride in recovering left-behind and demolition-bound places—and particularly in doing so collectively, outside of industrial and capitalist work processes—a similar refusal is at work.

For the first large-scale structure that the architects built when they were still in school, they spent two weeks harvesting 6,000 reeds. Júlia remembered,

It was all crazy, never in my life had I done something like that! Unloading an entire patio full of reeds, it's like, something is happening. The craziness of doing something when we didn't know where it was going, but it was all intuitive. We didn't know what we were doing but we were making a mess of things, and that part was attractive too.

There was no fixed endpoint or desired result from harvesting the reeds, but nevertheless both harvesting and experimenting were propelled by intuitive desires. In fact, the very messiness of the “craziness” was a source of pleasure and fueled the sense that something out of the ordinary was happening. The “craziness” Júlia describes comes from doing something that does not make sense in capitalist logics. Halberstam writes that “when we are called to this other place, the wild beyond, ‘beyond the beyond’ in Moten and Harney’s apt terminology, we have to give ourselves over to a certain kind of craziness” (2013, 8).

Harvesting reeds is a way of inhabiting this wild temporarily but repeatedly, in rhythmic excursions outside of the city for construction materials. These excursions follow the patterns of work, since the architects tend to harvest reeds when they have a new construction project lined up but have depleted their previous stores of materials. But they also follow the patterns of the growing seasons; the winter months are optimal because it's cooler outside and there are no mosquitos. The moon's movements draw insects and moisture toward and away from reeds at different times in its cycle, so some lunar phases are better suited to harvesting reeds than others. And most of all, the timing of harvesting reeds follows the demand of building a life in common among workshop participants. The architects of Investigació Canyera consider harvesting reeds to be essential to understanding them; this step cannot be replaced by simply working with pre-harvested reeds in workshops. Thus, nearly every educational workshop organized by Investigació Canyera includes an invitation to harvest reeds with the architects a few days before the workshop, regardless of whether more reeds are desperately needed or whether the time of year or month is well-suited to this work.

Working with reeds does not offer any opportunities for dwelling permanently in the wild beyond. But giving into the craziness of reeds while knowing that it is impossible to dwell permanently with them refuses the seemingly "organic division between the rational and the crazy" (Halberstam 2013, 8) that the need to operate a profitable architecture studio would seem to impose. Moten argues in his discussion of Fanon that "inhabit[ing] the crazy, nonsensical, ranting language of the other" is a technique for bringing about "the end of the standpoint from which colonialism makes sense" (Halberstam 2013, 8). For trained architects who could easily work with ready-made construction materials on

projects that are publicly recognized as suitable for architectural creativity to instead embark on work projects where they must harvest materials themselves and are regularly misrecognized as “artisans” or *manos de obra* (unskilled laborers) carrying out the design of an architect who presumably has better things to do than construction labor is also a kind of craziness. But this craziness seeks to inhabit a standpoint from which industrial architecture no longer makes sense as a system for building and dwelling in cities, and thus to bring about its end.

For the architects, reeds stand out for their affordances as so-called “zero cost, kilometer zero” materials. Along with their physical qualities, this makes reeds easy to experiment with, and easy to learn from. Marina, an architect from the Voltes studio who was then just learning how to work with reeds, observed,

It’s a material that allows you that experimentation. Because with another material maybe you’d be more limited. In the end reeds are always manageable? They don’t weigh a lot, it’s an easy material to work. In other words, imagine it instead with concrete, it would be impossible. In other words, you need, all this craziness comes about because [reeds] have this scale that is really human. Without that it wouldn’t be possible. It’s a very manageable material that allows you to throw things away, if you throw out ten reeds it’s ok because there are six thousand more, so it really allows you to play a lot and try things.

This sense of play allows both structures and labor processes to emerge as a response to the material, rather than as a plan imposed on the reeds. I asked the architects whether, in their earliest days as a studio, they had a design that allowed them to plan in advance where reeds would fit into a structure. Everyone emphatically replied: no! Albert elaborated, “it’s that we went around fiiiinding...It’s going around doing one crazy thing after another, but intentionally, right? And I think that element of, ‘I don’t know why I’m doing this but we’re keeping busy’ holds a certain attraction.”

This intimate contact with reeds, and the ecologies within which they are embedded as a “nuisance” material, led directly to the work processes that Investigació Canyera developed as a young studio. And although they invented these work processes by necessity, they teach them now as part of the art of building with reeds.

