

SPACES OF BECOMING:  
PUBLIC SPACE IN TRANSFORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOCIAL  
MOVEMENTS OF 2011  
(LESSONS AND QUESTIONS FOR PLANNERS AND URBAN DESIGNERS)

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by  
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ABSTRACT

Proposing that *space shapes publics* and *publics (re)shape their own spaces*, this dissertation explores how the sociopolitical construction of public space informs planning, design and space-making processes. Ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation, direct observation, interviews with key actors and video-photographic analysis documented two social movements, the 15M mobilizations in Barcelona (the *Indignados* Movement) and Occupy Wall Street in New York City, whose protest encampments and occupation of public spaces became means of expression, organization and resistance.

Fieldwork suggests that these movements rejected representative democracy and representative economy and refused representational processes in their assemblies and forms of organization. They enacted a politics of direct presentation in public space rather than *re*-presentation. Part One explores how the social movements constituted themselves as new publics in space. Part Two demonstrates how these newly constituted publics constructed their own spaces. Part Three draws lessons about how to plan and design public spaces through space-making processes used in these encampments.

The protest encampments operated as *open spaces* permeable to diverse physical, organizational and informational inputs from outside. Welcoming newcomers at all times, they developed an aggregative identity in perpetual transformation as true *spaces of becoming* in which the public and the space continually transformed and reinvented themselves. Like open-source or wiki systems, the social movements and their encampments operated through approaches of *open planning*. Implications and applications of such approaches for planning and urban design involve thinking of planning as a truly open-to-the-public process incorporating citizen participation *in situ* and in real time, with potentially enormous effects on city-making.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Silvano A. De la Llata González was born in Tampico, Mexico in 1976. He graduated as an architect at The Autonomous University of Tamaulipas (UAT) in 2002 and received a Masters degree in Urban Studies at The Iberoamerican University, Puebla in 2006. Since then he has combined design practice with teaching and research.

In 2000, he founded *Balance 1.618*, an architecture and urbanism studio, in which he practiced and did research on public space, urban design, affordable housing and informal urbanisms.

He has taught courses and studios on architecture, urban design, planning, urban sociology, urban environmental psychology and urban history since 2006. He has been a visiting lecturer at Cornell University, a lecturer at Anahuac University and a professor at the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas in Mexico. In the latter, he was a founding member of the Masters in Urban Design, Planning and Development.

In the last ten years he has studied contesting uses of public space, such as street vending, graffiti, public assembly and protest, as urban design and planning agents. In 2009, he went on to pursue a PhD in City and Regional Planning at Cornell University, in which he studied alternative planning processes in the context of social movements. He did research and participated in the 15M mobilizations in Barcelona and Occupy Wall Street in 2011 and 2012 in which he studied the protest encampments as open systems and spaces of resistance, expression and creativity. He is the author of *Urban resistance: Alternative interpretations of public space* (2011) (in Spanish).

A Elsa,  
Por tu amor, tu paciencia y tu fé.  
Gracias por estar en las buenas y en las malas.

A Valentina,  
Por que tu llegada me enseñó a hacer las paces con mi pasado: porque cada momento  
de mi vida fue como fue, para que tú fueras tú.  
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the General Confederation of Labor of Barcelona and to all the participants of the 15M Movement in Barcelona and Occupy Wall Street in New York City, whose words and actions give life to the present work.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF ABBREVIATION	xi
PREFACE	xii
EPIGRAPH	xvii
INTRODUCTION	18
From the “narratives of loss” to open spaces of insurgency	22
A diffuse object of study	27
Historical background of the 15M	28
Methodological approach	33
Structure of the Work	37
PART 1 – BECOMING-PUBLICS: EMERGING IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF REFUSAL	40
CHAPTER 1 - NO ONE REPRESENTS US: IDENTITY AND (RE)PRESENTATION IN THE 15M MOBILIZATIONS	47
1.1 Recapturing representation through participation	48
1.2 Recapturing meaning through practice	54
1.3 Transcending individual crisis through collective articulation	60
1.4 Debates about self-accountability and collective identity	63
1.5 Conclusion	69
CHAPTER 2 – “TOGETHER BUT NOT MIXED”: IDENTITY MECHANISMS IN A PUBLIC IN TRANSFORMATION	73
2.1 Identity and multiplicity: The case of the 15-O Global Demonstration	74
2.2 Identity and complexity: The case of the 29M General Strike	79
2.3 Identity and transformation: The case of the 15M anniversary protest	87
2.4 A public in transformation	91

PART 2 – ON BOUNDARIES AND OPEN SPACE	95
CHAPTER 3 – CHALLENGES, CONFLICT AND TENSIONS IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF OPEN SPACE	101
3.1 Who belongs and who does not? External participation and internal self-regulation in the encampments and assemblies	107
What makes sense? Between inclusiveness and permissiveness	108
What is relevant? Between diverseness and dispersion	115
What is accepted? Between condemning and challenging	123
What is tolerated? Between trust and ingenuity	126
3.2 Dealing with openness. The risks and challenges of openness and self-regulation	133
Permeability and self-regulation. Coexistence, transformation and replication of external practices	133
3.3 Between infiltration and expansion. Open and vulnerable versus protected and exclusionary	140
3.4 Dealing with the context. Externally imposed boundaries	149
3.5 Conclusions	154
CHAPTER 4 – THE DILEMMA OF OPENNESS: THEORIZING BOUNDLESS SPACE	158
4.1 The dilemma of openness	159
4.2 Strangers and acquaintances	161
4.3 Three approaches to conceptualizing boundaries	166
4.4 Spaces of becoming	170
PART 3 – OPEN PLANNING: THE PROTEST ENCAMPMENTS AS URBAN LABORATORIES	182
CHAPTER 5 – TURNING VOICES INTO SPACES: THE PROTEST ENCAMPMENT AS SPACES OF UNCERTAINTY AND POTENTIALITY	185
5.1 Planning the Barcelona Encampment	187
5.2 Spatial Maieutics: Evolution of the encampment	191
The Agoras: Space as an open question	197
The Commissions: Asking more specific questions	203
Unmapped Spaces: Everyday life and experimentation in the encampment	214
5.3 Conclusions	218
CHAPTER 6 – PLANNING IN OPEN SPACES	224
6.1 The Infrastructures Commission: A planning platform	225
6.2 The Kitchen Commission: Of paellas and planning	230
6.3 The Orchard Commission: Open-ended urbanisms	235
6.4 Conclusions	243

CONCLUSION	250
REFERENCES	267
Bibliographic References	267
Interviews	273
Field notes references	274
General Assembly minutes and online conversations	274
Others sources	275

## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

- BCN – Barcelona (Spain)
- AcampadaBCN – Protest Encampment of Barcelona (Spain)
- 15M – 15<sup>th</sup> of May or *Indignados* Social Movement (Spain)
- 29S – General Strike on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 (Spain)
- 29M – General Strike on March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (Spain)
- 27M – Attempt of eviction of the Barcelona Encampment on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011
- 15-O – Global Demonstration of October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Global)
- 12M15M – 15M’s Anniversary protests from May 12<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (Spain)
- PAH – Platform of those Affected by the Mortgage (Spain)
- PP – Popular Party (Conservative) (Spain)
- PSOE – Spanish Socialist Labor Party (Liberal) (Spain)
- OWS – Occupy Wall Street (New York)
- GA – General Assembly (New York)
- MAYDAY – General Strike organized by Occupy Wall Street on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012
- UGT – Workers’ General Union (Spain)
- CCOO – Workers’ Commissions (Spain)
- CGT – General Confederation of Labor (Spain)
- CNT – National Confederation of Labor (Spain)
- BwO – “Body without Organs” (Deleuze and Guatari, 1977, 1983)
- TAZs – “Temporary Autonomous Zones” (Bey, 1985)

## PREFACE

The study of the protest encampments and social movements of 2011 that are the theme of this dissertation were part of a ten-year research agenda based on the study of alternative uses of public space, such as informal street vending, graffiti, skateboarding, *parkour*, protest and public assembly. These interests came about after working as a professional architect and realizing that public spaces, architecture, urban furniture and any piece of design are always ultimately re-appropriated and reinvented by uses that transgress the programs intended for them. Having had a strongly modernist training as an architect, I used to get frustrated by – what I then thought was – the “misuse” of space. This frustration turned into an obsession about studying why and how users interpret the space beyond – and often against – design and planning programs.

Bit by bit, obsession turned into fascination as I discovered how street vendors transform modernist esplanades into informal markets, skateboarders interpret accessibility ramps, banisters and urban furniture as opportunities for tricks, and *traceurs* (*parkour* practitioners) move across the city transgressing the visible limits between private and public, indoor and outdoors, upstairs and downstairs. In 2011, protesters occupied parks and plazas that had been planned for “the enjoyment by the general public for passive recreation”<sup>1</sup> (as the managers of Zuccotti Park

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<sup>1</sup> This will be further discussed in *Part 2 – On Boundaries and Open Space*.

recommended after the eviction of the encampment) and turned them into spaces of resistance and creativity. The protest encampments and social movements of 2011 were outstanding opportunities to study how alternative interpretation and practice take place at a massive scale.

When I learned about these events, I was at the *Biennale of Public Space* in Rome, presenting a paper precisely about the latent social and political potential of public space. In that paper, I argued that after thirty years of literature claiming that public space and the public realm were dead,<sup>2</sup> there was evidence that the public dimension of space remained latent in quotidian – even microscopic and unconscious – manifestations of dissent.

As I followed the events of Madrid and Barcelona from Rome (and was tempted to take the one-hour flight to see for myself), I was convinced that this was going to be a once-in-a-life opportunity to study how publics shape themselves and their spaces at such a scale. I began working on my dissertation proposal as soon as I returned from that trip.

During the three months that followed, and as the protest encampments became viral across Spain, I developed a detailed fieldwork calendar to cover protest events that

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<sup>2</sup> This vision has been referred to as the *narratives of loss* (Orum, 2009). Beginning with Richard Sennett's (1977) *The Fall of the Public Man*, some authors (Harvey, 2008; Davis, 1992, Sorkin, 1992; Mitchell, 2003; Zukin, 1995, 2009) have said that we are witnessing the virtual death of public space in the face of an intense process of commodification, gentrification and privatization of the city. Others even claim that "shopping is the last form of public life" (Koolhaas, 2000).

were planned sometimes six months beforehand. One such event was the blockade of the entrance of the Barcelona Stock Market building in solidarity with an event called “Occupy Wall Street” in New York City – a “Tahrir moment” for the United States, as it was described. When I shared my calendar with colleagues and professors, they dismissed the event with a smile and a recurrent comment, “this will never happen in the US.” But, similar to the Spanish case, the encampments spread across US cities and there were more than 200 at the height of the movement. Simultaneously, there were other civic and student movements across the world that manifested themselves as being in solidarity with the 15M and Occupy – or even claiming to be sister movements – in Quebec, Mexico, Chile, Greece, Italy, France and more recently in Turkey. All of them created their own protest encampments using processes similar to those tested in Barcelona.

These networks were patent in statements in general assemblies, in online debates that included voices from both sides of the Atlantic – and both sides of the Mediterranean – and in direct actions in Barcelona in solidarity with Syria, in Cairo in solidarity with New York, and in New York in solidarity with Oakland. As these movements started to resemble a wave of mobilizations, I decided that I had to study this as a historical and global phenomenon. Therefore, I began studying the Occupy Wall Street Movement as well. This movement is not included in this study as a comparative case but as a study of common spatial tactics, approaches and discourses in order to situate the 15M in a global context. As such inter-movement articulations became evident, the events of 2011 emerged more and more as a historical process than as isolated cases of

political unrest. A wave of protest like this had not happened since 1968, when the Prague Spring was followed by the French May, The Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the Student Movement in Mexico, which ended with the killing of 500 students in the Plaza of the Three Cultures in Mexico City.

A protester in Barcelona commented that I was like a “storm chaser”, as he knew I followed the activities of other movements online in parallel to the study of the 15M and OWS.<sup>3</sup> Linking my dissertation research to my studies of other forms of reinterpretations and re-appropriation of space, I recognized a certain degree of truth in that comment. The metaphor of the storm was a powerful one. A storm is an episodic convergence of elements that are present in the everyday climate as well. A storm is not an anomaly of “good and passive weather” but part of it as well. Studying storms like “storm chasers” not only teaches us about storms themselves but about the potential of average weather, which contains latent elements of everything that is present in a storm (e.g., differences of pressure and humidity). Bringing that metaphor to space, we can say that the episodic insurgent uses of space are not necessarily anomalies but rather lessons about how space works in general and about what spatial disciplines (e.g., architecture, planning, urbanism) miss as they study space. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre explores the concept of *moment* as “points of rupture, of radical recognition of possibilities and intense euphoria” (Harvey in Lefebvre, 1991: 219). The moments of 2011 (as storms) revealed the hidden potential

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<sup>3</sup> In reference to that, Alberto, whose comments feature in many of the excerpts analyzed in this dissertation and who often said he wanted make sense of activist researchers, mentioned that I was a like a “Mexican John Reed”, because, according to him, I, like the author of *Insurgent Mexico* and *The Ten Days That Shook The World*, was always “chasing The Revolution.”

that lies in everyday life. The historical recurrence of these moments (i.e., 1848, 1968, 2011) shows that rather than being anomalies, they are integral parts of spatial history.

The forces and processes that were present in the “socio-spatial storms” of the occupations of public space are latently present in quotidian “misuse” of space. The encampments raised questions about how public space can be envisioned alternatively by the new citizenship that emerged in 2011.

My study of the “misuse” of space follows the premise of Kuhn’s *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, as it studies the accumulation of apparent anomalies in the use and production of public space in order to understand what those anomalies have to say about the normative order. In other words, it seeks to understand how an apparent “misuse” of space may reveal “mis-planning” and “mis-design”.

Thus, the drive of this research agenda has been to understand the values that are implicit in design and planning practices and that are revealed precisely when they are contested by alternative uses and users<sup>4</sup> in order to draw lessons and raise questions that make these disciplines more responsive to users’ reinterpretations and practices.

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<sup>4</sup> There also is another body of literature (Holston, 1998, Crawford, 1998, Irazabal, 2009, Hou, 2010) that claims that new forms of public space are arising as new publics appear in the city. This “insurgent citizenship” as James Holston (1998) calls it, escapes the categorizations of modernist planning and architecture and plans its own spaces beyond these orders (See Literature review section in Introduction).

“I think, therefore *we* rebel”  
Albert Camus (1956), *The Rebel Man*

## INTRODUCTION

“Do not name this,” read a banner in the middle of the protest encampment of Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona in May of 2011. That which refused to be named included debate sessions, stencil workshops, impromptu music performances, poetry readings, film screenings, puppet shows, an open-to-the-public library, a communal orchard, a kitchen that fed thousands twice a day, and an open-to-the-public general assembly. All of this was taking place among the hundreds of camping tents and light structures occupying the plaza. In the middle, many pockets of people were debating a variety of subjects.<sup>5</sup>

As these debates went on, the protesters started building structures out of recycled canvas, wooden skids, boards and furniture. As the discussions became thematically defined, the participants developed defined spaces for them that would later turn into working commissions. At the same time, structures hosted debates and workshops that were communal to the whole encampment. The 150 people that first occupied the plaza on May 15 grew exponentially into the 12,000 that at one point or another were in the encampment by the time it was dismantled two months later. Accordingly, the initial vision of the encampment adapted as more people joined the movement. This was only possible because the space was organized on the basis of horizontal

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<sup>5</sup> For example, the role of women in revolutionary processes, the supposed legitimacy of the state over the monopoly of the force, the unnecessary injustice implied in the disparity between homeless people and vacant homes, the ideological bankruptcy of neoliberalism, the need to collectively engage in the production of one’s own healthy food, the urgency to rethink an economic system that ensures the quotidian destruction of the environment, to name a few.

relationships that never allowed for the development of leaders or representative figures. People decided how to plan their spaces on the basis of deliberative processes and constant reflection upon the spatial needs and organizational circumstances. As we will see throughout this dissertation, these operated as *spaces of becoming*, as they were spaces in perpetual transformation and in which new citizenships enacted an alternative socio-spatial order. This transformative nature was the result of operating as *open spaces*, which allowed for the participation of potentially anybody. The notions of *becoming-* and *open space* will be central to the development of this dissertation's argument. These concepts are the result of the *refusal of representation* processes, which is also a key notion for this research (see Part 1).

The protest encampments were true urban laboratories in which alternative forms of planning and design processes were tested, although it is needless to say that this does not necessarily fall into the category of normative planning. The makers of the encampments refused to explicitly codify these spaces and planning processes – i.e., they refused to name them – which made it particularly difficult to study these phenomenon.

The work of urban design always encounters some tension between how a space is produced and how it is used, and these tensions are typically greater when it comes to public space. Public spaces are planned by proportionally very few and used by potentially all citizens. Also, normative planning and urban design are most often practices that defer the agency of the users in time and space – the planning processes

occur in spaces that are often remote to the planned spaces, and they come to fruition after the initial needs of the users have already changed.

The planning and design of public spaces is defined by the implicit premise that *spaces shape publics*. Architectural programs induce and propitiate certain uses in detriment of others to attract, shape and create certain publics, certain users.

Throughout the history of modernity, this has been a constant premise. Nineteenth-century promenades and boulevards were created not only to host the nascent bourgeoisie but also to create the new bourgeois culture in public spaces. Similarly, the modernist maxim, “form follows function” leaves out a similar implicit premise – architects not only create forms that follow existing functions but also invent new functions by creating new forms.

This work explores the flipside of that premise – how *publics shape themselves and their own spaces*. It seeks to understand how the reinterpretation and re-appropriation of space through alternative uses – in this case, the encampments and general assemblies – create the conditions for the encounter of new publics that reinvent the space in the processes of recognizing themselves.

The objective of this dissertation, thus, is to understand how public space is planned as it is lived by the ultimate users of the space. It seeks to draw lessons for planning and urban design from the spatial processes that were tested in the protest encampments. By examining how this public shaped its own identity in space and transformed its

space, I explore the conflicts, challenges and opportunities entailed in planning and designing through processes that are open to the public and occur in real time. For this purpose, I analyze two social movements – the Spanish 15M Mobilization (also referred as “The Indignados Movement”) in Barcelona and Occupy Wall Street in New York City.

***From the “narratives of loss” to open spaces of insurgency***

The so-called *narratives of loss*, mentioned in the Preface, lament that possibilities of activating the public dimension of space started disappearing in the aftermath of the 1960s social movements. Beginning with Richard Sennett’s (1977) *The Fall of the Public Man*, some authors (Harvey, 2008; Davis; 1992, Sorkin, 1992; Mitchell, 2003; Zukin, 1995, 2009) have said that we are witnessing the virtual death of public space in the face of an intense process of commodification, gentrification and privatization of the city. Others even claim that “shopping is the last form of public life” (Koolhaas, 2000).

The *narratives of loss* are triggered perhaps by the violent repression and gradual pacification of public space that was made directly and indirectly in response to the events of 1968. The criminalization of informal uses of space (e.g., panhandling, bench sleeping, loitering, graffiti, solicitation and unannounced protest) that were embodied in Giuliani’s Zero-tolerance policies and the thematization, gentrification

and hyper-regulation of parks were later exported to cities around the world.<sup>6</sup> The concept of *pacification by cappuccino* (Zukin, 1995) suggests that a 1968 scenario is always in the minds of city governments and that the park regulations which prevent people from playing the harmonica or laying on a bench and gatherings of more than 20 people without a permit, in a way, implicitly warn the public to “disperse and go back to shopping.”

1968 also saw the publication of Lefebvre’s *The Right to the City*, which directly responds to those events and suggests that modernist urban analysis is obsolete to study the growing complexity of the city. The method he later proposed (1974) for the study of urban space states that the way in which space is lived always differs from the way in which it is perceived and conceived. Perceptions and conceptions of space made by planners, architects, the state and the market produce an urban order defined by processes of *bureaucratization* and *commodification*. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1974) propounds a conceptual triad to study urban space: *spatial practices* define perceived spaces; *spaces of representation* define how we conceive spaces, and *representational spaces* define how we live spaces. The latter is crucial to understanding the development of the 2011 movements, since they used the encampments as spaces to refuse representation in favor of direct presentation in public space.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the government of Mexico City hired Rudolph Giuliani as a consultant for 20 million dollars to adapt the Zero Tolerance policies to public spaces of the Mexican capital.

The encampments of 2011 enacted alternative spatial orders at the local level that, at the same time, contested power structures at the global level. They also operated on two different temporal and spatial scales. They have been vastly studied as symbolic spaces of the contestation of hegemonic processes at large in the fields of geography and social sciences (Harvey, 2012, Castells, 2012, Chomsky, 2012, Purcell, 2012, Hardt & Negri, 2012, Marcuse, 2012; Sitrin, 2012b, 2013), and in social movement studies as well (Pickerill, J., & Krinsky, J., 2012, Halvorsen, 2012, Schein, 2012, Taylor and Gessen, 2011); yet, there is a relative dearth of research on how they operated directly in the public spaces they occupied. In general, these works touch upon the implications for the production of urban space but not on how the space of the encampments was actually planned from the perspective of their own planners or the mechanisms involved in this process.

In the last 15 years, however, there has been a growing interest in understanding space-making processes like those that shaped the encampments of 2011 and that can be helpful in analyzing these events. From the notion of tactical urbanism to insurgent planning, the recent literature in planning theory and social science reveals a resurgence of interest in the discussion about the potential of the organic and spontaneous nature of urban space to inform alternative forms of space-making.

A seminal text on the issue is James Holston's (1998) *Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship*, which describes the incapacity of normative and positivistic planning and design to read the social and political flows that escape institutional scopes. The notion of

insurgent planning has been influential in planning, urban design and urban theory (Irazabal, 2008, Miraftab, 2009, Hou, 2010, Friedmann, 2011). Similarly, other authors have focused on the potential of alternative space-making processes as *loose space* (Franck and Stevens, 2003), *ludic space* (Stevens, 2007), *everyday urbanism* (Crawford, 2005) and *unknown space* (Borden, 2001).

Other visions about spontaneous and organic space-making processes include the work of Hakim Bey (1991) (see section *Three Approaches of Boundary Conceptualization* in Chapter 4), who introduces the importance of time in the construction of “temporary autonomous zones” (TAZs), and the work of Collin Ward (2000) on the role of direct action and the tactical potential of squatting, community gardening and other forms of spontaneous organization. The notions of *bricolage* and *collage* strategies have also been influential in architecture and urban design (Rowe and Koetter, 1978) (see Part 3). Recent planning literature also shows interest in the importance of autonomous organization and social movements as planning factors (Chatterton, 2005, De Souza, 2006, Marcuse, 2013).

Specific literature about encampments also focuses on the capacity of space to self-regulate and achieve autonomous control (Hailey, 2009, Niman, 2011). In *Camps: A Guide to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Space*, Charlie Hailey (2009) collects examples of encampments that have arisen out of necessity, imposition and the search for autonomy. He presents different encampments that have grown out of a desire to establish spaces of opposition to external control.

In the recently published *Beyond Zuccotti Park* (Shiffman, et al, 2012), architects, planners and urban designers debate the notion of the public and the commons in the light of examples from various Occupy Movements and examine the role of professional designers as agents for social change.

The construction of the encampment analyzed in this paper utilized most of the approaches described above. It was the result of an insurgent consciousness. It worked tactically, in the sense that it operated within short-term and low-scale spatiotemporal frameworks. It was the manifestation of a collective and collaborative desire for autonomy, and its physical outcomes were the result of *bricolage*, collage and *DIY* logics. However, there were also other influences that have not been explored that will be helpful to study the 2011 movements, such as the influence of open systems approaches, which were adopted from the Internet culture and the aesthetics of informatics (see Chapter 6).

This dissertation explores the notion of *open space* as a condition that enables the participation of potentially any newcomer. This notion links two bodies of literature on open space that are often unrelated – namely, the notion of autonomous organization, which is usually studied in social science, political science and philosophy, and the notion of open-source, which is associated with Informatics. Open space, as interpreted by the former, is a condition that enables social relationships that transcend institutional hierarchies and membership boundaries (Hardt & Negri, 2000,

2004, 2012, Bey, 2001, Lotringer, 2007, Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, 1983), while the latter understands it as a system that is accessible for anybody to edit, contribute and modify. As we will see throughout the chapters, the general assemblies and encampments worked as mirror images of the movements' online communication. In effect, they operated as *wiki* systems.

Indeed, the encampments have been described as offline versions of their counterparts in the Internet sphere (Massey, 2012, De la Llata, 2012, 2014). In a recent article, the layout and mapping of the encampment at Zuccotti Park and its evolution were depicted as the result of the open-source hypercity (Massey, 2012). Other works describe how the openness of these movements was partly influenced by the Internet and social networks (Castells, 2012, Glassman, 2012, Fuster Morell, 2012, Gaby & Caren, 2012).

Recent online publications have also mentioned the potentialities of open-source and “wiki” approaches for urban planning and design ([opensourcecities.tumblr.com](http://opensourcecities.tumblr.com), 2013, Polis, 2010, Merchant, 2011, Coren, 2011, Vallejo, 2012, Niaros, 2012). There are also projects and theories that seek to incorporate these approaches into planning and design, such as The Open Planning Project (TOPP), the Peer-2-Peer Lab (Niaros, 2012), and MIT's Urban Network Analysis software. These projects focus on the potential of open-source to simplify participatory planning and make it more accessible.

### *A diffuse object of study*

These movements shared similar motivations,<sup>7</sup> but what gives some sort of unity to them and other mobilizations of 2011 is that they are responses to a crisis of representation. The slogan “They don’t represent us,” the most common battle cry in the Spanish 15M movement, became emblematic of these mobilizations. As the two movements studied herein responded to crises of political representation, they embarked on experiments to challenge and deconstruct representational processes. These experiments with the refusal of representation had peculiar implications about how space is socially and politically constructed – especially about how it is bounded. Representational processes are mechanisms that typically bound and bond people through identity and in space. Frontally challenging the conventional processes through the use of horizontal and leaderless organization created ways of relating in the space beyond boundaries.