As Marta explained, “it’s not just teaching how to build with reeds, but rather all the dynamics: of the group, of relations.” Albert added that after a few years of leading workshops, the studio shifted its orientation. “Now we teach how to make, rather than how to make forms.” In Catalan, the name given to these workshop activities is *formació en tallers*. While the more accurate English translation would be training in workshops, I want to rest for a moment on the English cognate: “formation in workshops”. Investigació Canyera still teaches formation in its workshops, but these are forms for interacting and working with other people as well as the spatial forms of materials.

Synergies

Imagination, labor, and along with them new and carefully cultivated perceptual capabilities are necessary to transform reeds into a *material digno* that can be used in construction. For Investigació Canyera, these requirements are the affordances that permit workshops in reed architecture to function as both opportunities for a different kind of education and as political interventions. Over the course of more than a half-decade spent working with reeds, the architects of Investigació Canyera have come to believe that reeds lend some of their own qualities to any project that involves manipulating them. As collectives learn how to rework reeds into a construction material, they are themselves reworked by reeds. Or as Albert once posited to me and to the other architects in the studio,

“the material with which you work defines the work groups for that material.” Albert said this abruptly, and then paused without any further elaboration. It left us all feeling rudderless. The other architects and I began to laugh, first nervously and then mirthfully when it became clear that our laughter would not by itself prompt Albert to further explanation.

Finally, I said, “what? Explain it to me a little more.” Albert replied,

In the collectives that work with straw, for example, there’s a construction network based on straw. And more or less—well, maybe I’m making this up and we won’t get to any conclusion, right? But the fact of the way you work the material generates for you a way of working with other people. You have to make certain kinds of efforts, and they’re different for each material. But that in the end you end up being left with some type of personality.

The “personality” that both reeds and the people who work on them “end up being left with” are a product of how they grasp one another. Material qualities, aesthetic judgments, and political economies come together or clash against one another in the alchemy of graspability. If it often appears to practitioners as though their work groups are defined (in both personality and technique) by the materials they work with, this is because landscapes and labor collectives undergo mutually responsive transformations in the course of grasping one another.

Reeds’ material qualities require that they be handled by a group of people, rather than by one person working alone, in order to become a construction material. Marta explained,

you can’t work reeds alone. The system that the material itself offers you for its use in construction is by a group. There has to be a team that processes that material and transforms it into something, in order to build. And by yourself you can assemble reeds, but if you don’t get together with three people, you’re not going to build an arch, right? Four people to build an arch. I don’t know if that’s dependence, but they are synergies and relations that are established between people in order to be able to build something.

Through their material qualities—especially their brittle flexibility and their size, which the architects referred to as “human scale”—, reeds offer a “system” for working on and with them. Reeds make their own demands of work collectives. Although Marta described “synergies and relations” between people, the reeds themselves prescribe this “system” of responsive labor arrangements as a technique for making reeds graspable. And while Investigació Canyera is very interested in the collaborative relationships that emerge in the course of working with reeds—in particular, in their tendency to reduce gender and age hierarchies in both long-term work groups and short educational workshops—these relationships do not exist for their own sake but are instead oriented toward building something. Continued building is both a means of creating new structures and a method for making and maintaining new relationships.

The human scale of reeds means that when people work them together, their bodies fall into intimate relationships not only with the reeds, but also with other workers. Irene explained, “Alone, you are not going to make an arch, you need four people. One here, another here, the other two there. When we go to *enchorizar*, one person winds the rope, another holds the knots, and the others hold down the chorizo.”³¹

Albert added,

and the relations that are created in this work, right? It’s not the same as being in a factory, cutting the same piece, with someone beside you doing the same thing. I don’t know, the way of relating is different: yes, no, take the reed through here, I’m going to stick it below my leg to be able to open the ‘u’ of the arch. Well, in the end, the synergies that are created in the work, right?

³¹ In Investigació Canyera’s practice, a *chorizo* (sausage) is a bundle of reeds held together by a knotted rope that has been wound around its length in a spiral pattern. *Enchorizar* is the activity of making a reed *chorizo*.

This reliance on people instead of industrial processes is a matter of both economies and sociality. The intimate work of sharing materials and maneuvering bodies around and with one another leads to an awareness of the potential of collaborative construction and makes clear how this kind of collective making could be revived on a larger scale.

For Ivan, participating in an Investigació Canyera workshop was an invitation to think through how collaborative economies might be strengthened. He explained,

I believe we have to expand and make a more collaborative economy. In other words, I can help you do this, and you can help me do that. We'd all get further. To do things. Always keeping in mind what each person knows how to do, and well, yes it's possible to create a collaborative network. In fact, these geodesic domes, there are workshops, people get together to make a house, they make a house for one person, then for another, like was done in the past.

The idea of a community building collectively is not only a fantasy of a different economy, but also a memory of a fairly recent past. Ivan's grandparents' house is a stone house in Galicia that Ivan's father built with his brothers and their neighbors. It is still standing. Ivan insisted to me that if houses are no longer built collaboratively, this is not because they are unsafe but because there is a "bureaucratic or political barrier" that requires people to pay for architects and takes both expertise and money out of their hands.

Workshop participants often felt that by learning reed-based construction techniques they were developing a kinship with practitioners of vernacular architecture from around the world. On multiple occasions in the studio, while harvesting reeds, and at building workshops, architects and participants shared videos (usually on their phones) with me and one another that depicted groups of people, usually in the global South, erecting buildings and digging foundations collaboratively and with traditional techniques. People enjoyed watching the videos and felt inspired by them, but the videos also evoked a sense of

loss and nostalgia for Catalonia's vernacular architecture techniques. I lost count of the number of times that strangers I met in Investigació Canyera workshops, on learning I was from Argentina, approached me to discuss indigenous construction techniques they had heard were still practiced in Argentina.

Both architects and workshop participants worked hard to develop an awareness of how their own practices differed from vernacular architecture as practiced in other places and times. For instance, on one excursion outside of Barcelona to harvest reeds, we struggled to differentiate reeds that were too young to be harvested from those that were ready for harvest. A Catalan workshop participant offered that "reeds aren't perfect, they're not all the same, they need to be measured—so you can't just grab all of them indiscriminately." A Cuban participant overheard, and observed that in Cuba, peasants or popular agriculturalists would just clear-cut the whole field, without regard to which reeds would actually be useful to them—simply to be rid of the reeds and expedite the harvesting process. He noted that we were being unusually careful compared to the attitude that most people who harvest reeds for construction would have.

Participants and architects alike understood their current relationship to the reeds and other naturally occurring "kilometer zero" materials of the Catalan landscape as a loss and attempted reclamation of vernacular knowledge. In workshops, participants' pre-existing commitments to environmentalism morphed into discussions of how traditional construction techniques had been displaced by modern building codes and their associated environmental destruction. If this loss of vernacular knowledge was accompanied by a shift from popular architecture to expert architects who alone had the legal and technical ability to oversee the construction of buildings, then redistributing construction knowledge as

shared and collective power was a means of restoring vernacular building techniques. Moreover, both the educational workshops and the general practice of building with reeds struck a blow against the capitalist imperatives that had made Catalan vernacular architecture “nearly go extinct” (as one workshop participant put it) in the first place.

Marta observed, “with reeds, collaborative construction is very evident, but really, years ago or in other cultures, the fact of building, of fixing your house, of maintaining your space, your field, your surroundings—they would do work days of construction where all the neighbors were invited, and these were also collective works.” Building with reeds reminds participants of the pleasure and possibility of building together. Vernacular architecture thrives in other parts of the world, and dominated Catalonia until building codes were imposed in the middle of the 20th century. Perhaps these techniques, and the community-based collaboration that they both relied on and reinforced, can return to Catalonia.

Affinity

Investigació Canyera’s workshops were first developed to teach building techniques, but they also teach techniques for re-assembling community. If we approach design as a process of coming into relation with others, then the workshops are a form of design that works simultaneously on the relationships individual builders develop with reeds and with one another, as well as on the relationships involved in finding anti-capitalist ways to make our habitats. But what does this mean for communities who, more often than not, take part in construction and design workshops because they want to produce an end product? What

kind of artistry is involved in accompanying communities as they learn that reeds are not just for building, but also for relating?

In part, the reeds themselves demand collaborative construction regardless of how comfortable or skilled with such a system the participants might be to start with. But affinities that are discovered in the process of building—whether political, professional, or on another basis—are key to the continuous discovery of non-capitalist modes of production not just as tools for meeting material needs, but also as resources for returning pleasure to the rhythms of everyday life. Irene explained,

Sometimes the public just draws closer to you. For example, when you do a training on greenhouses made of reeds, it's so that the people who are working in the fields can use a resource that is kilometer zero, that they have right there. In any case every year they have to throw away [the greenhouse] and this would be a residue, and instead aluminum is being used for that. What for, you know? So, there's a certain affinity with the public. That is, in the use of resources. It's not just a 'political' issue, as the politicians would say.