These movements have been described as *social mobilizations* (Rebelaos, 2012, Bonet, 2012), as it is impossible to encapsulate them as a single thing (see Part 2 – *On Boundaries and Open Space*). Consequently, doing research on a movement that refused to be defined as a finished object of study was no easy task. Identity, representational, and physical boundaries were explicitly and constantly avoided, and nominal identity – not to say a sense of membership – was nonexistent. Thus,

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<sup>7</sup> The foreclosure crises, the bank bailouts with public moneys, the dismantling of the public sector, the privatization of public health and educations, the corporatization of democracy, the lack of accountability of mainstream media, the lack of environmental responsibility of industries, and generalized government corruption were among many of the grievances of the movements of 2011.

analyzing a social phenomenon that embraces ungraspability, as a delimited object of study, seemed not only contradictory but also futile.

### ***Historical background of the 15M***

The 15M, or Indignados Movement has been described more as a mobilization than as a social movement (Rebelaos, 2012, Bonet, J., 2012) as it was defined by the convergence of a broad spectrum of social struggles that coincided in the occupation of plazas that started on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 in Madrid and Barcelona and later spread throughout Spain. Other movements like Occupy Wall Street, the Quebecois, Mexican and Chilean Student Movements were later inspired by these mobilizations, which in turn were greatly inspired by the Egyptian Revolution.

Three major factors triggered the mobilizations of the 15M in Spain, and defined what the movement wanted to respond to and position itself against: (1) the implosion of the real estate bubble after a long period of speculation, which resulted in a historical housing crisis; (2) the incipient dismantling of the welfare state or what is officially known as “austerity measures”; and (3) the approval of a series of unpopular Labor Reforms that sparked the General Strike of September 29, 2010 (29S),<sup>8</sup> a precedent of the 15M.

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<sup>8</sup> This was only the beginning of a series of wildcat strikes. There were two major ones in March 29 (29M) and November 14 (19N) only in 2012.

The ramping speculation that resulted in the collapse of the real estate bubble produced the most spectacular housing crisis in the history of Spain. In addition, the Spanish Law is particularly harsh in regard to evictions, as it does not allow for *in lieu of payment* and declaration of bankruptcy. Thus, people still owed money to the banks, as they were homeless. By 2011 (10% more than in 2001), there were 3.4 million empty houses and a comparable number of homeless people (El Pais, 2013). The situation is well summarized in the movement's slogan "It doesn't make sense: people without houses and houses without people."<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, there was the approval of a set of packages of budget cuts that substantially reduced the welfare state and incipiently – but decisively – privatized public health and education. The so-called austerity measures were approved by most of the political parties, including the governing Socialist Party (PSOE), whose reputation had substantially eroded. The protests of 15M directly caused the preterm deposing by referendum to the Government of Zapatero (PSOE).

Finally, there was a major Labor Reform that would seriously affect working conditions and worker's rights. The 29S General Strike was organized in response to the reform and served as an opportunity to rehearse most of the practices that were later adopted by the 15M. Alternative unions, squatter collectives, and neighborhood associations participated in the organization beyond any affiliations. It was not the first

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<sup>9</sup> Rhyming in Catalan: "No s'entén: Gent sense cases i cases sense gent!".

time the civil society engaged in autonomous organization, but it was the first time it had happened at that scale.

The initial call for strike was organized by the two major unions in Spain: The Worker Commissions (CCOO) and the General Union of Workers (UGT); however, alternative unions and other collectives later accused them (i.e., CCOO and UGT) of having made pacts with the employers about the unpopular Labor Reform in order to avoid a strike. The Reform clearly reduced the rights of unionization, organization and collective bargaining. The term *pactist* was used to refer to the unions that had supposedly betrayed the workers' interests in favor of the employers'. The reform was described by the movement as the precarization of labor or the cheapening of lay-offs, as it made it easier and cheaper for employers to fire workers, and more difficult for workers to organize themselves to strike, participate and defend their rights in general.

In parallel to the strike organized by CCOO and UGT, a *wildcat strike*<sup>10</sup> was also organized. Traditionally, a general strike is organized by unions and political parties; a *wildcat strike*, however, includes immigrants who are not affiliated with unions,

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<sup>10</sup> After 1968, the figure of the *wildcat strike* emerged as an alternative protest for disenfranchised groups. The Situationists in the late 1960s and the Italian Autonomia movement in the 70s made extensive use of this resource. In the late 90s, the tactic took new force in the anti-globalization struggles in Europe. The 29M Strike was a call for a wildcat strike (*huelga salvaje*). The general strike has been a recurrent resource in the history of social struggle in Spain and particularly in Barcelona, since before the times of the Civil War. It seeks to paralyze the city's capitalist production. Theoretically, the intention is to prove to Capital that its sole source of power is Labor, and that without it, Capital is nothing. The Italian autonomists, commenting on Marx's Capital, said that, contrary to traditional belief, Labor is not a slave to Capital, but precisely the other way around. If people take autonomous control of work and production, then Capital is stripped of power (Tronti in Lotringer, 2007).

informal workers, domestic employers, students and the unemployed. It is an autonomous strike. A strike like this consists of not only stopping industrial and commercial production by not attending to work but also manifesting publicly that you refuse to take part in those relationships. The idea is “salir a la calle” (to take to the streets), to participate, and to organize alternatively. A wildcat strike refuses to obey union leadership. It is the collective action of the non-affiliated. The 29S Strike was a seminal movement that articulated the various different non-affiliated struggles of civic organizations, neighborhood associations, alternative unions and anti-globalization movements. This kind of strike is the best example of organization without overarching leadership or nominal identity boundaries. The wildcat strike transcends and transgresses boundaries.

*Pactism*, as it was called, was portrayed as a crystallization of power that betrays any ideology. Union and party leadership are perceived as targets of behind-the-table or *de facto* pacts made by the government and the business class. Thus, more than a sense of betrayal, there is a generalized sense suspicion toward the representational role of political parties and congresspeople. The distrust, though, is not about the ideology (in this case, Socialism) but about vertical leadership and the permanent risk of co-optation that exists in representational institutions regardless of their nominal ideology. The phantom of co-optation is perceived to be always behind ideological crystallization. Names in general, and -isms in particular, are perceived to be dangerous. Nominality is perceived as the implicit menace.

Therefore, in response to the devaluation of names, people turned towards the restoration of practices. It does not matter what you call yourself but what you do. These practices pretend to be the opposite of hegemonic representative democracy and neoliberalism. Thus, faced with a lack of opportunities for recapitulation (in real time), they turn to direct democracy; as a result of the inability to participate and the lack of transparency, they choose openness; in response to the entrepreneurial and neoliberal discourses of leadership, they turn to horizontality; and in the face of the privatization of public goods, they launch their own defense of the commons. Mainstream media is also perceived as an irresponsible representational actor, as it selectively portrays a reality that serves the interest of particulars. Therefore, participants can only speak *ad personam*.

Direct democracy, in the form of public neighborhood and general assemblies, was perceived as the natural response to representative, partisan democracy. By principle, the general assembly is potentially open to all for participation, regardless of age, class, gender, nationality<sup>11</sup> or nominal membership to parties or unions. Thus, it naturally must take place in public spaces, where processes are physically accessible and visually transparent.

The issues debated ranged from the foreclosure crises, bank bailouts with public moneys, dismantling of the public sector, privatization of public health and education,

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<sup>11</sup> The 15M is profoundly internationalist. French, Italian and Argentine are among the most active foreigners in the Spanish movement, but throughout my fieldwork I encountered Uruguayans, Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Chileans and Moroccans (among others) who were deeply involved.

and corporatization of democracy to the lack of accountability of mainstream media, and the lack of environmental responsibility of industries. And since the discussions often went on for hours, people stayed over in the plaza. The protest encampment became a symbol of the recuperation of the political dimension of parks and plazas. This does not mean that all that happens in the encampment is necessarily linked to democratic discussions, but rather that every act acquires political meaning: from the planting of a tree, the screening of a film and the performance of music to the simple acts of eating and sleeping in the plaza.

### ***Methodological approach***

Throughout my fieldwork (both in Barcelona and New York), I encountered active participants in the movements that did not acknowledge belonging to them, as well as mere sympathizers that identified themselves as members. And although the movement presented itself as non-partisan and non-unionist, there were members of political parties and unions that participated *ad personam* in the movement.

Collectives participated only in solidarity with an action, as they could not represent or be represented by the movement. For that reason, I also interviewed individuals that were associated with collectives, organizations and unions that converged in the mobilizations the 15M beyond, due to or despite their affiliations.

Thus, the ethnographic and inductive approach of this research was imperative rather than optional, as it only presents the convergence of different sociopolitical forces in

common practices, as the affiliation with ideology is explicitly questioned. The empirical work presented herein is the result of fieldwork undertaken in Barcelona between 2010 and 2012. It is an ethnography based on direct observation of public spaces, participatory observation, and interviews with key actors of the two social movements. During the period between the Fall of 2011 and the Spring of 2012, I covered at least one protest each day.<sup>12</sup> I also attended general assemblies, neighborhood assemblies, marches, occupations, sit-ins, blockades, pickets and strikes as a participant observer.

These movements were vastly and expeditiously documented by their participants both online and offline. Thus, the fieldwork was also complemented by a detailed analysis of online materials, such as videos, blog posts, pictures, and minutes that were posted on their websites and Facebook, YouTube and Twitter groups, as well as printed material that was distributed in the streets, such as flyers, newspapers, brochures, and posters. In many cases, these forms of publication (especially online videos) completed the study of the events analyzed, lending a broadness to the coverage that would have been impossible without these resources. In fact, this even allowed me to study two simultaneous events, actions of the same event happening in two different places, and even simultaneous actions in solidarity in different parts of the world.

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<sup>12</sup> The number of protests in Barcelona has doubled since 2011, hosting 5.6 demonstrations a day (<http://www.europapress.es>). In Madrid, there have been 10 demonstrations a day on average since May of 2011 (<http://www.elconfidencial.com>).

I adopted this practice from observing how the 15M constantly followed sister movements around the world. News and solidarity communiqués from The Egyptian Revolution, Occupy Wall Street, Quebecois, Mexican and Chilean Student Movements were constantly re-tweeted and publicly shared in general assemblies.

In Barcelona, I studied two neighborhood assemblies – The Neighbor Association of La Hostia (Barrio of Barceloneta) in 2010 and the Neighborhood Assembly of the Casc Antic Barrio (linked to the 15M Movement) in 2011 and 2012. The latter suggested that if I wanted to attend, I should not do so as a researcher but as an ordinary neighbor (as I had lived in that barrio for six months). In parallel, I attended the general assemblies of the 15M Movement in Plaza Catalunya. I also attended different forms of protests organized by the 15M and other organizations in solidarity with them (e.g., alternative unions, social libertarian centers, students' associations) on a daily basis.<sup>13</sup>

In the last stage of my fieldwork, when the Occupy Movement had become a global phenomenon, I also decided to explore the articulations and resonance between the different movements and put the 15M into global context. The cross-breeding, intercommunication and sharing of tactics happening online and offline made clear to me that these uprisings had to be studied as global phenomena. From Cairo to Madrid,

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<sup>13</sup> During my fieldwork, I did extensive interviews with different organizations that on different occasions participated in the actions of the 15M. I interviewed members of the Federation of Neighborhood Associations of Barcelona (FAVB) and the anarchist unions the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and the historical National Confederation of Labor, as well as people from civic organizations, neighborhood assemblies, occupied social centers and libertarian social centers.

from New York to Mexico City, people were gathering in the encampments to debate the bases of an emergent transnational citizenship of resistance – one that perceives that local problems are often different manifestations of the same socioeconomic system and thus recognizes the potential to articulate a network of solidarities. Those networks are still in action today beyond the dismantling of the encampments in the form of neighborhood assemblies, art collectives and citizen associations. They are the result of these seminal moments of resistance and experimentation. The role of the Internet was decisive in the creation of identity articulations that worked as a virtual “imagined [global] community” (Anderson, 1983).

Thus, between the winter of 2011 and the summer of 2012, I also travelled intermittently to New York City to do fieldwork in the context of the Occupy Wall Street Movement. The purpose of this was to put the 15M mobilization in the context of similar social struggles happening globally. During that period, between trips, I also participated in several neighborhood and general assembly sessions of the 15M Movement in Spain.

The ethnographic material was edited and analyzed in the form of excerpts preceded by context and analytic points and followed by analytic comments. There are also pictures and video captions that complement the excerpts as well as drawings and diagrams that complement the analysis of the material. All the names of the people interviewed and quoted in this dissertation have been changed in order to protect their anonymity.

## *Structure of the work*

The first part, which begins by analyzing the development of the movement as a new public in space, focuses on the notion of refusal of representation that was recurrent throughout the interviews, communiqués and slogans of the movement. It describes how people convened at the plaza in response to a permanent call for action. Through the engagement of participants in the protest actions and the making of the encampment, the movement developed an identity. This identity grew through ties that bond – rather than bound – the social group together. It is also an aggregative rather than exclusionary identity as different – even antagonistic – groups allowed themselves to collaborate and perform together. This is a seminal chapter, because it seeks to understand how the constitution of this new public was inextricably linked to the space that they occupied.

The second part explores how the space is constituted and regulated by this public. The first chapter focuses primarily on exploring the notion of openness that is central to the development of the movement's identity and to its space-making mechanisms. The material analyzed herein describes the conflict between different participants and collectives within the movement and between participants and outsiders. The situations of conflict reveal how the space is constituted and self-regulated as a realm of strangers and acquaintances (Sennett, 1977). The objective of this analysis is to show how or if a sense of inside and outside arises in a space that is constructed

without physical or organizational boundaries. The second chapter focuses on the dilemma of openness that arises when a public constitutes itself in an open space. Here, Delueze and Guattari's (1983) – more than Lefebvre's – concepts of *milieu*, *body without organs* and *plateaus* are helpful scopes of analysis to understand how a permeable space is constituted vis-à-vis its context. With the aid of conceptual diagrams, the analysis shows that the encampments constitute *spaces of becoming*, in which publics transform their spaces and themselves by remaining permanently open to newcomers and external practices.

The third part explores the space-making mechanisms that develop the encampments and draws lessons for urban design and planning processes. It analyzes the development of the Barcelona encampment over a two-month period as well as three working commissions. Using maps and diagrams, it shows how the occupiers of the plaza dealt with the material, organizational and informational inputs in the encampment. This chapter reveals that the encampments were permeable to these inputs and operated as open-ended, open-source systems. The plaza is also used as a platform that is fixed and in which dynamic flows occur. The objective of this chapter is to understand how different voices (e.g., conversations, debates, arguments) in the plaza turned into spaces.

The stories presented and analyzed in this dissertation are helpful to understand how public spaces can be simultaneously spaces of experimentation, creativity and resistance and how there is always a latent potential to spark moments of

transformation for the spaces and the publics hosted by them. This work is an opportunity to explore how planning processes happen when they escape traditional forms of representation and institutionalization and how alternative new orders arise in the absence of a normative spatial order. The lessons from the encampments are not their material results but what those material results infer about the planning and design processes that brought them about. Thus, there are potential implications for planning firms, non-profit organizations, civic associations and design firms; however, as the encampments were ephemeral experiments, there will be a need for more testing of these processes in order to adopt these lessons into planning and design practice.

## PART 1

### BECOMING-PUBLICS: EMERGING IDENTITIES IN THE AGE OF REFUSAL



Solidarity act with Occupy Wall Street in Barcelona (Source: Author)

When they evicted us [my family] from our house, I was really depressed. I thought: “Why is this happening to us?” We had no house and we still owed money to the bank.<sup>14</sup> We were ashamed of being homeless, so we never told anyone but our relatives. I felt so hopeless and lonely, until we met others like us at Plaza Catalunya. We discovered that there were millions like us, and that people were organizing to resist the foreclosures and the crisis. That’s when I started to live again. I felt my life had meaning.  
(Marcelo, Bolivian activist, Barcelona, March 30, 2012)

The battle cry “They don’t represent us” inundated the streets of cities across Spain in 2011, and has continued ever since. Initially, the slogan addressed congress people of the two main ruling parties (i.e., conservative PP and liberal PSOE), but it was later extended to include the nation’s whole political, economic and labor representation system. The mobilizations of the 15M were not only motivated by reported feelings of indignation about the foreclosure crisis, the increasing unemployment, the generalized

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<sup>14</sup> In Spain there is neither the possibility for declaration of bankruptcy when someone is evicted nor the property can be taken in lieu of payment.

corruption or the labor reforms – it also arose in response to a broad crisis of representation. The public’s response to this crisis was to refuse all possible forms of representation coming from outside, as well as the replication of representation processes happening inside the movement.

Most of the movements in 2011 questioned political representation processes in their discourse and treated them as inherently problematic. They perceived representation as a political process that co-opts and defers the public’s participation. The slogans “They don’t represent us” in Spain and “We are the 99%”<sup>15</sup> in the United States clearly address such crises of representation. These slogans stress the tension between a majority that is (under)represented and (mis)represented by a minority that is (over)represented (e.g., in Congress, in media, in the economy).

This weariness about the general order of things was prevalent in other sister movements around the world. In reference to the Occupy Movement, the *Indignados*, the Zapatistas and the *Argentinazo* (Argentine uprising of 2001), Marina Sitrin highlights this gesture of refusal: “our movements are the shouting of ‘No!’ The ‘Ya Basta!’ [Enough already!] The ‘Que Se Vayan Todos!’ [They all must go!] They are our collective refusal to remain passive in an untenable situation. And so we pull the emergency brake, freeze time and begin to open up and create something new” (Sitrin, OccupyTheory.org, 2012). The Egyptian revolution also shared a similar spirit. In a communiqué to Occupy Wall Street, the Tahrir Square protesters said: “[a]n entire

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<sup>15</sup> Although, the slogan “We are the 99%” was used for the first time in the Occupy Wall Street movement it was quickly adopted by other movements around the world, such as the 15M in Spain.

generation across the globe has grown up realizing, rationally and emotionally, that we have no future in the current order of things" (Comrades from Cairo, 2011. Published in The Guardian).

John Holloway (2000) describes how refusal comes in the form of what he calls "the scream". This is the "No!" that serves as an act of stopping – and thus resisting, in the best sense of the word – in order to profoundly reconsider things. In this case, the movements said "no" to representation, insofar as it sustained the structuring processes of the general order of things. This has key implications for public space, as we will see throughout this dissertation.

What does representation do for space and publics, and what is entailed in refusing representation? 'Representation' comes from Latin *repraesentare* (re-, intensive prefix, + praesentare "to present"), which literally means "to place before". Therefore, to represent is to place one person or thing for another that is not physically present in the space. In any process of representation, one thing signifies or stands for something else. Just as a marble bust of Aristotle stands for the person of Aristotle, and a dollar bill – hypothetically – stands for its equivalent in gold in the Federal Reserve, or the word 'love', for instance, signifies the complexity of feelings, relations and actions associated with the concept of love, a parliamentary or a union secretary attempts to bound their institutions with his/her representational power. A representational process by definition delimits spaces and groups of people. It bounds a set of conceptual, symbolic, political or social interactions into coherent organizational or institutional

entities. Thus, a crisis of representation is in principle a symbolic crisis. Furthermore, there is a devaluation of the represented meanings (e.g., democracy, socialism, social justice, love, confidence) that are embodied in symbols of representation (e.g., discourses, institutions, political parties, authority figures); and such devaluation produces distrust in the representational process itself.

Representational processes are so ubiquitous in daily life that we take them for granted. In fact, there is not only a representative democracy but also a representative economy and a representative everyday life. In *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Bifo Berardi (2012) describes the events of 2011 as a response to the devaluation of creativity. He describes how language has been devaluated as a result of following the logic of financial capitalism. As money is made no longer through the production of goods and services but through the act of moving money, language, as a way of thinking and relating to the world, is necessarily reduced to the repetition and transaction of simplistic ideas contained in ready-made phrases that are circulated without being processed. Language carries less and less meaning as it is reproduced over and over like a currency that loses its value as more bills are reprinted.

Regarding space, Lefebvre (1974) extensively explores how representational processes define how we live, perceive and conceive spaces. In his famous triad, he describes how (1) *spatial practices* define how we perceive space, (2) *spaces of representation* mediate how we conceive spaces, and (3) *representational spaces* are spaces as we live them. The critique of representation that was made by the 2011 mobilizations was

a way to challenge the external representation that was happening in remote spaces (spaces of representation) to restore the representational power of people in their own spaces. The people challenged external *re*-presentation with direct “presentation” in space.

This tension was explicitly manifest in the protests and assemblies that took place in public parks and plazas (particularly in Spain). The Blockade of the Catalan Parliament, during the height of the occupation of Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona, highlights the importance of representation for 2011. A parliament building is a space where a group of people represents and talks in the name of people who are elsewhere. As a response to that, the protesters not only organized general assemblies in the main plazas, which were open for anyone to join and participate, but also tried to bar congresspeople from entering the building when a package of unpopular policies was being voted on. In response, the government sealed the parliament complex.<sup>16</sup> This is a clear example of the struggle to re-appropriate the representational power of space.

The general assemblies and protest encampments sought to restore not only political representation but everyday life in general. They wanted to represent themselves more expediently and *in situ*, through art, performance and democratic participation. The tension between how the movement is represented by the media and government and how it is self-represented was made evident throughout the assembly debates in 2011.

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<sup>16</sup> This was a protest tactic that was recurrent throughout the social mobilizations of 2011 and beyond. It was repeated in other Spanish cities as well as in Mexico City and other cities Latin American. Invariably, the response of the government was to seal the buildings with military-like strategies.

A crisis of representation is also one of identity – for example, the represented meanings may no longer be identical to the representing symbols, or the represented group of people may no longer be identical to the representative figure or institution. Although this tension is always present in any representational process, there are moments when the erosion of meanings becomes critical. Thus, the represented subjects lose the sense of identity that their representative figures formerly gave them. Challenging the very notion of representation creates a singular ethic and aesthetic spatial functioning in these mobilizations. The way they position themselves in the face of power – and internally – challenged the traditional notion of identity boundaries in social organizations.

The encampments and assemblies became places to test the micropolitics of non-representation. The banner of “Do not name this,” found in the middle of the Barcelona encampment at Plaza Catalunya, expressed the desire not to be represented, reduced or summarized by ready-made classifications. Through the assembly debates, participants struggled with this issue at every level. As will be shown in the fieldwork excerpts later in this chapter, the protesters were cautious of elders who claimed to represent the young, men who claimed to represent women, professionals who claimed to represent workers, locals who claimed to represent immigrants, and so on.

The refusal of representation as a structuring process of coding – as opposed to refusing particular codes in themselves – has peculiar implications in regard to the

social construction of space and identity. Charles Tilly (2005) describes how identity is formed through social “ties that bond and bound”; however, in the case of the 15M, the absence of representation as an overarching structuring process made the spatial and identity boundaries of the movement diffuse. At the same time, there was an undeclared commitment to openness that allowed potentially anyone to participate in the actions of the movement. If the 15M mobilizations indeed operated without ties that bound, then what were the bonds that held the movement together?

The ultimate objective of this part is to understand how these forms of interactions create and transform this public in space. This chapter provides a seminal analysis of how publics use space as a mean of self-transformation.

## CHAPTER 1

### NO ONE REPRESENTS US: IDENTITY AND (RE)PRESENTATION IN THE 15M MOBILIZATIONS

This chapter analyzes how the 15M movement (re)presented themselves publicly in order to challenge external representation and how that resulted in the creation of a new sense of identity. Drawing from communiqués, press conferences and assembly debate excerpts, I seek to understand how the movement developed into a new public through (re)presenting itself publicly. The 15M, like other similar movements, is an interesting case allowing us to explore how social and spatial organization work without the mechanisms that we typically consider conditioning.

Here, I analyze how the notion of refusal of representation served as a departing point to create an identity in construction. Thus, the movement began with an open call for action that only outlined what they were *not* (i. e. neoliberal, authoritarian, representative, leader-based, exclusionary) and invited anyone to join the encampment and the assemblies in order to discover alternatives to what they could be. The objective of this chapter is to explore the practices and discourses that developed into a transformational sense of identity to these movements, even when representation is challenged as an integrating mechanism.

### ***1.1 Recapturing representation through participation***

Inspired by their counterparts in Madrid, the 15M General Assembly of Barcelona published the following text as a declaration of minimal principles on the second day of the occupation of Plaza Catalunya:

We have come here **voluntarily and by free will**. After the 15th of May demonstrations we have decided to remain united and grow in numbers on **our fight for dignity. We do not represent any political party and they do not represent us**.

**We are united in our rage, our discomfort, our precarious life, which is derived by inequality, but, above all, what keeps us together is our will for change. We are here because we want a new society that puts our life on top any political or economic interest. We feel crushed by the capitalist economy, we feel excluded from the present political system which does not represent us. We are striking for a radical change in society. And, above all, we aim at keeping society as the sole driver of this transformation.**

They thought we were asleep. They thought they could carry on cutting our rights without finding any resistance. But they were wrong: we are fighting – peacefully, but with determination – for the life we deserve.

We have learned from Cairo, Iceland and Madrid.

**Now it's time to extend the fight and spread the word.** (Acampadadebcn.org, 2011. The movement published this communiqué in Castilian (Spanish), Catalan and English. The bold text is in the original)



Figure 1. The Barcelona Encampment (Fotomovimiento, 2011). The encampment that started on the May 15, 2011 (hence the name 15-M Movement), was the continuous occupation of the Plaza Catalunya for about one month. The riot police failed to evict the participants two weeks after it was established. During that month there were assemblies, workshops, film screenings, music performances, plays and think tank sessions taking place in the plaza, until it was voluntarily dismantled. (Source: Fotomovimiento. Picture by Vincenzo Rigogliuso. All sizes of this photograph are available under a license of Creative Commons by Fotomovimiento. May 27, 2011, Barcelona. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/63055421@N04/5766335812>)

Unlike the kind of manifesto that decrees in detail the political and ideological agenda of an already constituted social group, this declaration presents the group as deliberately open. It is a call for action addressed potentially to anyone to refuse the general order of things and discuss potential alternative orders. The encampment seeks to be more of an open question than an answer. Nevertheless, these minimal principles clearly describe what the movement is *not* about. The communiqué structurally questions representative democracy and representative economy. Most marches and protests ritually stopped in front of banks and government buildings – especially the

parliament – to shout “Guilty, guilty!” The encampments and the neighborhood associations that followed them tried to experiment directly in space with alternatives to these two institutions. The mention of putting “life above any political or economic interest” is an effort to, using Lefebvre’s triad, restore how space is *lived* above how space is *represented* by these power structures. Through the debates and conversations presented in this and subsequent chapters, we will see how the encampment served as a place to experiment with exchange without monetary transactions (see section on the Kitchen Commission in Chapter 6) and with democratic debates that privileged direct participation. The encampments were experiments to recapture what the Situationists and Lefebvre called “everyday life”. They became a space to refuse the existing order and imagine new possibilities (Zizek, 2012).

Although the identity of the movement remained open, in the sense that they were expecting it to grow in numbers, they called for unity. The encampments and the general assembly were open to anyone for participation, regardless of age, class, gender, nationality<sup>17</sup> or nominal membership to parties or unions. In this regard, they said that they had “decided to remain united and grow in numbers.”

This first line of the declaration outlines the dilemma that would define the movement in the future (see section on *The Dilemma of Openness* in Chapter 4). As it was open

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<sup>17</sup> The 15M was profoundly internationalist. French, Italian and Argentine members were among the most active foreigners in the Spanish movement, but throughout my fieldwork I encountered Uruguayans, Ecuadorians, Mexicans, Chileans, Romanians, Bolivians, Dominicans and Moroccans (among others) all of whom were deeply involved in the movement.

to potentially anyone, the movement in fact grew in number, while at the same time becoming increasingly complex in terms of identity.

Immediately after defining the open nature of their movement, they shift to the subject of representation. Here, they explicitly refuse the representation of any political or economic institution. At the same time, they state that they do not seek to substitute their representation with one of their own. In this sense, they manifest the way in which representational processes are problematic to them, as they say, “they don’t represent us, and we do not represent them.” The mention of “society as the sole drive of this transformation” is also a call to people to participate and be present in order to challenge representation.

The participants sought to apply the refusal of representation to themselves as well. They sought to commit to openness and non-representation even at the level of small-scale social – or even interpersonal – relationships. In the assemblies, the challenge to representation was addressed not only to the government but also to any quotidian situations in which there were processes of representation. From official representatives like guild, union or party leaders to quotidian or implicit figures of representation like elders, community leaders, spokespeople or even parents, the figure of the representative was placed under constant scrutiny. Examples of this phenomenon will be analyzed throughout the chapter.

The non-representation described and demanded in this communiqué was interpreted variously in the field. Thus, for example, in a later stage of the movement (particularly in Barcelona), they started using the slogan “No one represents us,” a variation of the original “They don’t represent us.” Whenever the slogan “They don’t represent us” was heard in demonstrations, it was always followed by the response “No one represents us,” as if they were reflecting on this issue every time. Some saw this “generalization as wrong and even dangerous, as it consider[ed] that if all [politicians] are the same, there would not be any possibility for change through politics” (15Mpedia.org/No\_nos\_representan). Nonetheless, this refusal of representational processes was also applied to the movement itself. These logics made the boundaries of the movements difficult to identify both spatially and in terms of identity. The movement, instead of rushing towards ideological reductions and political programs, embraced an identity in transformation.

The challenges to internal representation complicated the communication between the protesters and the general public, whom the protesters were trying to reach in their calls for action. In the first week of the encampment, some participants gave press conferences to describe what the movement was about. Karla, a young participant, explained the mobilizations to the national and local media as follows:

... We are gathered in Plaza Catalunya, we are people that are fed up and outraged, and we are calling everybody [to come]. We want the greatest number of people to come. Everyone, come. Workers, unemployed, businesspeople, children – it doesn’t matter. We are making change. We want change. We want to say ‘enough!’ We can’t take it anymore.

Later, Felipe, a man in his early sixties, followed up:

[t]his has only began, but it has already begun. This is why we are here in Plaza Catalunya – to debate, to be the agora of Barcelona, of Catalonia, and invite everybody to participate.”

Amalia, who had spoken before, interjected saying:

We are citizens<sup>18</sup> of all kinds: autonomous, precarious, unemployed, health workers, etc. People that after a long time – as they had to – exploded.” (Press conference at Plaza Catalunya, May 20, 2011)

This fragment approximates the open sense of identity of the 15M. The identity of the movement is presented as indignation about the systemic crisis and as refusal of its perpetuation. Identity is presented as potential and openness, as an invitation is extended for everyone to come to the plaza.

The refusal to provide ready-made manifestoes that can be misused and distorted by political parties, official unions, the media is a tactical response to the possibility of co-optation. The potential identity is also implicit in participants’ statements; they are actually not addressing the media or the government – they are addressing the general public with a call for action.

The fact that they present themselves with an identity-in-construction, however, does not necessarily mean that they are vague about their aims. The invitation to reflect together reveals a collective potential of generalized – and until then isolated – individual problems. The call is for those who have been disenfranchised by the system (e.g., the unemployed, the precarious, the children, the evicted) that have not yet acknowledged that they could articulate with each other.

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<sup>18</sup> In Spanish, emphasis is added to the call for male and female citizens: “ciudadanos y ciudadanas.”

These press conferences sometimes created conflict between participants, as they were perceived as a way to represent the whole movement since they often spoke in plural; however, as is evident throughout the fieldwork, participants often made clear that they were speaking *ad personam*. When the local and national media went to the plaza looking for leaders and lists of petitions that could summarize the movement, they found instead participants who described their version of the movement from their own personal perspective, explicitly making sure not to speak in representation of the movement. In that sense, the material only shows an approximation, a sense of the spirit of the movement rather than a definitive analysis of it.

### ***1.2 Recapturing meaning through practice***

As mentioned above, representational processes are also symbolic processes; more specifically, everyday life is coded and mediated by symbols that represent a system of meanings. In this regard, the 15M was a response to what was perceived as a devaluation of the meanings of words and symbols. The movement interpreted the political and economic system through their practices and through the effects on everyday life rather than through how these systems represent themselves. As stated in the first communiqué, the participants “feel crushed by the capitalist economy [and] excluded from the present political system.”

The following excerpt from a press conference given by a small group of people shows this tension between representation and meaning. Amalia, a woman in her mid fifties, took a turn speaking and explained what the movement was about for her:

... We are living a dictatorship (I'm sorry to say it like that), and a very harsh one,<sup>19</sup> because it is disguised as a democracy, which makes it even more complicated. I've been in the struggle since the times of Franco, and at that time you actually knew who was the enemy. Nowadays, the problem is that words have been devaluated. Be it socialism or whatever, only the concept remains. Therefore, the people have said 'Enough! We are here, and we will go from the bottom up. There's no one behind or ahead, it's us all and our assemblies'... This is an assembly called Acampada BCN (Encampment Barcelona).[...] We have assembly sessions. We decide by consensus, and then we make it public to the press. There is no one that leads, not even a [political] platform. We are just citizens in outrage... Until when [will we stay]? Indefinitely. (Amalia in press conference at Plaza Catalunya, 2011)

The devaluation of names is described here as the drive for the foundation of the movement. Amalia manifests a sense of urgency to recover the meaning of words (of which “only the concept remains”) through practices. Therefore, as an explanation of what the movement is about, only the process is offered: there are assemblies, we decide by consensus, and then we make our positions public. She describes a non-nominal dictatorship in a nominally democratic government – previously, symbols were consistent with meanings, but now it is difficult to read symbols and the devaluation of meanings makes it difficult to identify the causes and authors of problems. Drawing from her experience as a lifetime activist, she presents herself as a “translator” in that particular historical conjuncture crisis.

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<sup>19</sup> Literally “una dictadura muy dura”, a wordplay in Spanish.

In an assembly one year later, Clara, an Argentine young woman, makes a similar comment: “We are living in brutal times nowadays. Only it is more difficult to notice it, as they don’t have the mustaches, the hats or the uniforms, but the practices are pretty much the same” (General Assembly session, 2012). Here, the references to fascism are also obvious. The focus on the importance of performance, communication and human interaction made these movements aware that fascism or any form of totalitarianism are practices more than they are ideologies.<sup>20</sup> Similar to Amalia’s testimony, Clara suggests that the system is “disguised” but remains unchanged.

A little poster, among many others, glued to lampposts in Plaza Catalunya featured a caption describing a similar thought:

It is true the reasons to be outraged can seem today less clearly related or the world too complex. Who's doing the ordering, who decides? It is not always easy to differentiate between all the forces that govern us. We are no longer dealing with a small elite whose joint activities can be clearly seen. It is a vast world, of which we have a feeling of interdependence. We live more interconnectedly than ever before. But in this world there still are intolerable things. To see them, it is well and necessary to look, to search. I say to the young people, “Search little, and that is what you are going to find.” (Hessel, 2010: <http://indignez-vous-indignacion.blogspot.com/>)

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<sup>20</sup> After World War II (Adorno, 1982, Arendt, 1977) and later in the 1970s (Foucault, 1977, Deleuze & Guattari, 1977), there was an effort in academia to understand the true origins of fascism and authoritarianism insofar as they are practices. For more on this topic, see: Adorno, T. W. (1982) *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York: Norton, Arendt, H. (1977) *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report of the banality of evil*. Rev. and enl. Ed. New York: Penguin Books and Foucault’s preface of Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1983). *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

The text is a quote from the book *Indignez-vous*, by Stephane Hessel, which I later learned was a huge inspiration to the hence named *Indignados*<sup>21</sup> (the names 15M, Encampment Sol, Encampment Barcelona, Spanish Revolution and *Indignados* were often used indiscriminately), as it proliferated in the encampments, websites and social networks. It was translated from French to Spanish just two months before the mobilizations in Spain in May. Hessel's call does not seek to be a manifesto. It is more an invitation to consider how things have changed in form but have kept the same meaning, and how meanings (or concepts) have become devalued in spite of the forms remaining the same. Amalia, in the press conference, provides a clear description of how she thinks that forms do no longer represent meanings accurately.

There is a manifest desire to recapture the practices that give meaning to the words. Amalia describes the processes in which participants engage (e.g., the assembly, the discussions) as the core of the movement. She also describes how they operate temporally – they discuss issues in open assemblies and only after consensus is reached are proposals made public. Participants were not shy about lacking the answers that the media was demanding because the issues were still being discussed.

In fact, participants often stated that with a certain pride. The commitment to remain

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<sup>21</sup> The name and inspiration of the *Indignados* was adopted from Stephen Hessel's (2010) book *Indignez vous!* in which the philosopher and last redactor of the Declaration of Human Rights calls for outrage against the systematic violations of human rights, the commodification of politics and the dismantling of the welfare state. In the Spanish-speaking world, protesters involved in the 15M Movement started being called *Indignados*. Later, the word became a synonym of the struggles of 2011. Even Occupy Wall Street was referred to as *Los Indignados de Nueva York* in the Spanish and Latin American Press. Nevertheless, *Indignant* (the literal translation in English) is perhaps falls short of the intended meaning in French and Spanish. For the movement, *indignación* is closer to the concept of outrage. The title of Hessel's book was translated into English as *Time for Outrage!* The notion of outrage is also similar to the concept of the scream for refusal – the *No!* – described by John Holloway (2000).

in the plaza indefinitely also suggests that they think of the movement not as a means to restore representative democracy but rather as an end in itself – replacing representative democracy with direct democratic processes. Indeed, conversations in the assemblies often conveyed a sense that they were making history by participating in the movement.

The encampments and the assemblies did not seek to be acts of protest, in the sense that one group of people is protesting against another; instead, they sought to open spaces to enact change *in situ* and in real time. On more than one occasion, participants reported that they believed the encampment was going to be the place of that transformation indefinitely.

Representational processes are also challenged by the notion of working from the bottom up and with “no one behind or ahead”. In any process of representation, one thing signifies or stands for something else. A representational process, by definition, delimits spaces and groups of people; it seeks to bound a set of conceptual, symbolic, political or social interactions into coherent organizational or institutional entities.

Parliamentary or union secretaries symbolically bound their institutions with their representational power. These two institutions were often the target of the protests and discussions in the assemblies. It was evident in the discourse, but also in the marches that often stopped in front of the buildings of some unions, political parties, business associations or the Parliament itself to say the slogan “They don’t represent us”.

To return to the press conference, a symbolic problem is clearly posed by the mention of socialism as an ideology that only survives nominally and has been devaluated in practice. The warning about the devaluation of names is not only about the erosion of meanings in practice but also about the use of names in itself. Devaluation and erosion occur because names are used and abused. Therefore, they turn to practices as a source of meaning. The description of the processes in the assembly after her explanation about names is key. It means “we are what we do, not what we say.”

The crisis of representation is consequently also presented as a crisis of *identity*, in the sense that people no longer *identify* with their representing institutions. The representative figures appear to the general public as further and further from *identical* to them. Political parties are perceived as institutions that concentrate more in naming (e.g., branding, marketing) than sustaining meaning through practice. With their colors, logos and slogans, political parties are perceived as the epitome of the abuse of names.

A politician or candidate supposedly embodying a set of political and ethical principles as well as commitments to society and campaign promises is always in reality a diluted version of the ideal self that (s)he presents. Devaluation on any level is not perceived as an anomaly of symbolic representation but as inherent to it.

### ***1.3 Transcending individual crisis through collective articulation***

The call for action that arose on the first day of the occupation and that was included in the communiqué was a provocation for articulation, inviting everyone to join the assemblies and the encampment, but placing special emphasis on the disenfranchised and non-affiliated. The precarious, the unemployed, the students, informal workers, the immigrants, and the children are what Hardt and Negri (2000) have called the “multitude”. They say, “Only the multitude through its practical experimentation will offer the models and determine when and how the possible becomes real” (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 411). The encampment is the space in which these different individuals and apparently disconnected social groups test alternative models of articulation. In that sense, public space becomes a realm in which problems and crises that are rendered as individual are transcended and become opportunities as they are collectively acknowledged. The sense of identity of the multitude is not defined by an ideology but rather remains open as potential (i.e., not what we are but what we could become; not the ones here but the ones to come). They aimed for a sense of identity in transformation that was fed by the potential inputs of people who might be inspired by the same feeling of indignation. In doing so, they capitalized on the temporal ungraspability of the movement.

After the foundation of the encampment and the general assemblies, people arrived by the thousands at the plaza. A large number of them were people who were directly or indirectly affected by the foreclosure crisis. The evicted and the homeless were an

important component of the mobilizations of the 15M. They were an example of the concretion of that potential. Marcelo, a Bolivian immigrant and an activist of an organization called Platform of those Affected by the Mortgage (PAH), explains his encounter with the movement to the audience at a small assembly:

When they evicted us [my family] from our house, I was really depressed. I thought: “Why is this happening to us?” We had no house and we still owed money to the bank.<sup>22</sup> We were ashamed of being homeless, so we never told anyone but our relatives. I felt so hopeless and lonely, until we met others like us at Plaza Catalunya. We discovered that there were millions like us, and that people were organizing to resist the foreclosures and the crisis. That’s when I started to live again. I felt my life had meaning. (Marcelo, public speech, Barcelona, March 30, 2012)

The call for the occupation of the plaza was an invitation to people go public and collective about individual and private – but systemically – linked problems. The call was at the same time an act of reflection in public. Borrowing from Camus (1956), their call was the thinking out loud of “*I think, therefore we rebel.*”<sup>23</sup> Resistance is the result of individual reflections that can only become real when articulated with others. Transcendence occurs precisely when Marcelo realizes that he is not alone and that there is potential in his recognition that there are others like himself.

His testimony describes his transformation of identity as he encountered the movement; there is a clear transcendence from private to public, from individual to collective. Accounts of people who similarly reported that their lives had changed when they became involved in the movement were numerous. Loneliness, depression

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<sup>22</sup> In Spain there is neither the possibility for declaration of bankruptcy when someone is evicted nor the property can be taken in lieu of payment.

<sup>23</sup> In the philosophical essay *The Rebel*, Camus (1956) explored the idea of transcending individual absurdity through reflecting on the possibilities of articulating with others in rebellion.

and even shame, as he mentioned, were described as results of isolation. This sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, Camus says, can eventually lead to the desire to commit suicide.<sup>24</sup>

Bearing his problems collectively not only was easier but also made him feel that his life had meaning. It made him feel identified. Bearing them publicly while being alone made him feel ashamed, but doing it together gave him a sense of solidarity and courage. The “transfiguration” of this Bolivian activist echoes a verse by Octavio Paz: “The world changes if two look at each other and recognize themselves” (Paz, 1990).

The character of the occupation of public spaces is key to understanding the response to crises of representation. The encampments and assemblies seek not only to focus on practices rather than ideologies as representational figures, but also to do so transparently. Their commitment to discussing and debating in public shows a desire to be visible to other potential participants, to be public. Openness becomes a condition to find identity while refusing representation. Without the bounding power of representing institutions that is refused in the plaza, the practices that gave meaning to the movement had to be displayed visibly. Transcendence from private to public and from individual to collective can only occur in these conditions. The plaza is an ideal place to make the invisible visible (Sandercock, 1998).

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<sup>24</sup> Since 2010, more than 30 suicides were reported to be associated with evictions ([http://wiki.15m.cc/wiki/Lista\\_de\\_suicidios\\_relacionados\\_con\\_desahucios](http://wiki.15m.cc/wiki/Lista_de_suicidios_relacionados_con_desahucios), last accessed July, 2014). After a wave of suicides in the spring of 2013 (including that of a senior couple), the banner with the slogan “Let THEM [the bankers] commit suicide” was often displayed in front of bank buildings.

But how does the individual play out with the collective in terms of representation? Does the collective now represent the individual? And, is that not the flip side of the problem of representation, in which an individual (mis)represents the collective?

#### ***1.4 Debates on self-accountability and collective identity***

The refusal of internal representation and the development of a collective identity through articulation also posed great challenges for the movement. There was a constant struggle to maintain the pragmatic unity that was needed for collective action while at the same time securing the autonomy of individuals. In a press conference two days after the establishment of the encampment, sexagenarian Felipe referred to this implicit tension:

We are not here because of anyone's *protagonism*, we do not like *protagonisms*. What we want is to debate, that indeed we like. Because, we who are here, have enough indignation to do it [...] We will invite you [the media] as well... We will be the voice of those who don't go to the elections, those who don't vote – or do. In any case, we will remain here debating freely, without parties or unions, absolutely as persons, as citizens, the proposals that we will eventually communicate to you. (press conference at Plaza Catalunya, 2011)

Here, we can see that by talking about protagonism (i.e., being a protagonist of the movement), Felipe is making clear that he does not want to have the focus placed on himself. What is important is not the person communicating but the message.

Nevertheless, because the message is still under construction, and the media will be informed of proposals in the future, he focuses on the debate. He also suggests that indignation is a condition for debate. That is, the discussions will arise from refusing

the general order of things. Refusal is by definition an act of reflection. Refusing with indignation leaves space for debating alternatives to that which is being refused. Refusing collectively entails a potential sense of identity based on being outraged enough to start discussing alternatives.

There are, however, other interpretations of the notion of *protagonism* in social movements. Being a protagonist does not necessarily mean that there would be only “main actors” leading the play but rather that people take control of their roles in the play, regardless of the size. About the notion of social *protagonism* in social movements, Marina Sitrin describes how engaging in horizontal relations and direct democracy enables a new subjectivity of the person who is becoming the “protagonist of his or her own life [...] Based on this individual protagonist, a new collective *protagonism* appears, which changes the sense of the individual, and then the sense of collective” (Sitrin, 2006: 18). In any case, a tension arises between how the individual plays out within the collective.

Felipe also makes reference to unions and political parties as alien to the debate if they present themselves as institutions in the assemblies. People are welcome to join the conversations only if they participate “absolutely as persons, as citizens.” He describes the assembly as a process to incorporate discussions and people who think of politics beyond the elections. Those who believe that the discussion has to be done by someone else (e.g., by parliamentarians) and somewhere else (e.g., in Parliament) are not the intended audience of his speech.

It is worth analyzing one fragment in particular: “we will be the voice of those who don’t go to the elections, those who don’t vote – or do.” Note the contradiction entailed in trying to represent the non-represented (i.e., the non-affiliated, the disenfranchised or in Hardt and Negri’s terms *the multitude*). This kind of contradiction would not go unnoticed in the assemblies and was always the source of more debates; however, this contradiction did not cause the movement to split into different cells but rather the embracement of such differences as part of a whole that is mediated precisely by debate.

Amalia, the woman who talked about how she perceives a dictatorship disguised as democracy in the previous section, touched upon the tension between newly formed groups and non-affiliated citizens when she said “There is no one that leads, not even a [political] platform.” This and the explanation of protagonism were implicitly addressed to the media’s insistence upon looking for leaders and spokespeople or intercepting random participants of the movement and framing them as such. It was also addressed to those who believed that the encampment was run by an organization called *Democracia Real Ya* (Real Democracy Now). This organization was an Internet-based political platform that raised the first call for the occupation of Plaza del Sol in Madrid and Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona. They were often approached by the media – or they sometimes reached the media themselves – to provide explanations of the movement and their actions. The mobilizations that resulted from the encampment ended up swallowing the organization and turning it into one of the

many collectives that converged in the plaza. As the movement grew in size and complexity, many people explicitly disassociated from *Democracia Real Ya*.<sup>25</sup>

After this press conference, the movement decided via the General Assembly to publish another communiqué addressed to the mass media (published later in some Spanish journals), in which the movement stated their position about their way of representing themselves:

The encampment of Barcelona proclaims itself as a spontaneous, nonpartisan, non-unionist, peaceful and open movement [...] We understand your need to look for spokespeople and classify the unclassifiable, but we insist: the only spokesperson in the encampment is the daily plenary Assembly, and the only official communiqués are its minutes, ... which you can read in the blog. When you interview any person by the plaza, do not label him or her as a spokesperson, just as a person who talks *ad personam* about his experience in the plaza. We like that you suddenly are paying attention, but understand that we are facing a change of models of many things. Will you be prepared to inform about that CHANGE [capital letters in the original] when you inform the public opinion? We want to make clear that the so-called “alternative” media has been here since the beginning, covering the encampment very well. If the mainstream media does not know how to do so, then you have them as a point of reference. Thanks for your understanding and your effort to understand our proposal. Will you help us convey our message accurately to the public opinion?!. (posted on May 19, 2011; last accessed July 22, 2013) Translation from Spanish by the author.

This communiqué warns the media that the movement is complex. “Do not try to classify the unclassifiable,” they say. Not having an overarching representation structure they publicly embrace spontaneity as part of their nature. They do not want

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<sup>25</sup> This was clear when they condemned the blockading of the Catalan Parliament that was undertaken by most of the sectors of the mobilization a month after the beginning of the encampment. Some sectors criticized them for attempting to represent the movement at large, but they were largely ignored in general.

Something similar happened in the case of Occupy Wall Street – the call to occupy was made public in the Canadian anticapitalist magazine *Adbusters*. “Are you ready for a Tharir moment?”, called the publication, proposing September 17, 2011 as the date. Nonetheless, *Adbusters* became almost completely irrelevant to the organization and functioning of the Occupy Movement.

to be reduced to labels, such as political platforms, and they manifest that they understand that the general public might be unaccustomed to that. They warn about the media's typical approach of "guilty by association" and explicitly state that if someone who participates in the movement says anything about it, that is only a personal opinion – he or she does not represent the movement, just as the movement does not represent them. Again, there is a focus on the debates happening in the assemblies. When media interviewed participants, the participants usually started by warning that their response was only their personal opinion; however, it was also common for them to say: "If you want to know more about the movement, don't ask me: stay for the assembly at the plaza."

Throughout the mobilizations of the 15M, there was a constant defense of the unclassifiability, of "not being named", as stated by the banner in the plaza. There is an implicit commitment to maintain a processual character and not be coded or represented externally. The option of becoming a consolidated political force (i.e., a political party) is constantly rejected. Jumping to classifications and positioning oneself (physically and ideologically) poses the risk of becoming that which they are trying to transform. This commitment to unclassifiability does not necessarily mean that the movement lacks identity but rather that it is in a process of transformation. This kind of identity also does not reside in a charismatic leader or in the facilitators of the assembly, not even in the participants of the assembly (as the attendees are not always the same) but in the practice of the assembly. Although this may seem to resemble representative democracy, it is not. The participants in the assembly did not

form blocks within the assembly and did not represent others. Instead, they sought to become synchronized in praxis and work in relation to each other, while at the same time remaining “molecular” within the mass, to borrow a phrase from Guattari (1984).<sup>26</sup>

In a small assembly of Agora Barcelona, Alberto elaborates upon the issues of internal representation and identity:

I only respond about what I do and what I say, not what others say that I do and say. If the press or other movements or whomever says something about something I didn't do or associates me with something someone else did, it's their problem. (General Assembly of Agora Barcelona, 2011)

This intervention occurred in the context of a debate about how to deal with the reputation of the movement and how to speak about personal experiences that took place in the context of the movement. Other participants suggested that it was important not to give a bad image to the general public. The actions, however, were more consistent with the concept of a molecular kind of representation. In that sense, joining the movement meant joining actions. The space and time in which the actions take place are defined by the density and intensity of the people engaged in the action, not by the official positioning of any sort of leadership.

To worry about what others say is to place too much importance on representation.

The warning is not only about the connection between reputation and word of mouth.

What others say about you is not necessarily expressed in third person (i.e., “he did

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<sup>26</sup> Felix Guattari (1984) explored the notion of the “molecular revolution” throughout his work. This is, the articulation of different individuals (as molecules) into a larger insurgent society.

this”, ‘she said that”) but in first person as well. When Alberto says, “I only speak for what I do and say,” he also implies that when people say “we” (i.e., the movement), they are assuming that he and everyone is also included. This was always a motive for discussions in the assemblies. Although the encampments and the assemblies are constructed collectively, they refuse to represent themselves as a monolithic collectivity. Even when proposals are discussed together, participants are very careful not to make summary statements in the name of the others. They do this in order to preserve a sense of diversity.

These tensions accompanied the movement from its very beginnings in the occupation of the plaza to the stage when they restructured into small neighborhood and town assemblies. There was always controversy about how to have accountability for actions that were coordinated by the movement without imposing regulations on individuals. The following stories describe three such cases in which the movement faced challenges in regard to issues of non-representation and self-accountability.

### ***1.5 Conclusion***

Marianela, a sexagenarian activist, proposed a *sit-in*<sup>27</sup> action in Plaza Catalunya to a small neighborhood assembly of the 15M. The participants discussed the details of the action when an elderly man asked the woman the reason for the action. She stopped

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<sup>27</sup> A *sit-in* is a form of direct action protest that was very common during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and in other countries during the 1960s and 1970s. In a sit-in, Protesters usually occupy a space in sign of protest and remain sitting until they are forcibly removed by the police.

for a moment to think. The justifications for a proposed action were sometimes elaborate and often sparked long discussions in the assemblies; however, the lady simply replied: “to reflect.” After a long silence, the participants that may otherwise have started a debate agreed to undertake the action. Thus, the plaza can be seen as a space of meditation and imagination.<sup>28</sup>

This reflective character is key to understanding the uprisings of 2011. Raising questions was more important than rushing to provide answers. Reflection was the next step after refusal. Once the object of refusal was identified (i.e., neoliberal policies, representative politics, corruption and the effects of these on everyday life), participants did not rush into providing new programs. Having a stronger commitment to processes than to outcomes, the alternatives were revealed as potential. The idea of “one no, many yeses” summarizes well the reflective spirit of the movements (Kingsnorth, 2004). They embraced this potentiality in order to evade the risks of co-optation, ideological crystallization and symbolic devaluation that are intrinsically linked to hierarchical and representative processes.