Marina added while rolling her eyes, in the voice of someone whose politics have been dismissed too many times, "Free spaces, Barcelona, all that.' No!"

Irene clarified, "well, to me this is politics too! But I also see it as, more a problem of life." She added,

You do it from another location, you know? You don't want to profit economically from it. but you also know that you can't take on unpayable expenses, especially when you aren't generating any type of income. So, there's an element that has to do with time, which is to say your own motivation. So instead of going out to dinner, I'll go out tomorrow to harvest because it's really appealing to me! And spend the day outside with people because, well, it's an activity that's very pleasant, at least to those of us who are involved in it—because you like to work with your hands, with the tools, go to get the reeds. It's not woork, I don't know. It's not like the concept of work we have that's like, office, five hours, the boss. Not at all. So, then you say, well if this doesn't turn out economically profitable, it's all the same to me! Because if this one doesn't turn out maybe the other will, and I go on doing it anyway because it appeals to me to do it. Or there are building

projects in places where I share a political affinity, or for some other reason, it appeals to you that these spaces have this type of structure, and you do it!

The possibility of “doing from a different location,” as Irene put it, is at the heart of the various occupations of the means of architectural production that I have explored throughout this text. The labor practices involved in reed eco-architecture, collective construction, and participatory architecture are themselves a kind of direct action, seizing the tools of architecture for anti-capitalist ends. Designing in a way that allows residents to craft dignity into vernacular construction techniques and into the urban spaces and materials left behind by capitalism turns out to be both an experiment in building relationality and an effort to generate a different relationship between work, community, and politics.

CONCLUSION

Practitioners of participatory architecture and collective construction have lofty expectations for their small-scale, practically-oriented design and construction activities. The seeming misalignment between participatory design's small scale and its big-picture goals at first seems like a problem of scaling participatory design. However, participatory design operates at many scales—from the more than 200 participatory meetings involved in the elaboration of Barcelona's Municipal Action Plan and District Action Plans in 2016, to the collective decision of how to repair a human-height geodesic dome whose construction had gone off blueprint. As I conclude, I instead wish to emphasize a slippage between the domains of activity toward which practitioners orient their participatory design work—that is, to the concrete problem of building something—and other domains of activity on which practitioners act by participating in collective design and construction.

Consider: Why does building small structures with river reeds open a window onto alternative ways of organizing the economy? And why is it so important to residents of Sants that Can Batlló is built, maintained, and operated by neighbors instead of by the city, in the manner of other nearby civic centers? To be sure, I do not ask these questions to cast doubt on the efficacy of these design and construction practices. Practitioners' enthusiastic participation in these place-making projects is itself evidence of their effectiveness at gathering people together to build something that matters to them.

I ask these questions to gesture at the moments when participatory architecture and collective construction become “about” something other than the practical task of building

and the concrete uses to which the built structure can be put. For instance: building together can be a first step toward a more cooperative economy even though collective construction is not organized around exchange or value; design and construction practices that rarely concern themselves with formalizing collective decision-making structures can posit new types of democratic relationships. In these moments, participatory design still has a practical use. But design and construction are no longer oriented only to the structure that practitioners are working together to build in the immediate foreground. Instead, these are moments when the structures that are the object of shared design work become structural and structuring. By shaping the form and management of a building or a playground or a pergola in a community garden, residents and architects can—briefly, intermittently, and without predictability or guarantees—act on the political, economic, and social worlds that abut a particular design project. Collectively designing and building thus bridges registers of meaning-making that sometimes appear to be incompatible with one another or inaccessible to residents who lack political and economic power.

The La Borda housing cooperative, for instance, is legally designed to slow gentrification in the Sants-La Bordeta area by housing about 50 neighborhood residents in a building that is owned collectively and whose apartments can be neither sold nor rented. Why should building new housing stop gentrification, when in other cities activists have argued that any new additions to the housing stock—regardless of their legal classification or initial affordability—ultimately result in the displacement of a gentrifying area’s original residents? To understand the true potential of cooperatives like La Borda requires that we look past the innovative property model used to transform municipal-owned land into collectively-run public housing and to the possibilities that these cooperatives offer as

locations from which new kinds of political, economic, and social relationships can be encountered and made real.