Reflection was promoted and questions were left open in response to the movement’s general refusal of the ideological and identity boundaries imposed by classifications, labels, and answers. Going back to Tilly’s notion of identity boundaries (2005), we can say that in the absence of ties that bound, the participants adopted mechanisms

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<sup>28</sup> Slavoj Žižek has mentioned that one of the most important contributions of the 2011 movements, was actually that people gathered to imagine something different. See Žižek, S. (2012). *The year of dreaming dangerously*. London: Verso.

that bonded them. They remained united by sharing the same space and, most of all, by coming together in the same actions.

The convergence of actions brought together people of many political affiliations, thus granting functional cohesion to the heterogeneous crowd. The space was defined not by spatial boundaries but by different intensities of participation. An implicit principle of self-accountability ensured personal autonomy within the crowd. Yet, it was more than the aggregation of individual actions, it was the articulation of actions that made possible the transcendence from individual to collective, from private to public.

Lefebvre (1974) distinguishes *abstract space*, one that is mediated by commodification and bureaucratization processes, from *concrete space*, one in which everyday life is recaptured through face-to-face interaction. A lived or *(re)presentational space* makes life more concrete and “down to earth”. The encampments were, in that sense, spaces in which people experimented with an *in situ* and more expedited (re)presentation and with a “hands on” and more direct production of space. The recurrent answer, “Stay for the assembly,” to the question constantly posed by the media, “What is the movement about?”, was evidence of this misinterpretation. The demand for the reductive “about” summary was in fact a demand for abstraction. The underlying message – always under the nose of those asking the question – was clear: the means are the ends, the process is the objective. The movement is about the practices displayed in the encampments and the assembly.

The reflective spirit is the point of departure for organic solidarity as a sense of identity. This plays out in a cycle. Reflection is conducive to actions, which in turn invite further reflection (Schön, 1983). When performed collectively, reflecting is not perceived as passive but as an act of engagement. The reflective process that comes from refusal is also transitional, as people move from personal reflection and experiential learning to collective deliberative practice and to working and learning from each other” (Forester, 1990: 2). At the same time, the convergence of heterogeneous collectives and people in common actions opens opportunities for crossbreeding, exchange and reflection. Thus, deliberation in the assemblies is interpreted as an open-ended process.

Perhaps the testimony of an activist after a General Assembly in Plaza Catalunya serves as a conclusion for this chapter, as it summarizes the reflective-deliberative spirit and organic identity:

This is like a global congress, people are gathering across the world to rethink how we are doing things. If they [world leaders] are meeting at the World Economic Forum or Davos, wherever, in private to decide our future, which they don't have clear, and they're getting it wrong over and over, why can't we? And even more, we're doing it here [pointing at the plaza], we have nothing to hide. (Interview at General Assembly in Plaza Catalunya, 2012)

## CHAPTER 2

### “TOGETHER BUT NOT MIXED”: IDENTITY MECHANISMS IN A PUBLIC IN TRANSFORMATION

Organizing through non-representational processes made it difficult to develop a cohesive sense of identity. The protesters came from a broad variety of causes and inspirations and often disagreed on fundamental issues. Nevertheless, they shared the same spaces and for the most part, and engaged in the same actions. How then can a movement so diverse, with such a broad sense of identity and that explicitly refuses to be represented have such power of mobilization?

As mentioned before, the 2011 protests do not constitute traditional social movements but *social mobilizations* (Rebelaos, 2012; Bonet, 2012). A *social mobilization*, as local commentators Jordi Bonet and Rebelaos Collective have defined the 15M, is defined precisely by movement, by motion; it is not jacketed by a homogeneous agenda, ideology or identity.

In *The Division of Labor* (1897), Durkheim talks about two kinds of solidarity – *mechanic* and *organic*. The former is a type of solidarity in which the sense of collective is homogeneously constructed through common ideas, beliefs and lifestyles, whereas the latter is built through the interdependence of people who are different but work together. Organic identity allows for coexistence and collaboration between heterogeneous groups of people. This classification is helpful to analyze how this social movement operated and how that practice informed their sense of identity.

Charles Tilly's (2005) description of "social ties that bond and bound" incorporates the variable of space into the question. Bonding is an organic and pragmatic process that ties people in the same space, whereas bounding is a spatial process because it delineates ties in a particular area. Identifying which forces bound and which bond can shed light upon how these movements operate despite their differences.

The following three stories show how the movement dealt with diversity, complexity and unity when engaging in collective action. The first case is that of the Global Demonstration of the 15<sup>th</sup> of October of 2011, which concentrated many causes in the same places and revealed the differences among their senses of identity. The second case is that of the General Strike of the 29<sup>th</sup> of March of 2012, which turned into a riot and divided the movement on the issue of accountability. The third is the 15M's anniversary protest, which brought a sense of identity after the division of opinions that had been created during the strike. This analysis seeks to understand how this emergent public transformed and developed a processual sense of identity by performing together in space.

### ***2.1 Identity and multiplicity: The case of the 15-O global demonstration***

The 15M Movement made the call for a global protest on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011, exactly five months after the occupation of Plazas del Sol (Madrid) and Catalunya (Barcelona). The demonstration departed from Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona, and the

three main axes of the movement – housing, health and education – converged in the plaza. Each group had dressed in different colors – green for housing, yellow for education and red for health, and each group arrived chanting the historical slogan “El pueblo unido jamás sera vencido!”<sup>29</sup> (The people united shall never be defeated!). The march went on for about five hours and ended at the Arc de Triomf.

The Demonstration (also known as *15O*<sup>30</sup>) was one of the largest in history.<sup>31</sup> After a prolonged march in Barcelona, I conducted about twenty brief interviews with the people who had stayed for the final act at the esplanade of the Arc de Triomf monument. The interviews were conducted randomly in order to cover most of the space of the esplanade, and I talked to people from organizations as well as independent participants. For example, I talked to people in collectives that were about the defense of human rights, real estate speculation, environmental issues, feminism,

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<sup>29</sup> The slogan was repeated in Spanish in many cities across the world. I heard it in the Occupy movement marches in New York and in the occupation of the Arch de la Defense in Paris. The other slogan I noted that was directly adopted from Spanish was the chant: “A...anti...anticapitalista!” which was also present in New York and Paris in 2011 and 2012.

<sup>30</sup> In the English-speaking world, it was known as *United for Global Change*, but in the Spanish-speaking world, it was known as *From Indignation to Action*. There were demonstrations in most major cities in Europe, North America, Latin America and Australia. Major demonstrations were held in more than a thousand cities across the world. Spanish cities hosted the largest demonstrations, but cities like New York, Rome, Lisbon, Frankfurt, Berlin and Santiago also had protests with more than 10,000 people.

<sup>31</sup> The *15O: United for Global Change* is cited in Wikipedia as the seventh largest in history (<http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifestación>). There is some debate about the number of people that attended the demonstration in Barcelona. The police department said there were 60,000 people, while the movement said there were 400,000. The “war of figures” between the government and social movements is very common in Spain. When marches filled long straight avenues that gradually inclined, the multitude was able to see itself, and the crowd usually shouted the slogan “You [the government] will later say that we were 5 or 6!” (Rhyming in Spanish: Luego diréis que somos cinco o seis!). This was always a powerful moment for the movement because they were able to acknowledge the scale of the march and of the movement itself. The march was indeed massive, but not the largest in the history of Barcelona; however, it is worth noting that the city has hosted 4 of the 10 largest demonstrations in history (<http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manifestación>).

solidarity with the Syrian revolution, and food rights, just to name a few. These people were of various nationalities, including Brazil, Argentina, Syria, Mexico, Morocco and of course Catalonia and Spain. Each talked about their own struggles based on their own experience, but they rarely identified themselves as the 15M movement. They even sometimes referred to the *Indignados* or 15M as “they” while at the same time using “we” in reference to the action of that day organized by the 15M.

One of the interviews seemed particularly illustrative of the identity of the movement. A participant of a pop-up orchard action that occurred on the esplanade of the Arch, organized by a collective in defense of food autonomy, described their status in the movement as follows:

We are only one part of the movement. We want to join as a small part of the 15M. We don't consider ourselves as 15M. We have our own basis and our own structure. (Interview with people of the Orchard Commission, 2011)

In other words, they were *part* of the movement, but they were *not* the movement. I later learned that this particular collective converged in most of the assemblies, encampments and actions of the 15M, and even featured in their website. Though they are converging in the same action, they do not see themselves as a homogenous crowd. Similarly, on a different occasion, another participant in the orchard action described how he “was there in the plaza when the encampment came about,” but at the same time he described himself only as “close to the 15M.” Examples like this were common.

Even though most came from different collectives, I found a common thread of discourse in the interviews. In all the cases, participants expressed their weariness with the general order of things. “Because we’ve had it!”, “Because we can’t take it anymore!”, “Because that’s it!”, “Because we’ve had enough!” were common first responses when I asked why were they there. Their further explanations often focused on their own particular causes, but they all shared a sense of refusing the current global political and economic system. They also shared the general sense of refusing representational processes at large and representative democracy in particular. Unsurprisingly, they avoided being reduced to any single overarching sense of identity – even that of the 15M.

The diversity of statements on the banners and slogans in the movement reflected the constellation of traditions and inspirations from which these movements arose. Examples are vast: “We don’t understand: people without a home and homes without people”, “Viva la República”, “Nobody expects the Spanish Revolution”, “Let’s ruralize the city”, “The next [budget] cuts will be made with guillotines”, “We are neither from the Left nor from the Right, we are the ones from the bottom and we came to get the ones on the top”, “Take the streets”, “No more evictions!”, “The public is not private”, “The revolution will be feminist or will not be at all”, “We are not commodities in the hands of politicians and bankers”, “We are the 99%”, “There’s no crisis: this is a robbery”, “The next eviction will be at the City Hall”, “If there’s no bread for the poor, there won’t be any peace for the rich”. Yet, none of these worked as actual principles or components of a manifesto.

At the end of the day, when the protesters met in the Arc de Triomf Plaza, a girl with a megaphone tried to organize the crowd for the protest actions that were scheduled.

The crowd was supposed to split into three columns<sup>32</sup> She said:

People, remember we are here today because we are going *to take action* [emphasis added]. We are not only here to protest. There will not be a rally today at this plaza, so do not stay. I repeat do not stay in the plaza, but rather engage in one of the three actions. Remember, today we are going 'From indignation to action.'<sup>33</sup> (Public Speech, Barcelona, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

The girl was visibly frustrated because, although some hundreds undertook one of the three actions, the majority of people stayed in the plaza to rally and celebrate. This confirmed that the movement did not perceive itself as a homogeneous organization; thus, engaging in monolithic actions in the form of blocks did not work. Even though she was trying to represent and lead the actions of the movement, some people decided to stay in the plaza and others went to join the actions.

All of these expressions were, as the orchard activist said, “part of the movement, but not the movement.” Participants shared the same space, some engaged in the same actions, but they identified as different from each other, both in terms of collectives and individually. Here, it is helpful to refer to Durkheim’s classification of the different kinds of solidarity. Even though the context in which Durkheim’s Division

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<sup>32</sup> The first group (i.e., the Health axis) went to a hospital to demonstrate and try to occupy it. The second (i.e., the Education axis) planned to go to the department of education to organize a protest, and the third (the Housing axis) marched towards an apartment building to occupy it and give housing to a group of families that was put on a priority list of the most vulnerable people who had been evicted (e.g., senior citizens, people with disabilities, immigrants living below the poverty line). Of those three actions, the third was the only one to materialize.

<sup>33</sup> The posters and flyers that were made to publicize the 15-O demonstration used the theme: “From Indignation to Action”.

was written differs greatly from that of 2011, the construction of identity in the social movements was closer to the concept of organic identity. The group was able to work together even though they had different ways of thinking.

## ***2.2 Identity and complexity: The case of the 29M General Strike***

This section uses the example of the General Strike to illustrate how independent participants and collectives operated together despite not sharing the same identity boundaries. Some groups even had historical and profound differences. Nevertheless, they managed to work together momentarily at a massive scale.

In March 2012, the so-called (by the movement) governmental unions UGT (The General Workers' Union) and CCOO (The Workers' Commissions) decided to organize a general strike against the Labor Reforms. It was not long, however, before their efforts turned into a *wildcat strike* – also known as the 29M strike. The notion of a *wildcat strike* is that collectives and individuals remain autonomous from parties and union leadership; it is a strike of the non-affiliated. And even when people are affiliated with a union or party, they are encouraged to participate as ordinary persons. In a wildcat strike, the identity of the strikers is defined by their engagement in the actions, not by their institutional demarcation and representation. Most sectors of the 15M, neighborhood assemblies, student organizations, libertarian social centers, squatter collectives and the two main anarchist unions – CGT (The General Confederation of Labor) and CNT (The National Confederation of Labor) –

simultaneously organized their own call to strike. There was an immediate clash about the agency of labor representation through unions. Posters that were glued to walls, windows and telephone poles across the city said: “A general strike can only be a wildcat one, all the rest is a parody. See you in the streets on March 29<sup>th</sup>.” This posed the idea that if the strike were organized only by some unions, it would be not only partial and incomplete in principle but also not genuine, as labor representation would co-opt and impose hierarchical codes over the actions.

When I asked a group of members of the CGT (an anarchist union) standing next to their undeclared rivals of the CCOO (a communist union), both of whom were preparing for the first blockades and pickets of the strike, about whether they were together or not, a CGTer answered: “We are together but not mixed” (Interview with CGT strikers). She elaborated that they were going to work together in this particular strike despite their ideological differences. Later in the strike, in a march through the city center of Barcelona, I encountered another example of the autonomous nature of the strike.

A group of militants of the CNT (the oldest anarchist union in Spain) were getting ready to march when an acquaintance of them approached them to say hello. A CNTer put a sticker with the acronym of the union on the chest of the man as they were conversing. The man responded:

“Hey, no stickers please!”  
The surprised CNTer replied asking him,  
“But compañero, aren’t you an anarchist?”

To which the man replied:

“Precisely, because of it.” (Field notes, Barcelona, March 29, 2012).

This misunderstanding, however, did not stop them from marching together alongside other organizations and non-affiliated activists. Thus, he refused to be represented by or to be representing a name, but this did not stop him from joining them and others in practice.

Nonetheless, the events of the 29M created tensions between the different collectives. The main cause of the clashes between the collectives and the police was the action of breaking the windows of the department store El Corte Ingles (similar to Macy’s) and a Starbuck’s, undertaken by a contingent of people traditionally known as *black block*.<sup>34</sup> After that event, the riot police intervened, shooting rubber bullets, hitting people with batons and using tear gas on the crowd for the first time in the whole of Spain in twenty years.<sup>35</sup> Three days after, people met in a general assembly to discuss

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<sup>34</sup> A *black block* is a contingent of people that serve as the vanguard of a social movement. It is usually associated with anarchists. They are the postmodern version of the historical Self-defense Committees of anarchist organizations in the first half of the twentieth century. Black block participants typically dress in black. They throw rocks and carry sticks to defend from the riot police. They sometimes break windows and paint graffiti.

<sup>35</sup> After the black block’s charge on the Corte Ingles, the riot police responded by shooting rubber bullets. I myself was trapped in the middle of the clashes between the protesters and the riot police. As I sought shelter in the niches of the buildings, I realized that I was among an accidentally diverse group of people. There were strikers, people carrying shopping bags, business people and next to me a completely disoriented Chinese family with tourist maps in their hands and pushing a stroller. All of us were pressing against the walls to protect ourselves from the rubber bullets. A couple of riot policemen walked by the sidewalk in a state of euphoria and clubbed a couple of running people. I was about to exit the hideout and leave the scene when I noticed that a young woman next to me who did exactly that was immediately clubbed in the middle of her back by one of the two policemen. She arched backward and cried out as someone next to me pulled her back into the crowd that was pressed against the walls. It was made clear to me that the charges were completely indiscriminate. After that, people had a hard time leaving the scene. It took me more than five hours to get out of the city core. I was able to shelter in Plaza Catalunya with other protesters who wanted to occupy it, but it was practically under siege by the police. They shot rounds of rubber bullets, then tear gas, and finally charged against the remaining ones with clubs. Many, including myself, confirmed that the police had somehow interrupted phone

the events of the strike.



Figure 2. General Strike of March 29 (29M). The riot police shot rubber bullets and cans of tear gas at protesters. Barcelona, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (Source: Author).

Then the discussion centered specifically on the attack on the Corte Ingles. A young participant made an analysis and a detailed account of the strike and violence in general:

I don't care if something happens to the Corte Ingles. I was also in a *picket*<sup>36</sup> in another branch store of the Corte Ingles, and we made it [the picket] big time. But we should not be doing that [black block tactics] in a demonstration that is considered peaceful, which was a demonstration of the Labor Movement, with tens of movements [some considered rivals] that got together for the same time in history. To see CNT and CGT together for the first time since the separation [in the 1970s] and to know that they wanted to get together [to march], that was one of the greatest things of that day [...] to see IAC [Alternative Inter-union of Catalonia], Indepes [Catalan Separatists], etc. together and the group without flags that we were! [emphasis added]... and to realize that we [the flagless group] were more than the unions was such a great moral victory and it was only overshadowed by those five assholes [the black blockers].”

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communication of the people in the plaza. Later, they cordoned off the old city core and started random identifications and arrests of people in the streets. The sound of sirens and rubber bullets did not stop until after midnight.

<sup>36</sup> A *picket* is a form of protest often used in strikes that consists on encouraging people to join the strike. This could be in the form of calls for action (an informative picket), in which the strikers invite other workers to join the strike and not go to work for 24 hours or in the form of a blockades (a physical picket), in which the strikers stop buses that transport personnel, block the entrance of a building or cut the traffic flow of the main arteries with barricades.

At that point, a voice cried out from the crowd, “But, what about the police?” In response, the man carried on:

The police were the ones who made the damage and that fucked the life of those two people [who lost eyes to the rubber bullets], and many others that were also hurt. Including me, they didn’t get me [the rubber bullets] here [in Plaza Catalunya] but in a different barrio. The police are of course the guilty ones in this event. What I mean is that we should not allow that again. The black block is totally fine, but like the Greek social movements do – a peaceful demonstration with the black block marching along, at the end of the demonstration the march dissolves and then the black block carries on by itself. And if we have to burn down the Starbucks, then so be it, but let’s not do it when there are women and children playing in the streets because what is going to happen is that people won’t want to take their children to the streets. That’s what I propose, that we get all the groups together: CGT, CNT, unions, alternative unions and the 15M and talk, not so much about *what* is and what isn’t violence, but about *when*. For me, it is vital to discuss *when*. Yes, strong actions are necessary, but the question is *when*. (General Assembly, Barcelona, March 31, 2012)

This testimony provides a rich description the complexity of the crowd. He describes the march as a moral victory because it brought together collectives that historically were unable to together. He becomes even more excited “to realize that we [the flagless group] were more than the unions.” He describes the diversity of the strike as a success, particularly the inclusion of unclassifiable individuals (what he calls “the flagless” crowd). He identifies himself with the flagless but is excited to see the “flagged” working together with them. Truly, the diversity of the crowd is celebrated, but the black block is perceived as alien to the actions of the crowd in general. Nevertheless, he later suggests that they could also be part of that diversity and makes interesting reflections about the management of heterogeneity and self-accountability. He even makes suggestions about how they can all coexist. If they march at the beginning or the end of the event, they will not place peaceful protesters in danger. To him, the black block is not bad *per se*. They have as much right to march with crowd as anyone, as long as they converge in the same action, as long as they work “together

but not mixing” with the rest of the crowd, as he claims that the Greeks do. He even confesses that he participated in a picket and also engaged in “big time” actions, suggesting there were confrontations.

He does not condemn the anarchist ideology in general or the black block in particular, he disagrees with them in the timing of the practices. Even if they come from different or rival unions or as non-affiliated individuals, as long as they come together in actions, they are practically united. The flagless crowd and the flagged were only able to work together because they agreed to collaborate in the same action only for that occasion. The black block, on the other hand, joined the crowd and engaged in a different action. This man’s questioning of the black block is practical, not ideological.

Therefore, temporality is key to understanding the mobilizations of the 15M and, in this case, the strike. The way the movement addresses time also marks how identity and representation is constructed. This kind of identity is only defined by the level of engagement in space and time. Temporal and spatial convergence in common practices give unity to collectives (i.e., the flagged) and non-affiliated participants (i.e., the flagless).

Their approach towards time in the assembly debates defines their organic sense of identity. The issues in the assembly are discussed independently of hegemonic times. Participants can respond to the temporality of hegemonic agendas (e.g., planning an action in response to institutional electoral processes), but they operate outside of their

constraints.

In an interview with a city official of Barcelona, he shares his opinions about the sense of temporality of the 15M:

They [the 15M] are not in a hurry. They work at a pace of their own (...) they cannot be understood in the parameters of the more hierarchical and monolithic social movements of the 1960s and 70s, in which I, by the way, participated in the times of the transition [to democracy]. That is the discussion I always have with my daughter, who is in the 15M. At first, it didn't make sense to me how they organized, but now I am beginning to get it. They are a perfect example of the network society. (Interview with Barcelona city officials, 2012).

The rush to produce proposals and answers (i.e., manifestoes) as components of an identity is associated with ideologies. In regard to the movement's proposals, a woman responded to the media in a press conference: "The proposals will be decided in the assemblies. We have a bunch of proposals that we have been communicating through many means for many years. Oh, don't worry about proposals" (Amalia in press conference at Plaza Catalunya, 2011).

Back at the assembly after the general strike, a young woman took her turn to speak and made a call for an extraordinary assembly to evaluate the events:

You are all invited [to the next assembly], because this is a topic that really needs consensus (sighs)... Let's give it some time and let it rest, because from what I have heard, it is not very clear what our stand on the topic is. We will discuss it together, because it is not clear what we want to communicate. (General Assembly, Barcelona, March 31, 2012)

In this fragment, the participant makes a call to recapitulate the event of the strike and points out that in order to reach a consensus they will momentarily need to let the issue rest. Once again, they do not want to rush into making statements in the name of

the assembly. Here, she even seems to refrain from giving her own opinion, which, as she sighs, appears to be one of disappointment. Instead, she chooses to invite people to a further assembly in order to discuss in the complexity of the issue. She recognizes that it is difficult to make sense out of the strike. The diversity of the mobilizations had not been perceived as problematic before, but the strike made clear the differences among collectives.

As the movement grew more complex, it became more difficult to provide answers. Reaching consensus in general is a challenge, but even more so when there is a controversial issue. The convergence of diverse struggles and ways of thinking can only be achieved if the participants reach a consensus about what practices they will engage in.

The events of the general strike compelled the movement to reflect upon the organization of diverse collectives in conjunct action. The next large event of the 15M was the mobilization for its anniversary. This was a good example of how the movement evolved to maintain its diversity without adopting a homogeneous structure. The call to join the encampment and assemblies that was made a year before in the communiqués and press conference had received responses from hundreds of thousands with various views that coexisted in the movement, yet they had no common overarching representation or identity.

### ***2.3 Identity and transformation: The case of the 15M anniversary protest***

About a month after the 2011 encampment was established, it was voluntarily dismantled. In most of the assemblies across Spain, participants voted to “[r]estructure the movement [and for the] extension and reconception of the structural organization so that it can be decentralized creating a tight mesh across towns and barrios” (wiki.nolesvotes.org). During that period, the movement shifted from voluntary dispersion in the already strong neighborhood assemblies across Barcelona (and other Spanish cities) toward re-concentration as citywide movements in a new protest encampment.

The anniversary encampments of 2012 returned to the plazas after a year of independent deliberation and reflection in various neighborhood, university, school and town assemblies. Participants returned with some answers to the questions asked the previous year; however, they did not return pretending to have absolute answers. Instead, they presented “updates” to the many debates started a year before.



Figure 3. People voting at the evening assembly in Plaza Catalunya on the 15M Anniversary. The city government declared the occupation illegal; however, the movement successfully established a 4-day encampment without significant police opposition. In that time, the encampment hosted a variety of struggles that, after a year of organization, had consolidated into well-organized collectives. Collectives set up stands along the perimeter of the elliptic granite esplanade. In the garden areas, there were tents and hammocks hanging from the trees for people who were camping. General assemblies were hosted in the center of the esplanade. Barcelona, May 12, 2012 (Source: Author).

The anniversary of the 15M started with a march departing from Plaza Catalunya. The march, as a year before, was defined by a plethora of flags and banners (e.g., republicans, socialists, environmentalists, feminists, anarchists). The flagless crowd was organized into three main blocks associated with the three main 15M commissions: Health, Education and Housing. Among them there were performers and musicians supporting the march. After about five hours of a tiring but festive march across the city core, the crowd returned to Plaza Catalunya for a general assembly. The closing assembly happened in the center of the granite esplanade, surrounded by camping tents and stands representing the different struggles of the movement. The diversity was evident: there was Rearguard in Movement, a collective

to address police brutality; The Constituents, advocates for the promulgation of a constitution addressing the struggles of the 15M; *Feministas Indignadas*, a Marxist-feminist collective; International Commission, the branch that articulates the 15M similar struggles worldwide (i.e., Occupy movements); Audit to the Debt, a group created to persecute bankers and government officials suspicious of engineering the crisis; Platform for Those Affected by the Mortgage (PAH), to protect people from eviction and housing vulnerability; the 15M Housing, Health and Education Commissions, to address the dismantling process of the public sector; Auto-organization (*Autogestio*), a collective that produced a half-million copies of the newspaper *Rebel!* only from individual donations; and Real Democracy Now, the collective that, a year before, actually made the call for collective indignation and the occupation of the plazas and that, after a year, had become completely overshadowed by all the former struggles (See spatial organization of the anniversary encampment of in Fig. 15 in Chapter 5).

In the encampment assemblies, a series of new actions and tactics were presented and divided into various campaigns organized around websites and Twitter groups to address different topics. The encampment lasted for four days before returning to the organization at the barrio, town and school levels. The movement returned to the tactic of voluntary dispersion that had been decided upon one year before.

These stands did not offer final answers to these questions but rather more specific questions. They did not claim to have the exclusive right to discuss these themes. For

example, the housing problem was addressed by The Platform of Those Affected by the Mortgage (PAH), Autogestio (Self-organization), squatter collectives and the 15M housing commission at the same time. Each of these groups asked different questions and provided different alternatives.

The return to their independent organizations and assemblies in their own neighborhoods, towns, and universities proved the movement's commitment to leaving the questions open. As they returned to their smaller assemblies and associations to apply the lessons and implement the campaigns presented in the movement-wide encampment, they also continued to discuss the questions. Each group made different decisions and reported the actions they were going to take to the General Assembly.

Though some of the collectives and independent participants had very different opinions that did not stop them from collaborating in the same place. After the events of the anniversary, for example, I joined a discussion group of the collective *Constituyentes*, the advocates of promulgating a new constitution, in an occupied building that served as a social center. During the meeting, they told me that the collective having a session in the contiguous room completely disagreed with the idea of the new constitution, but they did not mind sharing the same building to debate their particular grievances independently. The idea of leaving the questions open made this coexistence easier. Aside from their views, if their actions did not conflict, then there was no point of confrontation. In other words, why fight about ideological

programs if they agree to march together?

#### ***2.4 A public in transformation***

The stories presented here describe how the 15M developed a sense of identity based on its practices. There was a kind of organic sense of identity and solidarity (Durkheim, 1964). Their identity was not constituted by constraining ideological programs or manifestos but by engaging in the same practices. The sense of identity of the movement as a multitude in transformation is *constituent* (i.e., in process of constituting itself) but never fully *constituted* (Negri, 1998, Hardt & Negri, 2000, 2004).

The bonding mechanisms of identity discussed here are several – (1) identity as multiplicity, (2) identity as complexity and (3) Identity as transformation. Identity as potential is implicit in the permanent call to join the movement, which reveals their commitment to openness. Thus, the movement naturally must take place in public spaces, where the processes are physically accessible and visually transparent.

The open spirit of the movement gave them potential but also posed important challenges. As more people responded to the call to join, the movement grew in complexity. In fact, the movement could potentially have become anything, which in turn created a problem of accountability. People participated in the movement, but

they were not the movement. As an activist of the 15-O demonstration said, “we are *part* of the 15M, but we have our own structure.”

This caused the movement to become incredibly diverse; paradoxically, though, diversity also became a condition for being *part* of the 15M. People could be driven to join by any possible inspiration, but what bonded them was that they *took part* in the same actions. The example of the General Strike was proof that clashes occur when people do not engage in the same actions rather than when they do not share the same thinking. People of different traditions (or flags) can indeed work together, as the union member mentioned about the general strike, if they agree to do the same, even if they do not mix as groups. It was the sharing of practice and performing together that brought a sense of identity.

The events of the anniversary illustrate how this kind of convergence can take place. The anniversary encampments and assemblies were still driven by reflection but had achieved a greater level of specificity, even while remaining open.

Engaging in common practices also provided affective bonds for the movement. The measure of identity in the movement was determined by the extent to which people were committed in practice. The more involved they were, the more emotional the bonds they developed. This was clear, for example, among people from the kitchen (See Chapter 6). They were held dear by most participants not only because they prepared their food but also because they were fully involved.

Criticisms of the movements of 2011 were often related to the risk of dispersion supposedly entailed in not having manifestoes and spiritual leaders as bounding figures of identity. Participants were also accused of being vague and abstract (<http://occupywallst.org/forum/occupy-wall-street-demands-are-abstract>), but the situation was quite the opposite. With a focus on practice as the source of principles, participants refused to *abstract* and decant concepts that could constitute the components of a finished ideology.

Thus, there is a desire to recapture everyday life and, as they mentioned in the first communiqué, to “place it above all economic or political interest.” It was an effort to restructure – not to substitute – the essence of the meaning, by redefining the practices that sustained it. The cohesion came from having a common object of refusal and a common will to reflect upon it. The identity came from people converging and engaging in the same actions at the same time. Thus, the sense of belonging did not come from a finished symbolic imaginary (i.e., flags, manifestoes and nominal affiliation) but from performing together.

Placing a high priority on practice provided the movement with a tactical conception of time. Identity was to be achieved through performance, regardless of the space. This was made evident when – after various attempts at eviction – the movement voluntarily decided to dismantle the encampment. In most of the assemblies across Spain, participants decided to restructure the movement through the creation of

neighborhood assemblies. One activist explained me how she tried to cheer people up after abandoning Plaza Catalunya. She recalls telling them: “Come on, people! We’re not just an encampment, we’re not a plaza. You know we’re more than that!”

(Personal Interview, Barcelona, December 15, 2011). The main objective was to hold on to the organizational structure even beyond the occupied spaces. The neighborhood assemblies that carried on the practices of the encampment at a smaller scale were good examples of Temporary Autonomous Zones, (Bey, 1991), i.e., spaces in which self-organization cannot be perpetuated in space but can be taken from one place to another, before it is effectively dismantled, thus surviving only in time (see drawings in Chapter 4 about this topic).

This social movement embraced a changing identity, thereby becoming a public in transformation – i.e., a *becoming-public* (see about the notion of *becoming* in Chapter 4) – using urban space as a realm of self-recognition and a means of articulating individual reflections into collective action and shared performance. Identifying the mechanisms of identity and the results of refusing representational processes that come from outside and happen within has interesting implications in space, which will be discussed in Part 2.

## PART 2

### ON BOUNDARIES AND OPEN SPACE



General Assembly in Plaza Catalunya. Barcelona, May 12, 2012. (Source: Author)

“[Social movements] will be multi-centered. Their different components will in no way be required to agree on everything, or to speak the same stereotypical language. Contradictions, even irreducible antagonisms, will be allowed to coexist.”

(Felix Guattari in Lotringer et al., 2007: 110)

This part explores the notion of *open space* and the role that socio-spatial boundaries play in its construction. An open space is any space (1) that is permeable to potentially anyone who wants to participate in its development and (2) whose inner functioning and relationship with its context are open to debate and therefore are in the process of construction.<sup>37</sup> Open space should not be confused with public or outdoor space, as

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<sup>37</sup> *Open space* is also associated with the notion of autonomy and self-organization. Examples of autonomous and open spaces include non-institutional neighborhood assemblies, Zapatista autonomous municipalities, “self-organized social centers” in squatted houses, occupied factories as well as protest encampments and communes.

For more on the topic, see: Bey, Hakim (2011). *TAZ: The temporary autonomous zone*. Seattle, WA: Pacific Publishing Studio, Chatterton, P. (January 01, 2005). Making autonomous geographies: Argentina’s popular uprising and the ‘Movimiento de Trabajadores Desocupados’ (Unemployed Workers Movement). *Geoforum*, 36, 5, 545-561. Newman, S. (January 01, 2011). Postanarchism and space: Revolutionary fantasies and autonomous zones. *Planning Theory*, 10, 4, 344-365. and Sen, J. (2010). On Open Space: Explorations Towards a Vocabulary of a More Open Politics. *Antipode*, 42(4), 994-1018.

there could be open spaces in indoor or private spaces; however, a space that is visible and accessible to anybody could technically benefit from more diversity.

The Zuccotti Park encampment is a good example of an open space in a privately owned publically accessible outdoor space; however, in the last stage of the occupation and immediately after the eviction, the space was turned back into a closed space. The owners and managers of the park reformulated the regulations for the space by stating that the park was a “privately owned public space intended for the enjoyment by the general public for passive recreation.” In addition, there were always at least ten police cars and two surveillance towers in the surrounding areas of the park. Therefore, the space remained visible and physically accessible, but it was coded in such a way that an open space (i.e., a space that was built through “active engagement” rather than “passive recreation”) could not last for very long (this will be discussed further in Chapter 3 in the section *Dealing with the context: Externally imposed boundaries*).

The encampments and general assemblies were established in public – or publicly accessible – spaces. Before the encampments, these spaces apparently were physically permeable to a variety of people and practices (especially in the Spanish case); however, the events of 2011 tested the capacity of public space to host even more complexity and congestion than suggested by normative planning. The contrast between the activation of the space through the assemblies and encampments and the “passive recreation” that have been fostered in the last thirty years made visible that

these parks and plazas were neither open nor public in practice. The events of 2011 made this issue visible by testing the limits of what was really allowed and taken for granted.

The exchange and interactions (e.g., material, organizational, informational, social) between the spaces of the encampments and their contexts reveal that the physical boundaries were transcended. Activities that were strange to the encampment (e.g. street vending, tours, police activity) penetrated the plaza, and the protest actions expanded beyond the plaza. The question is: How can we understand and conceptually delimit space when it exists without explicit conceptual boundaries?

Understanding how open spaces (in this case, in traditionally public spaces) are constructed and appropriated through use is important not only to activists but also to scholars and practitioners who deal with the planning, design and regulation of space. The scope of openness and social permeability can provide a broader perspective for the study of public space. The physical and visual boundaries of a space, which are used to conceptualize and plan public space, are often transcended by human interaction.

In parks, plazas and other public spaces, people spontaneously arrange their activities; they cluster in smaller groups or disperse into larger groups, they remain open to others or fence themselves off. Plaza and park activities expand beyond their defined boundaries and at the same time, activities from the surrounding context penetrate the

realm of public space. In all of these cases, disputes and conflict is rarely absent; however, most often this daily kind of conflict is spontaneously self-regulated. The protest encampments of 2011 arguably made the most intense use of public spaces in recent times. Therefore, they are outstanding opportunities to test the level of complexity and conflict that can be hosted in public space.

Richard Sennett describes public space not only as a realm differentiated from that of friends and family (i.e., the private sphere) but also as “[the] realm of acquaintances and strangers” (Sennett, 1992: 17) – i.e., a realm in which you do not know everybody as you might within communal or private space. How strangers and acquaintances interact, talk, avoid and relate to each other defines how public space is constructed. The conflicts that arose in the occupied plazas constantly redefined who was a stranger, who was a fellow and who was merely an acquaintance.

In these movements, there was another degree of engagement. In the Spanish case, people often called each other *compañero(a)*<sup>38</sup> and in New York people in the encampment used *brother* or *sister* to address someone unknown to them. Due to the openness of the movement, it was not difficult to become a *compañero* or a *sister*. If someone made a proposal or gave a short speech in an assembly, the facilitator could say, for instance: “What do you think about the proposal of the *compañera*?” even if it

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<sup>38</sup> The concept of *compañero* in Spanish is very broad. It can be used as friend, fellow, colleague, partner, spouse and comrade. In the movement was used as all of them, but more often it was used in the spirit *comrade* was used after the Russian Revolution and *citizen* was used after the French Revolution. In Latin, *compañero* literally means “the person you share the bread with” – *compartir* (to share), *pan* (bread).

was her first intervention ever in the movement. However, when there were conflicts, like the ones described later in this chapter, people could return to the status of strangers or acquaintances.

The third chapter of this dissertation (*Challenges, conflicts and tensions in the social construction of open space*) focuses on how different criteria of belonging and identity arose from situations of conflict and tension. Drawing from field notes and interviews in Barcelona and New York City, this chapter explores how the spaces were self-regulated through the rearrangement of the strangers-acquaintances map within the crowd. We find that, in an open space, when acquaintances and *compañeros* seriously conflict or disagree with one another, they were not fenced-off or removed from the space. Instead, they remained in the space and become strangers to each other again.

Drawing from the analysis of the instances in Chapter 3, the subsequent chapter (*Chapter 4 - The dilemma of openness: Theorizing boundless space*) explores the notion of *the dilemma of openness*: when space remains open to newcomers, it becomes more diverse, but its inner coherence becomes compromised; however, when it is closed, it becomes more coherent but lacks diversity. The evidence in this part shows that this dilemma is inevitably the result of the creation of open space. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's notions of *becoming* and the *Body without Organs* (*BwO*), we explore three approaches to study boundless spaces – *compartmentalized spaces*, *permeable spaces* and *milieus* – which are helpful to overcome this dilemma and to understand such spaces as self-regulated, transformational realms that are resilient to the growing complexity entailed in remaining open to newcomers.

This part explores how anomalous episodes (i.e., conflicts) illustrate and inform a general analysis of the social construction of space in the movements of 2011. The ultimate objective of this part is to understand the challenges that the movement's approach of "refusal of representation" posed for the construction of space. The stories presented herein seek to analyze how identity, practice and spatial boundaries operated in the context of openness and permeability and what role these factors played in the regulation of space in the movements.

This analysis establishes the basis necessary to explore the implications and applications for planning and urban design that can be drawn from the experience of the encampments and general assemblies. This will be analyzed in Part 3.

## CHAPTER 3

### CHALLENGES, CONFLICTS AND TENSIONS IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF OPEN SPACE

When I first approached the 15M movement in Barcelona in September of 2011, I asked one of the facilitators of the general assembly taking place in Plaza Catalunya if I could join that afternoon's session. She explained that anyone could join the assembly or the movement, and she told me to sign up for a turn to speak if I felt like it or to sit on the floor of the esplanade if I just wanted to listen.

Four months later, I had a similar experience in New York, while doing fieldwork on the Occupy Wall Street Movement (which incidentally drew inspiration from the 15M; the two movements often did solidarity actions for each other). I joined a general assembly that was already underway in the indoor atrium of the building at 60 Wall Street, where the movement had been meeting after the eviction from the Zuccotti Park encampment in November 2011. When the managers of the building closed the atrium, the crowd decided to go to Zuccotti Park to resume the unfinished assembly. Walking with them towards Zuccotti, I approached a woman and asked if she knew how long the assembly would take (it had already taken more than two hours). Looking at me, she asked if I was a member of Occupy Wall Street. I replied that I did not know I had to be a member. "You don't, I'm just messing with you," she said with a smile and as we walked together towards the park she told me I could accompany them and participate if I wanted, too.

Having done participant observation research in the past, I was expecting to have a period of “naturalization” in which people would get to know me little by little after someone from inside introduced me; however, both in the 15M and Occupy, there was never a clear sense of outside and inside in the traditional sense. Space and identity were socially constructed as open systems. It was difficult to pinpoint who was considered part of the movement and who a stranger, who worked in favor and who against, or who was neutral – all shared the same space. Therefore, the identity boundaries did not coincide with the boundaries of the spaces that were occupied.

As I continued my fieldwork, I learned that this spirit of openness was prevalent in most of the movements of 2011. They were open to anyone who wanted to participate, regardless of gender, age, religion, nationality or ideology. They were also open to people who were not physically present in the plaza, as people could participate in the assemblies and join the conversations online as well. There were also gestures of solidarity between sister movements around the world (e.g., the Quebecois and Chilean Students’ movement, the Mexican #YoSoy132 Movement, the Greek and Italian protesters, the Tahrir Square occupiers from Cairo), and it was often difficult to differentiate the limits between movements, other than geographic ones.

In the absence of apparent physical or identity boundaries that could effectively delimit the space and organization of the movement, anyone who volunteered to participate in the assemblies, the organization of the encampment and the protest actions (i.e., performed together with people of the movement) was somehow *in* it.

Solidarity and identity networks were built through practice<sup>39</sup> rather than membership or ideology. Therefore, the encampments constantly grew in size and complexity. The diversity of voices and actions that took place in the movement made it difficult to understand them as homogeneous phenomena.<sup>40</sup> Most of the differences were absorbed into the growing complexity of the movement, but some generated challenging conflicts. These conflicts shed some light on how space was socially constructed in these movements, for they reveal which practices could be incorporated and which could not.

To explore this question, I draw from stories in the 15M and Occupy Wall Street Movements. These stories describe moments in which conflict arose between individuals or groups in the general assemblies, debates, encampments and other protest actions in the movements. These stories do not represent of how these movements operated on a daily basis, for they are atypical. The majority of the time, the general assemblies and protest actions happened in an environment of debate but

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<sup>39</sup> In *The Division of Labor* (1897), Durkheim talks about two kinds of solidarity – *mechanic* and *organic*. The former is a type of solidarity in which the sense of collective is homogeneously constructed through common ideas, beliefs and lifestyles, whereas the latter is built through the interdependence of people who are different but work together. Organic identity allows for coexistence and collaboration between heterogeneous groups of people. Even though the context in which Durkheim’s *Division* was written is very different from that of 2011, we can say that the construction of identity in the social movements was closer to the concept of organic identity.

<sup>40</sup> Recent literature about social movements and the sociology of resistance have discussed the heterogeneous nature of social struggles in the last twenty years. The concepts of a *movement of movements* (Mertes, 2004), *non-movements* (Bayat, 2010) and *social mobilizations* (Rebelaos, 2012, Bonet, 2012) have been used in reference to struggles like those of 2011. The notion of *refusal*, coming from literature on autonomous organization, is also informative to the study of this kind of movement. John Holloway talks about the cry of *NO!* to the general order of things as a point of departure for creating and articulating alternatives. Based on this, Paul Kingsnorth has also discussed the notion of “one no and many yeses”. For more on the coexistence of heterogeneous groups in social movements, see El, K. H., Lotringer, S., & Marazzi, C. (2007). *Autonomia: Post-political politics*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e).

without any conflicts that disrupted the organization at large. The organization was proportionally very resilient to conflict, considering the number of people involved and the fact that it was self-organized. This chapter seeks to understand why and how some external participatory effects were naturalized into the realm of the movement and others were not. This can shed light on how the movement developed cohesion even when it refused to be defined by criteria of control and membership. The objective is to analyze the implications of the openness and permeability of participation for the social and political construction of urban space.

The relationships, interactions and communication that took place in the realm of the encampments and general assemblies of the 15M and Occupy Wall Street Movements are explored by the stories and analysis presented in this chapter. They begin to teach us how these movements socially constructed space through the convergence of common practices.

A typical assembly would start with the reading of the session's agenda, then the reading of proposals by individuals and collectives, which were subsequently voted upon by the attendants, and finally an open-mic session in which people discussed a variety of issues. The conflicts happened during the voting of proposals, but surprisingly there were also many clashes during the open-mic sessions, too.

Though tensions typically arose during the voting of proposals, they were usually resolved by the end of the assembly. In general, people tended to approve the

proposals and actions they discussed. A certain inertia dominated the assemblies, especially when proposing actions. A protest or march would most often be approved. Conflict arose mostly when deciding over actions that would involve the majority of the people, such as general strikes, encampments and large marches. Generally, in the voting of proposals, people agreed to disagree. People did not clash as much as in the open-mic sessions; however, as the movements were performative and more committed to processes than to outcomes, the clashes were often more about the form than the actual content of the discussions.

A prevalent dilemma could be sensed in the conversations in the plazas (See *The Dilemma of Openness* in Chapter 4). If the conversations were completely open for anybody to participate, then they could become vulnerable to losing coherency and to infiltration and disruption. If they became exclusionary, though, they would risk losing the diversity and openness that characterized the movement. Nevertheless, remaining open made the movement incredibly resilient to external feedback. This was at the same time a strength and a weakness.

In the first section of Chapter 3, I analyze a series of conflicts that arose in the encampments and assemblies that implied what practices belonged and which did not belong in the movements. These conflicts illustrate what was considered sensible, relevant, accepted and tolerated in these realms. In most cases, tensions and dilemmas arose in relation to the open character of the movements, and these tensions often led

to rearrangements of the stranger-acquaintance relationship between the people involved.

In the second section, based on three stories from the Barcelona encampment, I analyze how the participants dealt with practices they considered external to that realm as well as how they handled the challenges of regulating the encampment without mimicking the very practices that they were trying to question. I also analyze how practices that were unrelated to the encampment coexisted next to the encampment and general assembly, most often without affecting it. People who engaged in them were relegated to the status of strangers, without being considered adversaries.

In the third section, drawing from cases in Barcelona and New York, I analyze instances in which remaining open to the context put the movements at risk of infiltration. In both cases, they were faced with the option of protecting themselves or even fencing the movement off from infiltrators, *agents provocateurs*, and other people who might want to disrupt the movement. These characters were not addressed as strangers but as disrupting agents. Their mechanisms of control ranged from instruments to expel people from the general assemblies to relocating the assemblies to enclosed spaces. These cases illustrate how these movements that were committed to openness and self-regulation were willing to pay the price entailed in this commitment.

The fourth section, based on events taking place in the context of the Occupy Wall Street Movement, depicts how the police imposed boundaries upon most actions undertaken by the movement. In this case, the challenges to openness come not from the fear of infiltration within the movement but from the fear of expansion coming from outside the movement. The strategy of encapsulation that was adopted by police departments across the world tried to encapsulate people who were spatially engaging in the same practices in order to stop the practices from spreading.

### ***3.1 Who belongs and who does not? External participation and internal self-regulation in the encampments and assemblies***

The stories presented in this section describe several conflicts happening in the encampments and general assemblies in Barcelona that illustrate an implicit criterion of belonging. They illustrate (1) the challenges of remaining permanently open to external participation that could potentially be disruptive for the movement and (2) how interactions arranged what and who was strange in the space.



Figure 4. Video from a General Assembly at Plaza Catalunya. People take a vote after a proposal is presented by a participant. Video field notes from Barcelona, May 13, 2012(Source: Author).

*What makes sense? Between inclusiveness and permissiveness.*

The protest encampments of 2011 were physically accessible to anyone, and the general assemblies as well as other similar events were potentially open to anyone wanting to participate. Most general assemblies ended with an open-mic session. Anyone could sign up to speak about whatever issue or grievances they wanted for a period of five minutes. People presented proposals that had been designed by smaller groups or neighborhoods, made calls for action, or simply gave speeches based on their personal opinions. In these sessions, the interventions ranged from detailed calls for action by committed militants to elaborate speeches or even poems by sympathizers of the movement to digressions on issues completely peripheral or alien

to the movement. Nevertheless, the audience was tolerant and the facilitators of the assembly were faithful to the undeclared but de facto commitment to openness. The following three stories collected in the field include cases where the actions of some people produced conflict among the participants of the encampments or general assemblies. The first story shows how the participation of one person was regarded as conflicting in the general assembly:

In a small general assembly at Plaza Catalunya, a young woman shared a proposal with a crowd of around thirty people sitting in a circle on the floor. When she finished, people took a vote by raising their hands. A man who was standing on the periphery of the circle voted in favor of the proposal. According to what the participants told me, he occasionally wandered around the plaza and stood next to the speakers smiling and agreeing compulsively with whatever they said. The small crowd challenged him and asked why he was in favor and not against, but he remained silent. They informally agreed to ignore this person, who remained quiet standing on the edge of the assembly. A woman next to me told me not to pay attention to him as, according to her, he was mentally ill and did not even understand what they were saying as he did not speak Castilian [Spanish] or Catalan. “Besides, he is violent,” she told me. (Field notes from Barcelona, November 12, 2011)

A week after, there was a similar episode that included the same character:

On November the 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011, General Elections Day in Spain, the 15M movement held a general assembly at Plaza Catalunya. Close to the end of the session, a dwarf beggar from Romania who frequented the assemblies, mostly as a listener, tried to give a speech in a clumsy Spanish. Using words in Romanian, Italian, French, Catalan and Spanish, his speech revealed a road map of his passage across Europe. He rambled on for a minute or two, repeating over and over that he was Romanian, took drugs and had been in the streets for fifteen years. In addition to his poor Spanish, he also appeared to be intoxicated. The audience, sitting on the floor of the plaza looked at each other with estrangement but let the man carry on with his hardly intelligible speech.

A man suddenly interrupted the intervention and grabbed the microphone to confront the Romanian (also in a terrible Spanish). It was the same person who voted in favor of every proposals that I saw a week before. Two people standing next to the facilitators grabbed the interrupter and asked him to let the man finish. The interrupter was pulled by his arm by two men and taken out of the scene of the assembly. Opinions in the audience were divided. Some people cried “No Violence! No Violence!” Others said “Take him out already!” as the man was taken out resisting. The Romanian returned to the microphone and continued where he had stopped and again was caught in the same loop, until the facilitator politely approached him and

asked him to get to the point and finish up his speech. He rambled for another ten seconds, thanked the audience and gave the microphone back to the facilitator. (Field notes from Barcelona, November 20, 2011) (See Fig. 2)



Figure 5. Conflict at Plaza Catalunya. A Romanian participant is stopped from finishing his speech in a general assembly session. The interrupter was forced out of the space of the assembly. Video field notes from Barcelona, November 20, 2011 (Source: Author).

A week later, also at Plaza Catalunya, there was a similar kind of conflict; however, this time the reactions were different. In a small ceremony commemorating the half-year anniversary of the bloody attempted eviction of the protest encampment by the riot police and the subsequent re-occupation of the space by the protesters, people shared their accounts of the event taking turns as in the assembly sessions but without any debate. There were also films, musicalized photo presentations, and screenings showing scenes of the occupiers raising their hands painted white in signs of non-violent civil disobedience while being beaten with clubs and scenes of people being dispersed by the rubber bullets. There were also scenes of the festive re-occupation of

the plaza after the six-hour struggle with the riot police. Some of the scenes were very dramatic. In one, there were hundreds of people jumping and hugging and kissing strangers to celebrate the victory of the re-occupation of the plaza. Directly in the middle of plaza, a man in his early twenties was holding a sign above his head that said: "Today, the people won." He was standing still, weeping for joy, surrounded by the celebratory crowd. In the anniversary ceremony, people appeared to be quite touched by this scene. In fact, the feeling of the event was more of a memorial ceremony than an assembly.

Later, a young man shared the following story with group of about sixty people: "I was really sad when we were taken out of the plaza. I went home and took a shower and stayed there for about an hour until decided to go back, expecting to see the encampment evicted, but when I got there, I saw the Plaza full of people! [emphasis added]. There were children, ladies... everyone was in such joy! [He stopped and choked]. And I will always remember that day." As he finished his story, I counted at least five people choked up or crying.

Next, two more people spoke briefly about their experiences, and the same mood prevailed until a man who had been sitting next to the projector rolling a tobacco cigarette<sup>41</sup> and sprinkling it with hashish took his turn at the microphone. He staggered for a moment without saying anything and, after failing to control himself, succumbed

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<sup>41</sup> In Spain is more common that people make their own tobacco cigarettes instead of buying them ready-made

to a cannabic laughter attack for about a minute. The facilitators tolerantly waited for him then eventually asked him to give the microphone to the next person, as he had failed to recover from the seizure. Even though the audience waited until his time had ended, they looked at each other visibly offended by this intervention. He went back to merge with the crowd, but no one paid attention to him anymore (Field notes from Barcelona, November 27, 2011).