In the six years between 2011, when residents of Sants and La Bordeta first began to discuss creating a housing cooperative at Can Batlló, and 2017, when the first piece of wood was laid at La Borda's construction site,³² it was the building's design and not the design of its legal status that most frequently preoccupied its future residents. La Borda's future residents decided to pursue a *cessió d'ús* property model relatively early on in the process of making their ideas for cooperative housing a reality. In official statements by La Borda and the municipal government, La Borda's property model is the driving force behind the cooperative's promises of slowing gentrification, supporting an alternative economy, and experimenting with a different form of the right to the city. But in practice, residents put a great deal of effort and energy into co-designing and co-managing the building at every step from financial planning to architectural blueprints to day-to-day life in the building's shared dining, working, and play areas. Furthermore at each new *cessió d'ús* cooperative that is being designed and built in Barcelona, future residents plan not only to live in and manage the building together (as the cooperatives' legal status requires them to do), but also to co-design the building and co-manage its construction (activities that future residents choose to undertake but that are not required by the *cessió d'ús* cooperative model).

Collectively designing and managing the building's construction became just as important as the property model in residents' efforts to secure La Borda's future as both a

³² La Borda's construction began with the placement of a symbolic first piece of wood instead of a cornerstone because as an energy efficiency measure, the building was primarily built using wood. As of 2019, La Borda is Spain's tallest wooden building.

desirable place to live and an alternative to capitalist place-making. Designing the building at multiple scales was a years-long process that came to carry and help manifest the future residents' hopes for a collective way of life during the long interval when the general idea for the cooperative was fixed and agreed upon but the building was not yet habitable or even tangible as a construction site. This imaginative labor was not a means of practicing idealism. Indeed, it was often interpersonally and emotionally difficult for the cooperative's future residents to encounter unanticipated frustrations and to learn, through design work, that their priorities for the cooperative were in some cases very different from those of their co-residents.

For example, future residents had committed to the rough square footage and type of apartment they would move into relatively early on in the process of building La Borda. But they were not assigned their specific apartments until more than a year later, after La Borda's architecture commission had finalized the floor plans. Together, the future residents worked out a system for determining how to allocate identical instances of a floor plan in more or less desirable locations within the building between the various residents registered for that floor plan. Alba, who was slightly older than some of the other future residents and planned to live in the cooperative with her partner and children, was frustrated with her apartment's size and layout. She pointed out that this was her only chance to design her home to her specifications, and that therefore it was disappointing to know that her home—despite being made *for her*—would not contain everything she had pictured as part of her life. The fact that the kitchen range and oven would not be located in their own designated room was a particular sticking point. Alba told Gala, a member of the architecture commission, that in the new apartment she would be “cooking in a hallway.

It's not realistic for a family to live like this. Maybe you don't understand because you don't have a family." This remark was hurtful, Gala explained to me, because it seemed to imply that she had not carefully considered Alba's needs in the design process despite her responsibilities to that design process as a member of the architecture commission.

But more upsetting to Gala was the implication that by virtue of her childlessness she was both "someone who doesn't have a family" and somehow incapable of even understanding or imagining a family's needs. When Gala recounted this conversation to me, it was in the course of explaining how difficult the previous few months of seemingly "final stage" design work had been. There was a great deal still to be jointly determined about what the cooperative would be like, even after the formal design stage had concluded. If La Borda would simply reproduce the gender roles and economic imperatives of the nuclear family, Gala asked me, then what was the point?

But in the face of these frustrations, not a single person pulled out of the cooperative. Instead they worked harder to imagine what their everyday interactions with other residents would be like once the building was complete and everyone had moved in. About a year before they had broken ground on La Borda's construction, residents were already jokingly discussing their inaugural dinner and seriously working through how the large shared areas of the building could be used as co-working and childcare spaces. The residents anticipated and fervently hoped that their relationships with one another would transform both how they used the building's spaces, and their mindsets about what the building as a whole was for. For instance, even if they thought of themselves as belonging to nuclear families, residents explored ways to share childcare and evening meals outside of their familial structures. They envisioned the building's co-working spaces not just as

locations from which to pay the bills, but also as affordances for piecing together new ventures within Catalonia's rapidly developing cooperative economy. In other words, the residents' plans for the building did not always represent the residents' desires or needs in that particular moment, but instead sometimes made space for what they hoped they would come to desire *after* having received it upon moving into the cooperative.