These three excerpts illustrate the challenges of the open approach in assemblies and the movement in general. The first and second stories present two issues that we must analyze: a) the issue of openness and right to participation and b) the issue of (self)regulation of space.

In both stories, the open-door policy and right to participation is tested. They are apparently versions of the same issue, but they contain subtle differences that show what makes sense and what does not. In the story of the disturbed participant who voted in favor of the proposal, he stood next to people who were sitting in a circle. He was allowed to stay and listen to the proposal; however, when he voted, the participants became suspicious. He assented to everything that was discussed in the assembly, so they realized that he was not understanding what was being said. After that, he was ignored although he remained in the same space. During the assembly, he was perceived as part of the group, but when they took a vote he appeared suspicious. They did not confront or physically exclude him; they merely perceived him as a stranger and literally told the people in the assembly to ignore him. In the second

instance, both the crowd and the facilitators respected the right of the Romanian beggar to speak, even though he could not articulate well, seemed intoxicated and gave a largely irrelevant speech. And although they ultimately urged him to get to the point, they waited until he had finished his speech (or at least until he gave the microphone back). The broadness of the topics addressed in the assembly attracted the beggar to share his personal story. Here, the open approach to participation applied not only to people but also to topics. His time and effort to participate was respected, and he was even protected from the person who took the microphone from him. He was participating to the best of his understanding (unlike the previous instance) and therefore was defended as part of the group.

The question of regulating the order of the assembly and encampment is also present in both instances. When the men forcibly pulled the interrupter out of the assembly, some people also protested, interpreting his removal as violent. In this case, the interrupter was not just ignored, as in the assembly that happened two weeks before, but also physically excluded. He was not a just a “stranger” (in fact, he was well known by most of the people) but a disruptor.

On the other hand, the crowd’s reactions to the people who took the man out of the space were mixed, because even though he was known for being violent, the audience disapproved the use of coercive force. Some people perceived him as part of the group and agreed that he had to be protected; however, others perceived him as alien to the movement. This issue of regulation was particularly controversial in most of the social

movements of 2011 and 2012. As the movement embraced the approach of “no one represents us,” they rarely agreed to appoint anyone as regulators. The two men who took the person out of the assembly had spontaneously appointed themselves as the “security”. The people in the audience that agreed with the people taking the man out appealed to the fact that the opportunity for participation of the beggar was being denied. In both cases, the space remains physically open, but the practices show who is recognized as part of the group and who is not in the space. Clearly, the right to remain in the space is different than the right to participate.

The third story shows a similar situation but with different results. The event of the half-year anniversary of the eviction was not an assembly but more of a ceremony. It was also open for anyone wanting to participate, but the interventions had a different tone. The person who took the microphone after smoking hashish was perceived as disrespectful of the feelings of the participants. The facilitator of the ceremony asked him to give the microphone back, but waited for him tolerantly, even though everyone looked offended. In this case, this man was also ignored even though he remained in the same space.

These three stories reveal that (making) sense, seriousness and respect are valued in the assemblies. Of those, respect of people’s opportunity to express themselves appears to be the most valued. The participants showed tolerance to people giving non-sensible speeches when they were trying to be serious and respecting other people. The beggar was taken seriously or at least was tolerated because he was taking

his participation seriously even though he apparently was not making sense. The person laughing in the ceremony was allowed to stay in the space because, faithful to their spirit of openness, no one wanted to stop him; however, even though he remained in the same space, no one paid attention to him after his turn finished, as happened with the man who assented to all proposals. As he did not engage in the same practices as the others, he was excluded practically, although not physically. Violence and disrespect toward other people's thoughts or feelings, on the other hand, was not tolerated in the same space, as the person who interrupted the beggar was physically removed from the esplanade.

*What is relevant? Between diverseness and dispersion*

In the occupation of Zuccotti Park in New York City, we find similar conflicts. The space of the park and the general assembly were open to anyone's participation; however, some occupiers believed that assembly interventions should be thematically relevant to the overarching topics being treated in the movement, such as the foreclosure crisis, the precarization of labor, the debt, the role of Wall Street in the corporatization of democracy, and so on. People who participated in the encampment and the assembly for "non-political" reasons were tolerated but sometimes criticized. There were, for example, a considerable amount of homeless people who approached the encampment, sometimes to join the assemblies, discussions and actions at the park,

but sometimes just to sleep on the benches or have lunch at the encampment kitchen.<sup>42</sup>

One sector considered the homeless as strangers to the encampment, but others saw them as crucial stakeholders in the movement, as many of them had been directly affected by the foreclosure crisis.

Three months after the eviction of the encampment, Brian, who had been active in its organization, walked with me around the park and described the occupation at its height in October of 2011:

On the west side of the park, people were playing drums and singing, non-stop. The Broadway-side encampment was more concentrated in the General Assembly, it was more... let's say, politicized [...] I was struggling with those people [the drummers] all the time. It [OWS] was about convincing and engaging middle-class America, but many people thought it was just about 'Fuck off, I'll do whatever I want', You know? [...] I was always telling people to clean up after themselves. How are we going to attract the middle class if the encampment is full of homeless? Who would want to join this movement? Do you know what I wanted to do? I wanted to throw garbage on top of them. That's what we used to do when I was working in a submarine. People who didn't take a shower affected everyone because they stank, so when they were asleep we threw garbage in their beds to make a point. (Field notes from New York, February 24, 2012)

As he was telling me this story, an unknown person dressed as a baseball player from the waist up, called for our attention to explain to us what "Occupy Wall Street was about". He was stopping people passing by to tell them about his view of the movement. He showed us a kitchen blender of his own invention. It was designed in such a way that it could fill several glasses laid out in circle. The invention did not

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<sup>42</sup> Throughout the two-month occupation of Zuccotti Park the movement served lunch for anyone who wanted to join. Many of the commensals were homeless. After the eviction in November of 2011, lunch continued to be served at the atrium of 60 Wall Street, where Occupy met. All the food came from donations and was prepared from volunteers.

look particularly original at all; yet, he said that innovative technology designed by the 99% was the solution to facing the 1%.

“That’s what Occupy Wall Street is about” he said, as he shared cups of lemonade filled by his “invention”.

Ignoring the explanation, my friend said to me as if he were a narrator speaking into a camera:

“You see what I’m saying? You see how confused people are? He thinks this bullshit is what OWS is about. That’s the problem. This is too...” he paused.

“Diverse?” I said trying to help.

“Diverse? Really? That’s a very happy word. I would say more like ‘fucked up’ and ‘crazy’. That’s more like it...” he replied in such anger, that he said goodbye and left all of a sudden. (Field notes from New York, February 24, 2012)

Another case shows a different approach towards the homeless question in Occupy Wall Street. After a general assembly, a group of occupiers dispersed from Zuccotti Park. Three of them were walking uptown when they heard a man crying who was sitting outside the downtown MacDonald’s on Broadway. It was a man in his early thirties saying he could not take it anymore, over and over. The occupiers stopped to ask him what was wrong. The man wiped his tears and said he had been evicted from his house a year ago and since then had been living in the streets.

I lost my family. I don’t have anything to support them. I am so ashamed! [emphasis added], I don’t want my children to see me like this. [...] I had a job, a car and a house... I don’t drink or take drugs, I just lost everything. (Field notes from New York, February 25, 2012)

The occupier sat down next to him and listened to the man, putting a hand on his shoulder. A person walking by asked if he was all right, putting a five-dollar bill in a paper cup next to the young man, and the occupier replied:

This is not just about money. This is not solved with putting a bill in a cup. You give him money because you don’t want to relate to him, you are sympathetic, but you want to solve it with a transaction. As you see, he just wanted someone to listen to

him. You want to buy yourself out of his story with your money. (Field notes from New York, February 25, 2012)

After close to half an hour of listening to the homeless man, they told him about the network of shelters organized by Occupy in collaboration with several New York churches. The homeless person, who looked visibly recovered, put the note with that information in his pocket and thanked the occupier for having listened to him.

In these two stories, we can see different approaches towards participation and inclusion in the Occupy Movement. In the first, Brian explains how some people did not understand what the movement was about, which according to him was to engage the middle-class to participate more in issues that affected them. His vision of the movement was exclusionary as he explicitly said that it was “about engaging the middle class.” People who came to the encampment and participated in the assemblies with other issues were considered alien to the movement and non-representative. To Brian, the vision of the person with the blender departed completely from the struggles and spirit of the movement. Brian got angry because he felt that the movement was problematically disperse in its objectives, to the extent that it no longer even made sense. The assembly and the encampment, in his view, should be thematically coherent. Nevertheless, the encampment of Zuccotti Park as well as the Spanish encampments were virtually open for anyone who wanted to participate, and although these kinds of tensions arose often, access and participation were never regulated. In this case, Brian was the one who voluntarily became a stranger to the space. He pointed out that the person with the blender did not know what the movement was

about. Brian put him in the category of a stranger, but the person still felt that his story about technology, creativity and the 99% fell into what the movement was about. He probably even saw Brian as a *brother* in the movement, but as Brian did not share that idea and it was he who did not want to share the same space with this person, he left.

The second story shows a different approach towards the homeless.<sup>43</sup> The three occupiers, just coming from the general assembly, where the foreclosure crisis and the homeless question were often discussed, stopped to listen to the story of the man outside MacDonald's. Even though they were not in an assembly or at an Occupy event, they extended the open approach of the movement to the surroundings of Zuccotti. Similar to the participation of the beggar in Barcelona, the story of this homeless person is relevant and deserves to be heard and understood; the occupiers' did not interpret the homeless man's story in regard to its function in the movement, as Brian described it (i.e., the homeless makes middle-class participants look bad), but rather as an issue of merit in itself. The three occupiers wanted to listen and understand that person, rather than "buy their way out" with charity, so they engaged with a complete stranger (the homeless person) and turned him into a *brother*.

The first story is about discrimination against the homeless and other groups who are considered to be thematically "alien" to the movement. The second story, rather than

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<sup>43</sup> The homeless question became one of the central topics in the conversations happening in Occupy. Many homeless people participating in the movement (contrary to what many thought) were well informed about issues of affordable housing, the foreclosure crisis and *the right to the city*. Frank Morales, active in the "Picture the Homeless Movement", participated in Occupy Wall Street several times, talking about direct action tactics (e.g., squatting, reoccupation of vacant homes) as means to turn around the homeless crisis in New York City.

being about homeless “penetrating” the movement, shows the opposite approach. The occupiers, and in that sense a sector of the movement, are reaching out to the homeless outside of the movement. This suggests that the diffuse boundaries of the movement were not only permeable for participation but dynamic as well. Indeed, they expanded outside the organizational and physical realm of the movement to proliferate its practices beyond its margins.<sup>44</sup>

The relevance of people like the beggar in Barcelona and the homeless man in New York cannot be understood outside the approach of openness. Their stories are relevant, because they have not been heard and need to be heard. To prevent the homeless from participating would mean engaging in practices that the movement is questioning, and it would cancel the possibility of potentially interesting contributions from those who happen to be homeless. The following story is a good example of that.

On the first anniversary of the occupation of Plaza Catalunya, I encountered a homeless person whose story challenged the idea that their presence in the plaza was “non-political”. He was a French hermit who had been living in the mountains of the outskirts of Barcelona (See Fig. 6). When people from the encampment introduced me to him, they referred to him as a “modern Thoreau.” He only came down from the mountains when there were protests like the one being held that day. He often joined

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<sup>44</sup> Felix Guattari writes about social movements as realms without boundaries. He propounds the notion of “the proliferation of margins”. This is the idea that the boundless condition of a social movement is actually an advantage because this is how it expands to other sectors, beyond ideological reductionisms. For more on this topic, see the essay *The Proliferation of Margins* (Guattari in Lotringer, et al: 2007).

the general assemblies to listen, although he rarely participated. In an interview with him, he told me in French and a broken Catalan:

“I can feel the life in the encampment. The city is alive. I only come back [to the city] to see this. The rest of the time, the city is dead to me. Dead! Dead! [emphasis added]... But not today. Look around! [pointing at the plaza]. People are awakening”, he said with a big sigh. (Field notes, Barcelona, May 13, 2014)

Contrary to the idea that homeless people are not political, he joined the assemblies because he thought that people are most often not awake.



Figure 6. An atypical homeless man in Plaza Catalunya. A French hermit living in the mountains of the outskirts of Barcelona (with his arms crossed in the foreground) joins the general assembly at the encampments of Plaza Catalunya. Barcelona, May 14, 2012 (Source: Author)

The space is open insofar as it challenges the exclusive character of the hegemonic political system that says what is relevant, who is important and what is the right place

to hold discussions. Thus, the encampments are not only permeable for physical access and democratic participation, they are also thematically open. Similarly, they seek to entertain open questions that become more specific little by little, instead of rushing to provide answers.

The assemblies were political precisely because they were challenging the traditional notion of politics, which dictates what to discuss, when to discuss it, and where to discuss it. The encampment actions were also political in that sense, as they were contesting the uses that had become considered acceptable in public spaces. They were political insofar as they contested what is considered political.<sup>45</sup> For some protesters, only the assemblies were political. Activities like music performance, films screenings, happenings, and art workshops were not political; however, I would argue that they were too, precisely because they contested this idea that politics is only comprised of assembly discussions. The occupation of the plaza contested the depolitization of public space.

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<sup>45</sup> Jacques Ranciere (in Dikeç, 2002) describes the difference between *politics*, *the political* and *the police*. *Politics* is the practice of debating within the framework of institutionalized realms (e.g., parliamentary, institutionalized assemblies). *The political*, on the other hand, is the debate happening beyond institutional spaces. And *the police* is the order that ensures that politics only remain in their designated spaces. The political is always in a struggle with the police. The political is so, insofar as it contests the police order that dictates how politics should operate. Therefore, dissent (about who, what, how, where and when debate should take place) is the actual drive of the political. The movements of 2011 were in many ways a frontal challenge to a police order that designates in which spaces politics can take place. The movements were critical of representative democracy because parliamentary politics cancel the possibility of having debates beyond the spaces and times designated by institutions.

*What is accepted? Between condemning and challenging.*

As the encampments and assemblies were open to “strangers”, there was a particular concern about the practices that these strangers brought in. People could join the movement and participate in the assemblies if they converged in the same actions and performed together. Racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination were practices and visions that were of particular concern for the protesters. In the 15M, people raised their arms in the form of an “X” to point out when a speaker was using discriminatory (e.g., sexist, racist, classist) language in the general assembly. For example, the feminist participants of the movement were particularly alert to sexist language.<sup>46</sup> In this vein, the following story shows how people reacted to xenophobic remarks made by a person participating in an assembly for the first time.

In Plaza Catalunya, a small encampment was organized ten days before the General Elections of Spain. Every evening, people gathered in circles to discuss various topics ranging from the foreclosure crisis and the relevance of voting to proposals of alternative banking and autonomous organization. That night, the discussion centered on the problem of unemployment. Participants talked about alternatives to a job-based

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<sup>46</sup> On more than one occasion, I saw feminist participants raising their arms every time someone used the word *coño* (literally “cunt”), an omnipresent and largely assimilated filler word in Iberian Spanish, used similar to “damn”. “My apologies, compañera,” the speakers often replied and went back to their speech. The feminist approach of the 15M was so important that people widely spoke “in feminine” when referring to “us” and “we” (i.e., *nosotras*, instead of *nosotros*, *compañeras* instead of *compañeros*, and so on) in general assembly interventions, figures that are not used in Spanish or Catalan.

economy and a money-dependant society. Two participants were sharing their experiences with not using banking institutions and the challenges that this involved. One participant shared how he had survived for over a year without using any money, relying only on collaboration and networking with other people like himself.

As the conversation went on, a man approached the circle and listened for about ten minutes then raised his hand requesting to speak. Having arrived late to the discussion, he mistakenly assumed that the conversation was only about jobs. He said:

“It is true. The unemployment is never going to end, if more people continue coming to Spain and taking our jobs. I am a construction worker, and I’ve had a hard time finding a job, because the *mores* [Moroccans] and the *pakis* [Pakistanis] always work for less payment. Besides...”

“Wait, wait, wait, wait...” said a woman sitting close to him. Three people in the circle raised their hands in the shape of an “X” and a man in his forties said out loud to a person sitting next to him, “What the hell is wrong with this guy?”

The small crowd started whispering and a grandmother addressed him saying,

“You know what you are?, You are a racist person!”  
“Xenophobic!”, shouted Ana, a woman in her forties.

The construction worker replied, “I don’t understand. Weren’t you talking about unemployment? Isn’t it what this is about?”

“It is certainly not about racism,” the woman replied.

The man said, “Then what is the problem if not the immigrants?”

Ana said, “We are talking about alternatives to the logics of employed, unemployed, etc... Not having employment doesn’t mean we can’t work. If we make networks with other people in our same condition, we can have other forms of exchange. We should not be afraid to work.”

“I’m not afraid to work. I often work without payment. The other day, for example, I made the roof of my cousin’s house, without any payment. But I often go for dinner to his house and he gives me clothes for my daughter,” said the construction worker.

“Well, there you go! That’s what I’m talking about. What do immigrants have to do with that?” said Ana. (Field notes from Barcelona, November 15, 2011)

The construction worker assented and said that he understood as he sat down on the floor to hear the rest of the debate, which lasted for another hour. In the following days of the encampment, he continued attending the assemblies and debates. He was mainly quiet but several times asked people sitting next to them about the interventions and they often explained to him politely.

This story is a good example of the contentious and fluid aspects of openness. The construction worker approaches the discussion with a particular point of view that is resisted and that evolves over the course of the debate. Deliberation produces this transformation, and the participants come to trust the process even though the outcome is unpredictable<sup>47</sup> (Forester, 1999). The participants challenged him for his xenophobic discourse, but they explained their own views of the problem. He listened carefully to what Ana said and ended up being persuaded by her proposal. The fact that he sat to hear the rest of the debate and that the participants accepted him shows that they differentiate between people and practices. The worker engaged in racist rhetoric, but he was not inherently racist (even though some people called him so). People noted that he probably said what he said because he did not realize there could be other explanations of his problems, and so they patiently explained what the speakers were talking about. He became sympathetic to the movement after listening to the debate and continued to join in subsequent assemblies.

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<sup>47</sup> John Forester (1999) has written about embracing unpredictability in deliberative processes. In the case described here, the people of the assembly trust deliberation even though they do not know what the outcome is going to be. For further insights on unpredictability in planning processes see Forester, J. (1999). *The deliberative practitioner: Encouraging participatory planning processes*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

In this case, an “alien” practice penetrated the permeable boundaries of the assembly, but as the construction worker modified his practice the space “incorporated” him. He was in the same space as the assembly but did not initially share the same ideas; however, as he engaged in the same practice as them (in this case, debate), he was not ignored. At this point, he was not yet a *compañero*, because of his ideas, but his presence was tolerated because the group believed he could change. It was not only that he was “educated” by the rest of the group, but also that they made a common sense collectively as they deliberated (Forester, 1989, 1999).<sup>48</sup>

*What is tolerated? Between trust and ingenuity*

Another practice that was considered ambiguous for the movement was the participation of collectives. The risk of an interest group, faction or political party taking advantage of the permeable character of the movement and wanting to hijack the assembly often worried participants in the movement. Collectives and associations participating in the encampments often made proposals that were discussed and voted upon. There were also individuals who militated in political parties but who always talked *ad personam* in the assemblies; however, as these movements were adamantly anti-partisan and often opposed parliamentary elections, they distrusted people who

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<sup>48</sup> In *Planning in the Face of Power*, John Forester introduces the notion of the evolution of a design as “making sense together”, which is a helpful concept to understand the case I analyze in this section. See examples of this approach in Part 3, about the physical planning of the protest encampment in Barcelona.

might want to infiltrate the assemblies in order to tilt the movement towards influencing mainstream electoral politics.

During a general assembly in Plaza Catalunya, groups of people signed up on a list to participate. Most often, it was individuals who signed up, but there were also small neighborhood associations presenting proposals that had been approved by consensus in their own assemblies. Among these groups, there were some that, although they participated within the rules of the assembly, seemed suspicious to others. The following story shows the tensions that arose when such groups participated.

On the General Assembly of Election Day, a group of five people requested to speak in the open-mic session. A man in his late forties with a clipboard in hand diligently gave instructions to four younger men that acted as his employees. He had very short hair and a well-cropped beard. He was wearing a turtleneck sweater and tight pants, all in black. People around me looked at the group suspiciously and mumbled: “Who the hell are those guys?”

I thought they looked like undercover police, but I was wrong. Two of them signed up to speak and, before taking their turn, went back and forth to their “master”, apparently to confirm what they were going to say. The older man put the clipboard on the floor and continued giving instructions as he pointed to an imaginary list in the air. The four younger men submissively assented to everything he said. One of them made a proposal that came from a cooperative

they ran, a minor intervention. The other proposed that instead of meeting every one or two weeks, the General Assembly should meet monthly, in order to be more effective and not waste time.

People in the audience protested, and considered this a major change. The leader signed up to speak when he realized that his pupils were failing to get the proposal voted on. Pointing again at his ghostly list, he explained for five minutes why he thought meeting monthly was a better idea. Ultimately, in the midst of protests, the proposal was approved.

At the end of the assembly, when others prepared for a *cacerolazo* action [a ‘pots and pans’ protest], a woman in her seventies named Merçè talked to a small group shaking her head in disappointment. When I asked her opinion on the assembly, she replied: “This is the end of the 15M”. She blamed it on “the Trotskyists”,<sup>49</sup> as she called the five. Merçè regretted that this had caught them off-guard, and that there wasn’t enough time for her to make an intervention. In her opinion, it wasn’t just about the spacing out the assemblies, but the fact that they were trying to monopolize the discourse (and rather effectively).

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<sup>49</sup> During the encampment, assemblies and actions of the movement, there was a group of people led by a girl in her early twenties that handed out well-produced flyers and brochures describing a movement that had the intentions of becoming a political party, for which they often collected signatures in stands placed at the plaza. They were relatively unpopular in the 15M, but nonetheless participated frequently. It is worth noting that not all of those called “Trotskyists” called themselves that. They were generically named “Trotskyist” by people who either knew Trotskyist-influenced circles or associated disciplined and hierarchical organization in the Left with Trotskyism.

After that, I continued attending the General Assembly as well as my own neighborhood assembly, and to me the 15M did not appear to be over, as it is still active today (August, 2014). But clearly, for some, the movement had completely departed from its original spirit (Field notes from Barcelona, November 20, 2011).

The intervention of the so-called “Trotskyists” illustrated the values implicit in the 15M movement. The practices of direct democracy and horizontalism are obvious guidelines of the movement, but the forms in which these practices are carried out are also fundamental to the movement. The individual speeches of the “pupils”, even though given in a horizontal context, were suspicious to the movement because they were the result of vertical thinking, as the youngsters were clearly just following orders. In a way, the person coordinating the young speakers was doing at a micro level what lobbies do in Congress when they try to influence a representative to vote for a particular agenda (the invisibility of lobby politics was recurrently criticized in the debates and conversations of the 15M and OWS). This indicates that the 15M valued the fact that the movement was a convergence of individual thoughts, wills and actions, rather than actions orchestrated by organized groups.

Autonomous representation is the other value that is implicit in the discourse of the 15M. The movement took to the streets with the slogan “They don’t represent us” and later “No one represents us.” There was, and still is, a faith in the idea that change can be achieved by the convergence and resonance of single individual autonomies. The outcomes resulting from those processes are secondary.

These practices made the group of five look “strange” to the movement. Even though many people participating in the assemblies did not know each other, when this group arrived, they literally asked, “Who are these people?” Other unknown participants were immediately called *compañeros*. Participants would say, “Let’s hear the proposal of the *compañero*”, for example. The way these three people participated does not give them the status of *compañeros* in the eyes of assembly participants.

The idea of spacing out the assemblies was apparently secondary and merely operational but implied certain values that the movement did not share. For the so-called “Trotskyists”, efficiency was at the center of their agenda. This suggested that they considered the assembly and the movement only instrumental to achieving change. Meeting regularly was perceived as a burden. For the critical voices of the 15M, the means were also the ends and the form was the content. Meeting regularly was fundamental, because this could give voice to more people and allowed participants to think through the issues as they deliberated. In other words, the movement was not an instrumental activity for them, but substantively part of their lives.

The next story of an encounter between two people marching in a General Strike in Barcelona during March of 2012 illustrates the conflicts between different groups and their approach towards representation. As I marched with Alberto in the General

Strike on Balmes Street in Barcelona, he pointed out a young man walking alone with a laptop and headphones, apparently trying to get an Internet signal.

“Look at this guy, look at this guy... I know what they are doing, I have seen them before,” said Alberto.

He approached that person and put his arm on his shoulder and looked at his computer. Alberto asked him:

“What are you doing? Who are you talking to?”

The young man said:

“I’m trying to do a LiveStream video because we want to show the march to the other movements.”

Alberto said:

“WE want to show it?, Of course! It is like when you went to Brussels to the European Union to represent US... OUR movement, right?” (Field notes from Barcelona, March 29, 2012)

The young man assented, apparently not understanding the sarcastic tone of Alberto.

“It is a good thing these guys [he later referred to them as “Trotskyists”] are always there to represent us,” he told me as he patted the young man on the back. He said goodbye and we continued walking.

The encounter between Alberto and the young “Trotskyist” illustrates the different approaches to the issue of representation in the 15M movement. Alberto emphasized the pronouns “we”, “us” and “ours” because he thought it problematic for individuals to speak in plural for the whole movement. The young man did not seem to understand that others resented his efforts to represent the movement. Here, we see a clear tension between a) those who followed the they-don’t-represent-us approach, who thought that the people in power had no legitimacy to represent the people, and b) the no-one-represents-us approach that questioned the notion of representation in general and

thought this should only happen if a motion is discussed and approved by the general assembly of the movement.

These two groups coexisted in the movement.<sup>50</sup> They shared the same space, participated in the same discussions and converged in the same actions; however, they had different approaches towards practices that clashed on particular issues. The space was permeable to both approaches, although the more horizontal sectors were suspicious of vertical organization when this happened at the macro level, as in the case of the representation of the whole movement in the European Union or at the micro level, as in the case of the people that participated in the assembly following the orders of an organizer. They coexisted because they were somehow interdependent on each other. They shared a kind of organic sense of solidarity, as Durkheim would call it. Or to use the words of the protesters, they worked “together but not mixed.”

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<sup>50</sup> According to Felix Guattari, when social movements organize autonomously and beyond institutional boundaries, differences are more likely to coexist without losing a general identity. In *The Proliferation of Margins*, he described how social movements were going to be in the future if they continued organizing as they were in the 70s (i.e., autonomously). He wrote: “[Social movements] will be multi-centered. Their different components will in no way be required to agree on everything, or to speak the same stereotypical language. Contradictions, even irreducible antagonisms, will be allowed to coexist.” (Felix Guattari in Lotringer et al., 2007: 110) – the epigraph of Part 2 of this dissertation.

### ***3.2 Dealing with openness. Risks and challenges of openness and self-regulation***

#### *Permeability and self-regulation Coexistence, transformation and replication of external practices*

In the 15M in Barcelona, the critical voices constantly warned that trying to regulate practices and access actually placed the movement in great danger of mirroring the very power structures they were trying to transform. Even though a vote had determined that there would be no external regulations, some people became self-appointed guardians of the encampment.

Alberto, who was there during the occupation of Plaza Catalunya, described how in his opinion the encampment (or at least a sector of it) failed to avoid the emulation of power structures:

One day, a bunch of rich old ladies approached the encampment saying they wanted to donate money to the movement. This created a number of problems. First, no one wanted to have anything to do with money inside the encampment, as it would “contaminate” it.<sup>51</sup> Second, no one wanted to be in charge of that. So they decided to put it in a box in the center of the plaza and save it for when a decision had been made as to what to do with it. Another dilemma was that of security. They noticed pickpockets and people drinking and smoking hash (you know, as people have always done in this plaza). Some wanted to prohibit drugs and alcohol and control the entrance of the encampment, but others said that prohibiting or controlling the access was against both the spirit of the encampment and the fact that the plaza is public. Well, some people self-appointed themselves to be the guardians of the encampment. They carried walkie-talkies and even wore white bands on their arms. Therefore, they ended up replicating three institutions that they claimed to despise: Caritas [a Spanish charity institution], Prosegur [The Police] and banks. (Interview with Alberto, November 12, 2011)

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<sup>51</sup> Throughout my fieldwork, I learned that it was not the use of money that the movement necessarily challenged but the use of banking systems. The encampment and the neighborhood assemblies actually received donations from individuals and used them for the organization of events.

Josep, also present in the conversation, said:

“No way! Are you positive? I don’t remember that. Wearing bands on their arms? I never saw that.”

“You never saw them?” asked Alberto.

“But who ever paid attention to them? It’s obvious that no one did. People must have thought they were a bunch of crazy people,” said Josep.

“Yes, but they were there,” said Alberto.

“But they must have realized it was pointless at some point,” said Josep.

“Oh, yeah. They gave up eventually,” replied Alberto. (Interview with Alberto and Josep, November 12, 2011)

This fragment depicts how attitudes towards the permeability of practices differed from attitudes toward people. Alberto describes how, although they managed to keep the encampment open to anyone, practices that were implicitly considered strange to the movement were nonetheless adopted in the encampment. The issue of regulation is the one that caused more controversy in this conversation. Regulating access and practices in the encampment would imply that a new order was being imposed on the existing one – in this case, the closing and regulation of a public space. According to Josep, the self-appointed guards apparently had not succeeded in imposing that order. He describes how people must have ignored them, thinking the idea ridiculous.

The space was permeable even to practices that mimicked the power structures being challenged in the discourse of the movement; however, these practices apparently dissolved in the realm of the encampment. For Alberto, it was interesting that this even happened, for he says “Yes, but they were there.”

His point is that although power structures can be mimicked, people need to be alert about that. For Josep, the fact that they gave up proved that they could be assimilated

by being ignored. Public space spontaneously became a space of “strangers and acquaintances,” as Sennett puts it. If there is someone engaging in a practice that others disagree with, like that of policing the space, then they can always just ignore him. Such practices have no real power unless everyone acknowledges that power. Power is only sustained if the powerless recognize authority in the powerful (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, Foucault, 1977), even when this happens at a small scale.

Alberto wanted to point out that authoritarian practices originate in this way, when people are not alert. These intentional or unintentional attempts to replace authority are similar to what Foucault referred to as “microfascisms”. If we are unaware of the authoritarian and repressive aspect of ourselves, we are condemned to mimic the structures we are seeking to transform (Foucault in Deleuze & Guattari, 1977).<sup>52</sup> In a small debate session about police brutality and direct action at the Pre-election Plaza Catalunya encampment, a college student expressed his opinion about how power worked: “I think power does not activate when a policeman calls you [he paused for ten seconds and continued] ... I think it activates when you turn around and look at him.”

In that same debate, Alberto elaborated upon the issue of regulating the encampment:

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<sup>52</sup> Foucault, in reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus*, discusses the importance of “the tracking down of all varieties of fascism, from the enormous ones that surround and crush us to the petty ones that constitute the tyrannical bitterness of our everyday lives” (Foucault in Deleuze & Guattari, 1977: v). He asks “How does one keep from being fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior?” These are the kinds of questions that Alberto is posing in this particular conversation. How can we prevent ourselves from replicating power dynamics? Josep, on the other hand, trusts the intrinsic self-regulating character of public space. Ignoring people is a way of letting the space regulate itself.

When the encampment started, many poor and homeless people went to the kitchen to eat. Some ate two or three sandwiches in one single meal. Some looked very hungry and they ate with desperation. Some people told them not to eat so much and even tried to stop them on their own initiative. They [the ones stopping the poor] couldn't realize that they [the poor people] were just too hungry. This went on for about five days, I guess, until it normalized. After that, they only ate one portion. There was no need for regulation. In my opinion, people who want to regulate something are actually repressed inside. They want to do what they are stopping you from doing. They repress because they are repressed. (Interview with Alberto, November 12, 2011)

The regulation of practices and access to the encampments, assemblies and actions was always at the center of the discussions of the mobilizations. To impose regulations on the encampments and assemblies, which took place in public spaces (or publicly accessible spaces), would seem to represent the replacement of an existing order with a new one. Therefore, the movements were always concerned about regulating access, practices and participation.

Violence and the use of drugs and alcohol in the encampment were also always at the center of heated assembly debates. In the encampment in Barcelona, as well as in those of other Spanish cities, participants decided not to ban the use of drugs and alcohol in the plaza. Those in favor of prohibition argued that people using drugs gave a bad image of the movement to the public, thus giving the city excuses to evict them. Those against prohibition argued that drinking (and even smoking hashish) in public spaces was already a common practice in Barcelona and across Spain. The tradition known as *botellón* – that is, getting together in plazas and public spaces to drink

alcohol in great amounts, is largely tolerated in Spanish cities.<sup>53</sup> It is also not uncommon to see people sprinkling hashish on hand-made tobacco cigarettes in crowded outdoor areas. Therefore, the idea of regulating these activities was interpreted as a conservative imposition on an already tolerant context.

Nevertheless, some sectors insisted on protecting the public image of the movement by regulating the behavior of people in the plaza. Trying to maintain the good reputation of the movement was perceived by the most liberal sector as a way of replicating the reductionisms imposed by the media and the government. Regulating would mean buying into the idea of “guilty by association” (i.e., if some use drugs in the plaza, then the movement is about drug use). People who were drinking, doing drugs or participating in the assemblies and the construction of the encampment did not represent the totality of the movement. The “they don’t represent us” approach applied to people from within the movement as well.

In the mobilizations of 2011, the festive spirit of the encampments was a constant. The impromptu music performances and the spontaneous circles that formed around guitar players, jugglers and dancers were as much part of the movement as they were the general assemblies; however, while some sectors defended this festive spirit, others distanced themselves from such behavior. People who interpreted the movement as

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<sup>53</sup> During the first encampment in May of 2011, a big cloth billboard said: “Menos botellón y mas revolución” (Less drinking and more revolution). The sign was made by and addressed to the people participating in the encampment.

instrumental to accessing popular power and political representation saw the carnivalesque as problematic, but others defended the festival-like spirit.

The following story depicts a festive scene after a protest action at Plaza Catalunya on the day of National Elections. It was a common practice in the 15M movement to hold a protest action before or after the assembly. People sometimes said “let’s end this with something combative.” This usually meant a march, but could also mean a sit-in, a demonstration, or a *cacerolazo*.<sup>54</sup> To finish the day with “something combative”, people gathered in the center of the plaza for a half-hour *cacerolazo*. Middle-aged men, elderly women, university students, and even toddlers in their mothers’ arms were banging pots with spoons. There seemed to be around two thousand people in the plaza, though I stopped counting at five hundred.

After ten minutes, the caceroles fell into a cohesive rhythm that started to sound more like a continuous buzz. Then, after the *cacerolazo*, people gathered around a band of four drummers wearing *Anonymous* masks (which were omnipresent in arguably all the social movements of 2011 across the world) (See Fig. 7). Others sat in small circles carrying their now useless (at least for cooking) pots. Even though it had been confirmed by then that the conservative Popular Party had won the election, most people were still in a festive mood. Alberto, pointed to one group sitting in a circle where there was a man spilling beer on the ground, two girls contorting to the rhythm

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<sup>54</sup> A *cacerolazo* is a protest action that is common in Latin American and Spanish contexts, and it consists on people banging a pans and pots (caceroles) to show indignation. This form of protest became popular after the 2001 Argentinean uprisings that resulted in the ousting of the government.

of the drums, and the Romanian dwarf (quoted at the beginning of the chapter) dancing, and he told me:

Look at that scene. That is what the power is most afraid of because they can't classify it. Even within the movement, there are some people that despise pictures like that. This reminds me of that movie *300*, about the war between the Greeks and the Persians, you know? Those people over there in the circle look like the Persians, an army of different men and women, artisans, performers, archers and even crippled people, from all over the world, impossible to be classified. The Spartans, on the other hand, are like the powerful, like the police, you know? Hollywood loves glorifying people in uniforms, versions of the Nazis; the villains always look like those guys over there. (Notes from Barcelona and Interview with Alberto, November 20, 2011)



Figure 7. Festive spirit at the *Cacerolazo* ('pots and pans' protest) action on General Elections Day. People gathered around a band and joined in the celebratory event with their pots and pans, even though the conservative Popular Party had just won the elections. Video field notes from Barcelona, November 20, 2011 (Source: Author).

The spirit of openness, in a way, was a response to the regulation in public spaces and the exclusionary practices of the political system. If the space was to be considered public, it had to be permeable to all expressions already happening in public spaces. If alien practices permeated the encampment and no one had agreed with them officially in the general assembly or informally in the use of space, then they only coexisted with the other practices independent of each other. There were common practices, others that conflicted with the encampment, and still others that were simply transcended or just ignored. Public parks and plazas are already examples of spontaneous coexistence of uses (Whyte, 1981); however, the encampments tested the limits of this capacity of self-regulation.

### ***3.3 Between Infiltration and Expansion***

#### *Open and vulnerable versus protected and exclusionary*

The cost of openness was that the complexity and diversity of the encampment became increasingly difficult to manage, even though people had a strong commitment to the permeable nature that public space entails and that was enhanced by the encampments. This issue was also central to the discussions happening in the neighborhood assemblies of the 15M. Neighborhood assemblies took place in public parks and plazas in every barrio of Barcelona. In an assembly session of the

neighborhood where I lived during my fieldwork, there was a heated debate over whether to move Wednesday assemblies to an indoor space or remain in a public park.

The winter rain season was approaching, and the neighbors were worried that they would no longer be able to hold the assembly in the neighborhood park. A young mother pointed to a fenced space across the park and suggested that they should occupy it as squatters. The space was one of the many pieces of land cleared by the urban “sponging” program of the city government to open public spaces by demolishing buildings. A debate that lasted at least seven weeks started with a discussion about the importance and need for the occupation. A man interrupted, saying;

“I don’t know, I don’t like that idea. The assembly should take place in an open, public space, not in a closed space. What happens if someone wants to join the assembly and they see us over in that corner, fenced off? They are not going to join. The assembly should remain public... it is public in essence, damn it!”

A woman replied, “But it’s getting cold. It’s already becoming pretty hard to be sitting here.”

“It doesn’t matter, we should remain here in the park, we can bring umbrellas,” the man responded.

“How about putting up a tarp?” proposed another man.

“The police wouldn’t let us,” said the woman.

“It won’t be permanent, we can put it up during the assembly and then take it to the social center, just as we do with the chairs,” said the man who opposed the occupation.

“Okay, umbrellas, tarps, but what about the cold?” said the woman who had made the proposal.

“Why don’t we make a bonfire each time we have an assembly,” said the man.

“The police are going to stop us for sure. Don’t you see how they harass us already,” said a woman sitting next to me. (Field notes from Neighborhood Assembly, Barcelona, November 15, 2011)

The woman told me that the police often came closer to the assembly and started taking pictures of participants in order to intimidate them. “For sure. We are always under attack,” confirmed the man sitting to the other side. A man who only spoke Catalan suggested that they use the space of the community center [related to the city government] that is specifically designated for neighborhood meetings. Another man said they shouldn’t approach the people of the community center for any reason. “They are always asking us questions, they are not going to help us,” he continued. After taking a vote, the group decided to occupy the empty lot. The man who opposed the action vehemently disagreed because he thought the meetings should be open to the public. The action was organized for a period of two months until the idea was eventually dropped in favor of meeting in the occupied social center that had been in the neighborhood for much longer and that was already an occupied locale (Field notes from Neighborhood Assembly, Barcelona, November 15, 2011).

This story shows a controversy over whether the assembly should remain permeable or be closed. The motivations to squat in the space are different for each participant. For the woman proposing, the occupation would be a symbolic action that would give strength to the movement. For others, it was more of a practical problem, as the rain and cold were making their meetings impossible outdoors. For others, having a closed space seemed like an opportunity to become less vulnerable to police harassment and raids. For the man who was against the proposal, it was essential to have the assembly

in a public space, because it would lose its legitimacy otherwise. People need to see them meeting outside, he believed, so that they can know that it is open for all the neighbors to join and participate. He believed that the space should remain permeable for potential newcomers even if that meant being more vulnerable.

This discussion shows the dilemmas entailed in remaining open for participation in a public space. The movement was permeable to all levels of participation and all kinds of people – even those who worked against the spirit of the movement. Thus, excluding people became virtually impossible, as that would have made it necessary to define the conditions for membership.

### *Fear of Infiltration*

People in the movement worried about infiltration and disliked the fact that disruptive practices, like the use of drugs and alcohol, took place in the realm of the assemblies and the encampments, but they tolerated it. What was really perceived as a risk, though, was the possibility of agents deliberately infiltrating the movement to disrupt it. In fact, there was constant concern about so-called *agent provocateurs*. These figures have historically infiltrated all sorts of social movements in order to spread confusion, gather intelligence, disrupt the organization and undermine the reputation of the movements (Zirakzadeh, 2011). They were the real danger implicit in the principle of openness. Whether the concern was about secret police, undercover

government agents or even people from organized political organizations wanting to co-opt or use the movement for their own interest, fear of infiltration was always in the air.

The following excerpts present different cases from the OWS and 15M Movements in which the issues of infiltration and access control played an important role. In the context of social movements and protest in Spain, it was widely known that the government sent undercover agents to infiltrate marches and demonstrations. Activists have developed a keen sense to identify them, and on many occasions these agents have been actually confronted or even attacked.

The following story describes my personal experience with reactions to unknown people in small demonstrations. When I first approached the assembly of the barrio of Casc Antic, where I lived in Barcelona, I joined a march against police brutality that was moving around the neighborhood. They made stops to give short speeches and listen to a ska band playing songs in solidarity for the movement. Everyone looked at me with suspicion. One of the slogans they repeated was “What does the police do? They kill and torture!”

When a girl looked at me in anger and shouted the latter part of the slogan in my ear, I realized they thought I was secret police. So, I approached two women that I knew from previous protests and asked them to introduce me to people. At the end of the

march, they gathered in the barrio park for dinner and discussion. I introduced myself to them.

The girl who had shouted blushed and apologized when I told her I was doing field research for my doctoral dissertation. When I asked if I could join the assembly as a participant observer, one of them replied with a simple statement: “If you live in the barrio, then you are a neighbor. Don’t come here as researcher, come as neighbor and participate as such.” After getting to know them, I asked why they thought I was secret police. I told them that this was the second time I had been suspected of that. The first time, I had been participating in a march (however, mostly observing and taking pictures), when a young woman shouted a rhyme reserved only for infiltrators: “Secreta idiota, que crees que no se nota!” (Secret police, you idiot, you think it doesn’t show). When I explained that I was doing research on the movement, she replied: “You never know.” On hearing about this, they laughed and said: “Of course, that’s natural. You were alone and you weren’t participating” (Field notes from Barcelona, October 1, 2011).

This story reveals that participation is, in a way, a parameter of identity. When someone is too passive or stands alone in the crowd, the group becomes suspicious of him/her. As practice and not ideology is the measure of belonging, not engaging is seen as a sign of suspicious alienation. Identity is based on *organic* engagement in practice (Durkheim, 1964). Trust is thus based on the commitment to participation. This is more evident in a march than in an assembly. In the march, the common

practice is to walk and chant slogans. So, if you walk but only as an observer, you are not fully engaging in the same practice. In the assemblies, however, you can talk or you can listen, so people are less aware of potential infiltrators.

Familiarity is also important. On a small scale, such as that of the neighborhood, it is easier to identify who is and who is not a neighbor. Thus, the criterion of openness operates differently at this level. They allowed me to participate because, as is customary in a neighborhood, I introduced myself to the community. Moreover, the condition was that I participated as a neighbor, and not as an observer. Participating gave people the status of stakeholder. A person who was present as an observer would be suspicious and, in a way, actually engage in some of the same practices as the secret police. The space and organization was permeable to people who engaged in the same practices. Practice is what defined the criteria of permeability in neighborhood assemblies as well as general assemblies; however, participation was necessarily more intense in smaller-scale contexts.

In this story, I transitioned from being a potential enemy (and not just a stranger in solidarity with the march) to being an acquaintance after they allowed me to stay, to eventually becoming a fellow neighbor who participates in the same actions.

The neighborhood assemblies remained open for the rest of the development of the 15M. The diversity that the group achieved by being potentially permeable to anyone was ultimately valued more than the risks of infiltration.

Occupy Wall Street also faced the same issue, and there were several failed attempts to limit access for people who were undesirable to the movement. In January of 2012, there was a polemical motion for an “accountability proposal” to ban some people from the movement. At first, it was very general, but then it became specific to a particular person. The following story describes the evolution of that proposal.

In the OWS General Assembly (GA) taking place in 60 Wall Street, a privately owned publicly accessible indoor plaza that became the Winter See of the assembly, different groups presented their proposals. There were calls for actions and requests for funding to the GA to support other groups. Most of these proposals were “blocked” by an individual named Jan. Blocking is different than voting against – it means that the person blocking will leave the movement if the particular proposal is passed. In many cases, the blocker suggests a “friendly amendment” and the proposal passes. Jan, on the contrary, systematically blocked most proposals, making people in the assembly visibly frustrated.

After the assembly, a group of people called for a meeting at Zuccotti Park. The accountability proposal did not mention Jan, but when I asked the attendees what it was about, most agreed that it was implicitly addressed to her. Since the beginning of the occupation of Zuccotti, some occupiers accused her of being an infiltrator from the Tea Party, and lying about her personal background (e.g., age, education). Many said that she systematically rejected the proposals in order to exhaust them and undermine

the power of the movement. Others said that she was just particularly picky about approving solidarity or funding to other sister movements.

This motivated the drafting of the accountability proposal. A young man stood on one of the stone benches of Zuccotti Park to read the proposal to an audience of around thirty but was constantly interrupted by cries of “Bullshit!” from the audience. The most active shouters were a barely-twenty boy and a woman wearing a leather jacket with spikes, safety pins and hand-written legends all over it. The woman also stood on the bench to challenge the proposal. She argued that the proposal was elitist and an excuse to silence minority groups from the assembly and the movement. She made particular mention of the LGTB community, ethnic minorities and the homeless community, which were important components of the OWS Movement. The man on the bench finished reading the proposal and handed out hard copies to the audience. At least a couple of people crumpled up the pieces of paper and threw them in the garbage. Others left the plaza reading it as they walked away. The Jan Affair remained in the agenda of OWS for another month until the proposal was finally dropped (Field notes from General Assembly, New York, January 20, 2012).

The accountability proposal was rabidly opposed by people who disliked the person that was trying to be expelled. For many, even though it was never proved that Jan was an infiltrator, she was nevertheless a suspicious character; however, in order to be consistent with the open character of the movement, they accepted the risk of keeping her. For the movement, to have a mechanism preventing people from participating in

the assembly was contradictory to their essence. Even if some people apparently worked against the movement, others were willing to pay the price of remaining open.

### ***3.4 Dealing with the context. Externally imposed boundaries***

The lack of explicit boundaries of identity and representation in spaces created more than simply conflict within the movement – institutions existing outside the movement (e.g., police, media, government) were also confused about the movement's lack of boundaries. While the movement feared infiltration, those in power feared expansion. The lack of representational boundaries, co-optable leaders and overarching ideologies that could be publicly discredited made it very difficult for external institutions to understand them. City governments and police departments did not really understand where the movement started and where it ended. In other words, boundaries were diffuse.

In response, they imposed external boundaries (physical and conceptual) or constrained them to particular spaces and times. Some encampments were evicted while others were sent to parks and public spaces where they could be better monitored (e.g., Occupy Boston). For them, the objective was to bound the expansive character of the movement. Several mechanisms were used to create coercive boundaries around these movements and their actions. A great example is the May Day General Strike of 2012 in New York City, organized by Occupy Wall Street. The following description illustrates the relation between OWS and its context.

Occupy Wall Street promised that the General Strike of May Day would be the “Greatest shutdown of New York in History”; however, the NYPD had prepared to isolate it from the rest of everyday urban life. The deployment of security was huge. The main march from Union Square to the Financial District via Broadway was completely sealed off by metal barricades erected by the police. If you didn’t enter the march in Union Square, you would have to remain as an observer, as it was not allowed to protest on the sidewalks. The ten-thousand-people march was flanked by hundreds of police officers, and headed and followed by about fifty police cars and wagons. Helicopters also flew over the march for the whole day. At the end of the march, the Stock Market was completely militarized. If you looked at Wall Street from Broadway, you could see the deployment of three heavily equipped lines of policemen arranged in a layered formation: regular street policemen in front; then riot police with shields, helmets and clubs; and behind them, a mounted police contingent. In the distance, you could see the permanent lookout posts and iron barricades emerging from the ground that had remained in place since the occupation of Zuccotti.

The intention of the police was to set boundaries in order to separate the protesters from the rest of people. A protester shared with me that this had become a common scene after the occupation. “I have seen people walking dogs and jogging on the other side of the barricades as if nothing is happening. They are completely alienated from the protest. The idea is that the protests shouldn’t spread,” she told me (Field notes from New York, May Day, 2012).

Encapsulation became a recurrent strategy for the NYPD. The strategy of “kettling” (corralling protesters with nets or police officers) that police departments used to contain marches of Occupy movements around the world revealed the preoccupation about the growth of the boundaries (or the non-boundaries) of the movement. I first saw this tactic in practice two months before the May Day Strike on the half-year anniversary of the occupation of Zuccotti Park (in September 17, 2011).

Six months after the occupation of Zuccotti, people marched towards the park. There was a crowd of about five hundred people standing in a circle and celebrating a general assembly. Others were singing songs and having conversations further from the assembly but still inside the park. The temporal reoccupation lasted for around three hours. Around 10 PM, hundreds of police officers surrounded the protesters, who were sitting on the ground. A girl trapped in the center shouted “You can’t shell a revolution!” as the policemen tightened the circle and arrested the protesters, pulling them by their hair, and by their belts and pants, thus stripping them and exposing their buttocks on more than one occasion. A protester was taken by his arm by three policemen, and they smashed his head against a glass door, which they broke. Ambulances came to attend the wounded. At the end of the raid, around a hundred people were arrested and tens were taken out in ambulances. The next day, there was a march to protest against police brutality, also departing from Zuccotti Park and heading towards Union Square. There were about seventy protesters walking on the sidewalks and stopping at every corner and every stop sign, as it was illegal to march on the street. A group of about a hundred police officers surrounded and flanked the protesters, completely encapsulating them as they marched. Ten of them carried packs of plastic handcuffs on their belts<sup>73</sup> and five of them who were dressed in civilian clothes next to them were constantly talking into radios. There were three police cars and two golf-cart-like vehicles also flanking the march. Inside the “capsule”, the protesters marched as they chanted a blues song: “Mamma, mamma, can’t you see... what the police has done to me... they’ve been trying to beat us down... but we’re rising all around. (Field notes from New York, March 17 and 18, 2012)

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<sup>73</sup> The occupiers often joked about the plastic handcuffs. After the mass arrest of more than 700 Occupy protesters at the Brooklyn Bridge, a month after the occupation of Zuccotti, they said the NYPD kept a pair of handcuffs for every New Yorker.



Figure 8. Encapsulation of the May Day March on Broadway. The NYPD fenced off the demonstration from Union Square to Wall Street. People were allowed to join or leave only once. Video field notes, New York, May Day, 2012 (Source: Author)



Figure 9. Police contingent blocking Wall Street from Broadway on May Day. Behind the policemen, there is a military-like control post with thick-caliber metal barricades installed in the middle of the street are permanently displayed since the occupation of Zuccotti in 2011. The bull bronze across the street is still fenced off and a police officer stands next to it, guarding it rain or shine. Video field notes, New York, May Day, 2012 (Source: Author).

The encapsulation strategy was used predominant throughout the development of Occupy in New York. On some occasions, they encircled protesters for hours, denying them food and access to the toilet, until the protesters were exhausted and left one by one. When they use this tactic, the capsule only opens if you want to leave. In other cases, the police corralled them with a net and used pepper spray. The kettling strategy became infamous in other sister movements around the world, as local police departments also adopted the tactic. It is a tactic of attrition intended to tire the protesters.

“It is like a condom,” a friend later told me in Barcelona. “This happens here, too. They fear that this might spread,” he continued. Later, I shared the image of the condom with another occupier in New York, and he enriched the figure: “Exactly, a condom! They are afraid that something is going to spring out of this.”

Among the occupiers, there is an acknowledgement of the contagion and seminal character of the encampment. Such encapsulation is an effort to define boundaries for a social organism that is dangerous to them precisely because of them.