The problems that Gala and Alba encountered in their conversation were undoubtedly design problems: a too-small kitchen in an inconvenient part of the home; a building whose limited number of floor plans had to accommodate a large variety of family structures. But in designing solutions to these problems, residents moved out of the domain of architecture- or construction-oriented activity. Instead, they found potential solutions in leveraging the cooperative's design and management to reconfigure caregiving relationships and the economic function of the home.

In the cases I have outlined thus far—which involve hoped-for futures where alternatives to gentrification, capitalism, and the nuclear family are readily available—these alternative futures seem like they should be difficult to reach. Yet for practitioners of participatory architecture and collective construction, such futures are both anticipatable as a consequence of their work and emerge naturally in the course of laboring together. Possibilities that dominant political and economic systems stubbornly keep hidden reveal themselves and become newly imaginable through shared design work.

In this dissertation, I have explored how new and emerging experiments with participatory architecture and collective construction bring Barcelona residents into the world of urban planning and architecture as co-designers instead of as stakeholders to be periodically consulted. These practices draw on and are made possible by a number of

20th- and early-21st-century projects that sought, often successfully, to create new economic and political futures for Barcelona by reshaping the city's physical form. But participatory architecture and collective construction seem to offer new futures precisely because they wrench place-making in Barcelona slightly askew from the established political and economic tracks along which it has proceeded in the 40 years since the Transition. Of course, this does not mean that participatory design proceeds independently of political and economic power. But participatory architecture and collective construction offer novel means of organizing these power relationships.

Encounters with hopeful futures occur so frequently in participatory architecture and collective construction because these activities' design practices subtly reconstruct the economic and political relationships on which they are overlaid. As co-designers who shape architectural plans and make construction-oriented decisions as they build, residents rework their relationships both with other residents of Barcelona and with the systems of economic and political value that structure their movements through the city. For instance, architects use participatory architecture to train residents to interact with their neighborhoods as resource-laden landscapes rather than as immobile backdrops or obstacle courses to their everyday activity. As part of the participatory process of creating a Plan for District Action in Sants-Montjuïc, the feminist architecture studio Col·lectiu Punt 6 led women residents of Sants on walking tours of their own neighborhood as a means of collectively analyzing how women move through the neighborhood. In another case, the staff of the weekly leftist newspaper La Directa asked the architecture studio Voltes to design and build some small display tables and benches for La Directa's booth at the annual *Fira d'Economia Solidària de Catalunya* (Solidarity Economy Fair of Catalonia). Voltes

tackled this building brief by using recycled cardboard as a building material (instead of a trendier building material) and by inviting the La Directa journalists to collaborate in the furniture's construction. Near Voltes' studio in Vallcarca, the group first augmented their own stash of cardboard with cardboard encountered on the street, and then moved to a collectively run woodshop where the journalists learned to cut, drill, and laminate the cardboard into furniture alongside the architects.

Through collective construction, residents become more attuned to the social and material resources that even abandoned buildings and empty lots contain. Moreover, residents use collective construction to build up an interconnected landscape of collectively built and managed spaces where relationships of solidarity and shared strength can be gathered geographically and fixed in space. In these place-making projects, residents (often alongside sympathetic architects who are themselves residents of the neighborhoods where they work) gain the skill of seeing their urban surroundings differently than they once did—and the skill to manipulate and shape these environments—through their participation in professional and vernacular design labor. Residents make the city into something they can work on and with.

The design components of collective construction and participatory architecture are important, therefore, not just for how they reconfigure relationships between residents, architects, and government officials, but also for how they remake residents' relationships with the city they inhabit—now become the raw material for and provocation to design interventions. Participatory design has become a good tool for future-making in Barcelona because it beckons residents out of more established ways of place-making where these futures have become blocked. Perhaps most intriguingly, residents are mobilizing

participatory architecture and collective construction to make the futures of their surroundings infinitely iterable and flexible. Shared practices for reworking places continue to unfold even after their spatial forms seem to have become fixed. The collective and participatory nature of these design practices requires that places' futures be bound up in the life of a community. If Barcelona is to have a future, participatory design's practitioners insist, it is Barcelona's residents who must themselves find and make this future from within their everyday experiences and relationships.

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