The notion of boundaries was present in the discussions of most social movements of 2011. In a communiqué from the occupiers of Tahrir Square in Cairo to Occupy Wall Street, they touched upon the subject: “Hold on to these spaces, nurture them and let the boundaries of your occupation grow (...) reclaiming these spaces and managing

them justly and collectively is proof enough of our legitimacy” (Comrades from Cairo in NYCGA, 2011: 21).

Since encapsulation seeks to contain “the proliferation of margins” (Guattari, 2007), it acknowledges that the practices and relationships that constitute the movement are “contagious”. Self-organization and openness operates as a “germ” that redefines and reverses the top-down relationships that commonly structure space (Castoriadis in Chatterton, 2004).<sup>74</sup>

Externally imposed boundaries, however, were somehow transcended by the movements. Most of the practices that happened in the encampments (e.g., debates, general assemblies) were also replicated in other places. In the next chapter, I analyze how the movements continued operating despite the imposition of boundaries.

### ***3.5 Conclusions***

The stories described in this chapter illustrate the conflicts that arose in the encampments and general assemblies insofar as they worked as open spaces. These events illustrate how the spatial and organizational boundaries of these spaces were

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<sup>74</sup> Castoriadis uses the metaphor of *the germ* to describe how autonomous organization operates. He says “[a]s a germ, autonomy emerges when explicit and unlimited interrogation explodes on the scene” (Castoriadis, 1991: 163 in Chatterton, 2005). Another reference to the idea of self-organization and autonomy as being contagious is Lotringer’s notion of “the virus of power” (Lotringer, 2007). He claims that autonomy reverses the logics of top-down power. They are both complementary ideas; however, Castoriadis uses the metaphor of the germ to describe how autonomy positively “infects” others, whereas Lotringer says that autonomy “cures” the infection of power.

constructed, sustained and regulated. Although there were no explicit regulations for the space (on the side of the movements), the disagreements, confrontations and debates provide an approximation of the values that gave a sense of belonging to the space.

First, we learned that whenever there were disagreements, the people involved engaged in debate and assessed the status of the person in respect to themselves. If their viewpoints were too different, if they were not taking the assembly seriously, or if their presence in the plaza was only circumstantial, then the participants merely ignored them. The arrangement of space and identity was made through a process of differentiation between strangers and acquaintances (or if there was enough affinity, they could even become brothers, sisters, or *compañeros/compañeras*). The tensions were never resolved by fencing off people or policing the space, but through self-regulation. This allowed the space to remain open.

Second, we learned that public space was already potentially open to many kinds of uses that are regulated through quotidian renegotiation between strangers and acquaintances. The encampment made use of that implicit order and built upon it. It was a more intense use of the space, but it was still just another use; however, the intensity of the use is what tested the limits of the amount of complexity that can be hosted in public space. For example, the police argued that the encampments were “privatizing” the space. In the case of the Barcelona encampment, eviction was attempted because there was a soccer match celebration scheduled at Plaza Catalunya.

So, they dispersed people from the plaza and removed the encampment in order to make space for this event. The issue of congestion was often the excuse used to evict the encampments. The campers never seemed to mind this congestion. There was never a tension between the soccer fans and the protesters but between the police and the protesters. The space itself remained open to other practices.

Third, we learned that the issue of the replication of external practices inside the encampment was always present. Although, the movement was inspired by the refusal of representation (e.g., economic, social, cultural, political), there were manifestations of representational institutions, such as the police, banks, charity and so on. For example, some sectors from within the encampment wanted to have a “security” body watching that people did not use drugs or alcohol in the space; however, these people were largely ignored as those practices had already become common in that space before the occupation. Again, the space was regulated not through the fencing out of these practices or the expulsion of people that engaged in them but by creating a critical mass engaged in the same protest practices and thus outnumbering the alien practices.

Fourth, we learned that, even though the space was resilient to external practices that were neutral or just strange to the encampment, the movement was very vulnerable when infiltrated by agents that deliberately wanted to harm it. The infiltration and external imposition of boundaries by the police ended up stripping them from the space; however, in these cases, the movement mutated into smaller versions of itself

and turned into neighborhood assemblies that replicated the practices of the encampment at a smaller scale. Thus, they became “temporary autonomous zones” (see section entitled *Three Approaches of Boundary Conceptualization* in the next chapter). The encampments embraced self-regulation, and the protesters were usually willing to coexist with people that did not engage in the same practices. But, how can we make sense (socially, politically, in terms of identity) of a space that is atomized by various different practices? How can we imagine identity and organizational coherence in a space that does not set the practices that define it?

In the next chapter, I explore this question and the dilemmas created by the openness of the encampments and assemblies. Using maps and diagrams to illustrate the issues presented in this chapter and building upon the notion of *permeability*, I problematize boundary conceptualization and space-making in open spaces.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE DILEMMA OF OPENNESS: THEORIZING BOUNDLESS SPACE

In this chapter, I will analyze how the spaces that were used by the mobilizations of 2011 preserved a certain organic integrity even though there were no boundaries delimiting them. To understand what I call the “dilemma of openness”, I present three different approaches – *compartmentalized spaces*, *permeable spaces* and *milieus*. Here, I use diagrams to illustrate how boundaries operate in different forms of spatial organization and to differentiate how practice bonds and how physical delimitations bound people in space.

The dilemma of openness is the consequence of structuring space through socially constructed permeable – or absent – boundaries. The experiences analyzed in the previous chapter show that openness was perhaps the most valued aspect of the movements. Participants trusted and embraced the openness of practices, though not necessarily of people. Although everybody was potentially welcome, not everything was welcomed. This means that people were considered part of the same identity if they engaged in the same practices. Others that shared the same space, but who did not engage in shared practices, shared the space but not the identity. Therefore, the space actually worked as a boundless space. It operated as a *milieu* that was only

differentiated from its context by the *intensity* of practices and relationships happening within it.<sup>75</sup>

Building on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *milieu*, I explore the concept of *spaces of becoming* to understand how the dilemmas generated by openness were overcome.

Analyzing how the notion of boundaries was addressed internally and externally in the social movements, I show how space was constructed by different people through the convergence of common practices. Here, I analyze the role that time played in the survival of those practices in the movements.

#### ***4.1 The dilemma of openness***

The social movements of 2011 were the result of the generalized refusal of conventional representative processes and figures. With no explicit demands and principles that could constitute an ideology, they developed a strong commitment to practices, congruent with the spirit of openness that is the theme of this chapter. This approach produced conflicts and dilemmas, as illustrated in the stories of the previous chapter.

This dilemma was present in the development of the encampments and assemblies of the two social movements analyzed in this work, and it is as follows: **if the space**

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<sup>75</sup> Deleuze and Guattari (1983) use the term *Body without Organs* (which they borrowed from A. Artaud) to refer to entities that are differentiated by intensity and in through which external flows pass through without substantially affecting the milieu in which they take place. This figure is helpful to think about how the social movements of 2011 operated in public spaces.

**remains open to anyone, it can potentially grow in diversity and complexity, but compromising its initial coherence. On the other hand, if the space is bounded, then it keeps coherence but cancels the possibility of renovating itself with external contributions.** Thus, the question arises: exactly how much complexity can the space host without losing coherency? Interpreting how boundaries operate between the movement and its context is key to understanding this dilemma.

The socio-spatial boundaries that emerged in the 15M and OWS mobilizations were physical and organizational limits that were always to a degree permeable. The encampment and assemblies absorbed voices and practices coming from a wide range of collectives and associations as well as from individuals participating of their own initiative. The encampments were constantly nurtured by external participation until it became highly difficult to identify any thematic coherence.<sup>76</sup> They were in a way a scaled-down version of the movements at large.

Having analyzed several cases in which conflicts revealed that the identity and physical boundaries were ambiguous, we can now return to the initial questions posed in the last chapter: How can we understand and conceptually delimit space when it exists without explicit conceptual and organizational boundaries? What are the “ties that bond and bound” the organization and the space (Tilly, 2003)? And how is space socially constructed in the face of the dilemma of openness?

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<sup>76</sup> This why many have called these kinds of movements as “non-movements” (Bayat, 2010), “movements of movements” (Mertes, 2004), or as local analysts called them in Barcelona, “social mobilizations” (Bonet, 2012; Rebelaos, 2012).

To analyze the social movements of 2011 within a framework that contemplates defined physical, organizational, political and ideological boundaries is impossible. Borrowing practices and discourses from other movements in other parts of the world and from traditions of resistance in other times, these movements developed their own aesthetics from the crossbreeding between different groups and collectives within the movements. The dilemma of openness is the result of analyzing urban space (and social organizations' use of that space in particular) in terms of defined boundaries and physical compartments.

#### ***4.2 Strangers and acquaintances***

As discussed in the introduction to Part 2, Richard Sennett (1977, 1991) argues that the public is the realm in which not everyone knows each other – that is, a realm of “strangers and acquaintances”. Public space is constructed through relationships and negotiations between these two. In the encampments, people could participate and collaborate with people whom they knew or did not know. The constant structuring and restructuring of the map of strangers and acquaintances in the same space is what makes public space so resilient to conflict. Space maintains a general coherence and order despite the occupation of heterogeneous publics; however, in a congested space such as the encampments, this resilient capacity and coherence was tested.

The stories analyzed in the first section of the previous chapter illustrate an implicit sense of coherence in the encampments. The practices and topics that are considered relevant, sensible, acceptable and tolerated are never declared as such. They can be deduced from the relationships and interactions occurring in the plaza. These stories demonstrate a sense of outside and inside, even though there were no declared boundaries to make it physical or evident. In most of the stories, it was clear that practice was the criterion of inclusion. Therefore, the participants were defined by what they did and how they did it (e.g., participating, collaborating, engaging in direct actions), rather than by what they were (e.g., communists, feminists, anarchists).

Discrimination, disrespect and violence were disavowed by the movement. In the encampments and assemblies, people reacted in ways that discouraged such practices; however, the people that engaged in these practices were allowed to remain in the same space and the encampments still maintained their structure. There were also practices that coexisted with those of the assembly and encampments that were “neutral”, such as people strolling through the plaza, street vendors selling souvenirs and tourists taking pictures, to name a few.

Sometimes these alien practices penetrated (e.g., in the cases of the street vendors, tourists, homeless) or infiltrated (e.g., in the cases of agent provocateurs, secret police or partisan militants seeking to turn the movement into a political party) the space of the encampments, sharing the same spaces but not engaging in the same practices.

This permeability has implications. First, there was a certain commitment to self-regulation. People disapproved, challenged or even condemned certain practices, but they never expelled anyone from the space. Such people were often ignored when they remained in the space. Second, there was a certain faith in the notion of the public. Public space provided the context in which the assemblies were happening. This can be interpreted as another layer of the space (usually the way that city governments interpret space) or as the same political layer that already existed latently and was reactivated precisely by the assemblies. This faith in public space trusts that different practices can coexist in the same space despite and beyond potential conflicts. When a person engages in a practice that clashes with the encampment practices, the person is detached from the interactions and relationships but not from the space. In other words, in a space that is regulated by practice, potentially anyone is allowed but not everything is allowed.

Such openness to anyone implied not a lack of regulation but a faith in self-regulation. In general, the participants saw openness as an opportunity. They were more provoked by the arrival of newcomers than they were suspicious. They trusted that newcomers were more likely to join the movement than to infiltrate and disrupt it. In that sense, the encampments operated in opposition to the tendency to “wall off the differences between people” and the “assum[ption] that these differences are more likely to be mutually threatening than mutually stimulating” (Sennett, 1990: xii). The “fear of exposure” that, according to Sennett (1990), drives people to withdraw from encounter and engagement in public spaces was challenged by an attitude that embraced

exposure – that capitalized on it. The fact that they invited people to join the assemblies (or even the movement) when those people approached to ask questions revealed that they were very confident about the value of their ideas and self-regulation. Therefore, they believed that the encampment and the assemblies could influence or even transform people, as happened in the case of the construction worker who, after being challenged for his xenophobia, stayed in the assembly and appeared to have changed his views. If it was the case that the person did not change, the participants could always ignore him or her, as people usually did in public spaces.

People engaged in the same practices in the same space but could also coexist with those who did not engage. For example, the person who spoke while intoxicated during the ceremony remained in the space, but as people felt offended by his disrespect of the ceremony, they no longer paid attention to him; they essentially demoted him to the status of a stranger.

Conflict did arise, however, when two strangers deliberately acted against one other, as in the case of the person interrupting the beggar's speech. One man's actions clashed with those of the other. In this case, self-regulation momentarily disappeared and a form of regulation arose based on a type of social contract. Though this contract was implicit, it was clearly based on the sense of equality upheld among the participants: everyone gets to talk, and everyone gets the same amount of time. When the contract was disrupted by someone who was perceived as an outsider, people

intervened to coercively expel the person from the space. After that, the criteria of openness and self-regulation were restored.

Permeability entailed tension between the social organism and its context. There was a permanent tension between the movement's fear of infiltration and the hegemony's fear of expansion. The effort of police and city governments to impose external regulation upon the movements and encampments proved that openness was more of an advantage to the movement than a weakness. The strategy of encapsulation revealed a fear that the movement could spread and more people could join. Those tactics were physically coercive as they realized that communication, interaction and exchange between the movement and its contexts flowed beyond boundaries. Co-optation by ruling political parties (i.e., sympathetic comments from the Democratic Party in the United States and the Socialist Party in Spain) also failed, as the movements only allowed people participating *ad personam*, even when they belonged to a political party.

The dilemmas and conflicts produced by openness remained throughout the development of the 2011 movements. Participants somehow learned to live with these dilemmas and embraced the possibility of infiltration and expansion. They preferred to take the risk of including people that could disrupt the movement than to develop mechanisms of exclusion like the so-called "accountability proposal" to expel specific participants that was proposed to the OWS General Assembly.

To make sense out of the conflicts and negotiations that delineated the social map of the encampments and general assemblies, I propose three different lines of analysis for the conceptualization of spatial boundaries, as described below.

#### ***4.3 Three approaches of boundary conceptualization: compartmentalized spaces, permeable spaces and milieus***

Especially in regard to social and political organization, boundaries are used as mental constructs and become problematic when thought of in absolute terms. They are conceptual tools that help us to consider and analyze different issues, but thinking of them merely as divisions puts us at risk of thinking in terms of reductionism and compartmentalization.

*1. Compartmentalized spaces* are those that are imagined to have defined borders that contain one spatial reality as distinct or separate from another. They are considered in terms of a dichotomous relationship of inside-outside. The space is impermeable to the context. In Figure 8, we can see a diagram of a space that is constructed through impermeable boundaries. Identity and spatial divisions are graphically clear and defined. In this approach, public and private, indoors and outdoors, workplaces and leisure spaces, and my house and your house are clearly delimited by physical boundaries (Fig. 10). Space is defined by the different controls that enforce these limits.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Lefebvre (1974) describes how capitalist space is produced through two main processes – *commodification* and *bureaucratization*. The former is the gridding and delimitation of space into compartments that can be taxed, priced and speculated with. The latter is the police and governmental

This dichotomous approach is currently becoming the trend in the planning and design of public space. Spaces are becoming increasingly subdivided and fenced off physically and through the regulation and coding of their uses. For example, we are now seeing more and more public spaces in New York City that are fenced-off within a small park – such as playgrounds, dog-friendly areas, and dining spaces – with different strict regulations for each. These spaces are physically and functionally impermeable to other uses and users.

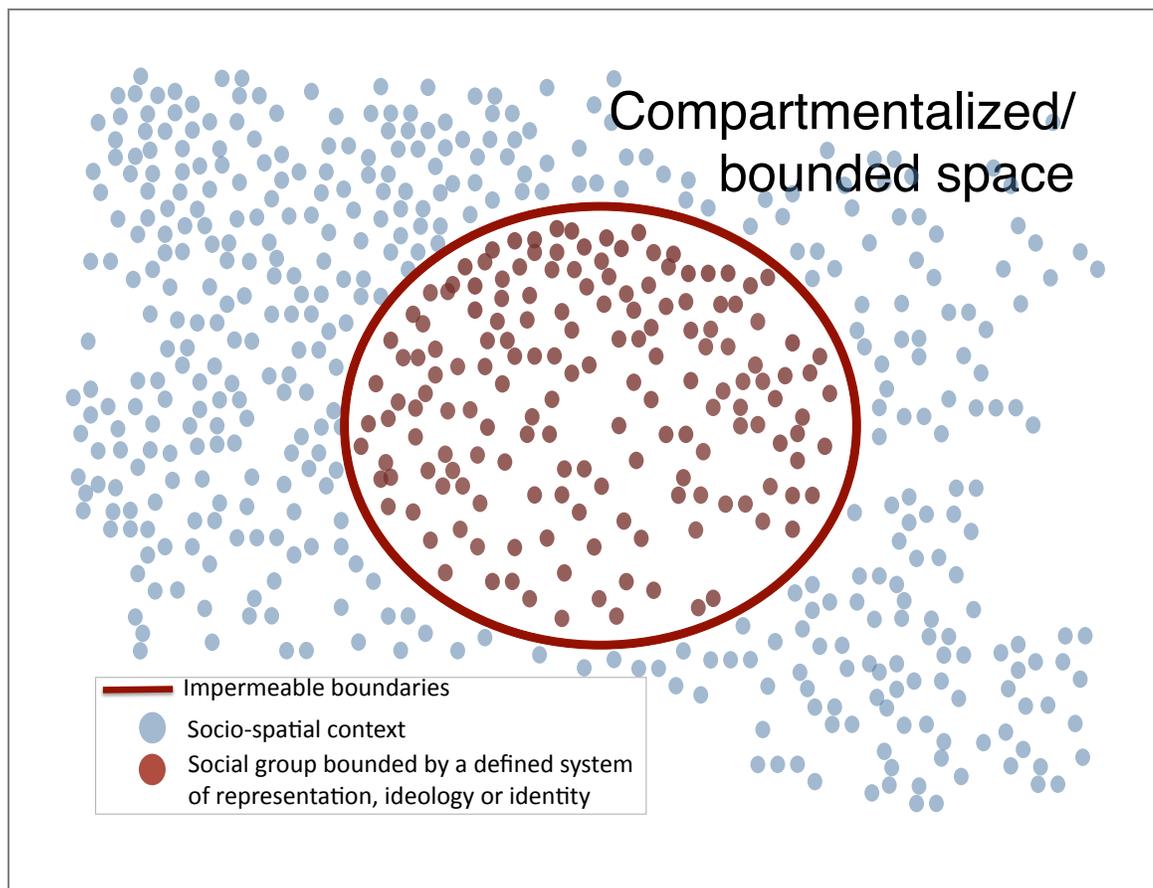


Figure 10. *Compartmentalized space*. The spatial, organizational, ideological and identity ties are delimited by boundaries that differentiate the organization from its context. (Source: Author)

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power imposed on the space to control and enforce the former. See For more on this, in see Lefebvre's (1974) *The Production of Space*.

2. *Permeable spaces*. In this kind of space, boundaries are diffuse and the context in which the bounded space is embedded penetrates the space; furthermore, the practices happening in the space expand beyond its limits. In this case, public and private space overlap, and the practices of a permeable space flow to and from the context (Fig. 11).

To situate this in regard to the two cases analyzed in this chapter, this approach helps to approximate the movement as various different movements overlapping and working across the boundaries of the overarching structure of the movement (i.e., what Mertes (2004) calls a “movement of movements”).

The stories analyzed in this chapter illustrate how the realm of the encampment hosted not only individuals that joined the movement freely but also a variety of collectives, associations and groups that participated in the general assemblies and debates at the plazas. Most of them participated individually and only represented themselves *ad personam* (even though they belonged to or militated in other organizations), but in some cases they presented proposals collectively. Some organizations overlapped in the encampment, and some individuals worked in more than one organization that came together in the movement. The limits between the encampment, the organizations that joined it, and the context that surrounded them were diffuse; yet, the practices in which they engaged when performing in the plaza defined the nature of the encampment and the movement. In Figure 9, we can see how space can be conceptualized in this way.

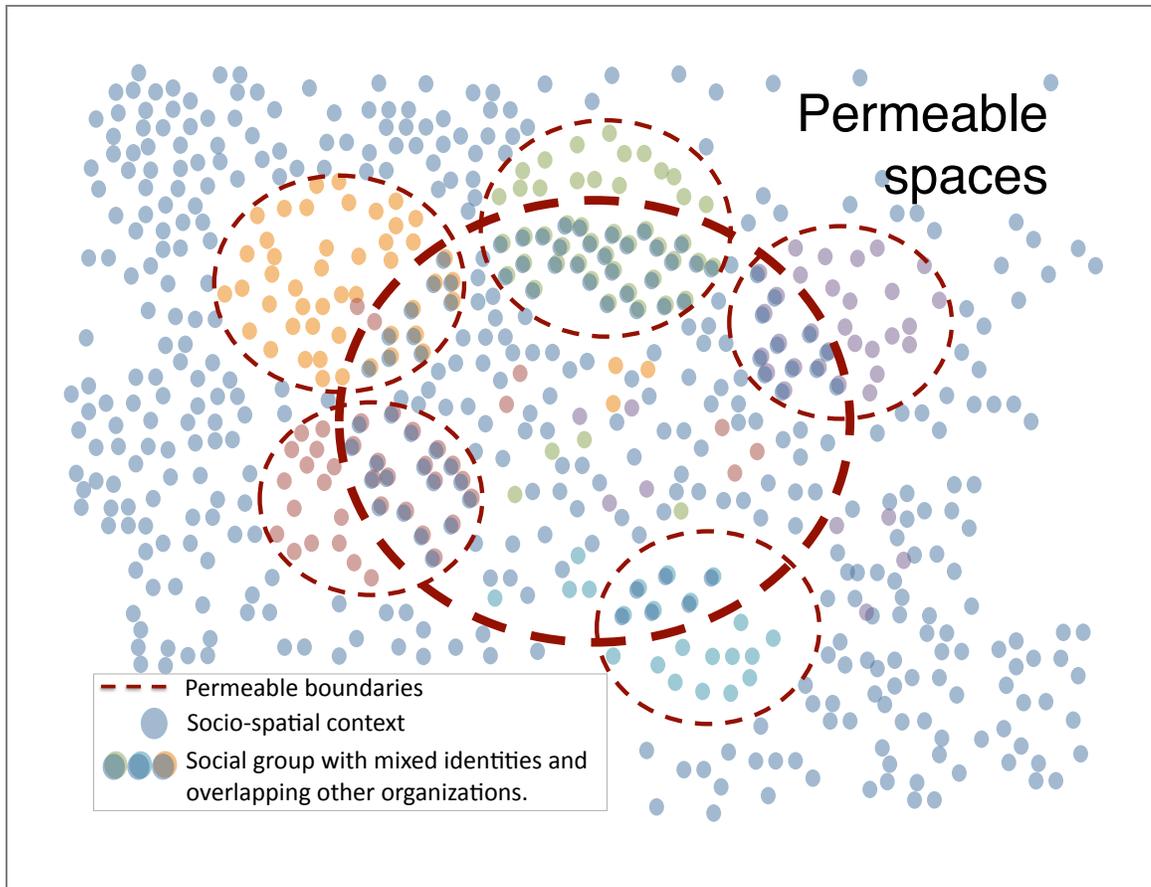


Figure 11. *Permeable spaces*. A movement of movements (Mertes, 2004). Diagram of a social movement or organization with permeable boundaries. In this case, the movement overlaps with other organizations and the space is open to external participation. Nevertheless, there are boundaries that define membership. (Source: Author)

3. *Milieus*. A third way of analyzing how space is socially constructed vis-à-vis its context is to think of it as a realm without boundaries. In this case, the space is not delimited by physical boundaries but constructed as a *milieu*. This is a space that is only defined by differences of intensity. In a milieu, groups of practices, exchanges or interactions are more intense closer to the center and less intense along the periphery. Therefore, it is unclear where the milieu starts and where it ends (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983).<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari (1983) explore the

This implies approaching space not as physically delimited but as organically constructed, and requires thinking of space as defined by the convergence of practices in the same location, regardless of the spatial limits. In this view, social space exists as people perform together. This approach is closer to what Durkheim called *organic solidarity*, discussed above.<sup>79</sup> This is the interpretation I will explore in the remainder of this research, as it illustrates a richer view of how space was constructed in these social movements.

The two social movements analyzed here embraced an existence without boundaries in an effort to elude the risks of reductionism. To think of urban space in those terms complicated the notion of boundaries and provided more helpful tools to understand how flows and exchanges operated across physical limits.

#### ***4.4 Spaces of becoming***

The public space where the encampments and general assemblies took place remained open to people who were external to these activities, and they coexisted most often without conflict. They do not necessarily overlap (i.e., as layers) but exist independently of each other. Looking at it from that perspective, the encampment is

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notion of *milieu*. They describe how space is constructed as a network of rhizomes that interconnect endlessly. The milieus that host a higher intensity of rhizomatic networks form what they call a *plateau*. The relationship which exists between plateaus and that which exists between a plateau and its context is not mediated by boundaries but by differences of intensities.

Another helpful concept that they explored is that of *Body without Organs (BwO)*, that was mentioned previously in this chapter. A *BwO* is a milieu that does not process and codify the that which flows that go through it; however, the intensity and kinds of flows that going through it define the milieu.

<sup>79</sup> *Mechanic solidarity*, on the other hand, is closer to the notion of defined identity boundaries (i. e.g., religion, ideology, lifestyle, etc.). (Durkheim, 1897).

not even a space but the convergence of common practices in an already existing space. In this sense, the space was not necessarily defined by the surface that the common practices cover but rather by the various intensities in which they occur. The encampments were more *milieus* than they were conceptually defined spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1981). They were *spaces of becoming* – spaces in a constant process of becoming something else and in which people become something else.

In a *space of becoming*, since the differentiation between one space and another is not achieved through boundaries but through difference of intensity, spaces are always transforming in time (i.e., turning into something else) and transforming in respect to their context (i.e., turning into the context and thus merging with it). In the following passage, Deleuze and Guattari (1980) explain differentiation by becoming:

The real distinction [is] between forms, but forms belonging to the same aggregate, the same thing or subject. *Now, however, expression becomes independent in its own right, in other words, autonomous.* Before, the coding of a stratum was coextensive with that stratum; on the organic stratum, on the other hand, it takes place on an autonomous and independent line that detaches as much as possible from the second and third dimensions. Expression ceases to be voluminous or superficial, becoming linear, unidimensional (even in its segmentarity). (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980: 80)

A *milieu*, such as the encampments and the assemblies, does not operate within the logics of an outside-inside dichotomy (i.e., the inside is open to the outside) but rather as a condition in which there is a boundless continuum that is only differentiated by the convergence of practices. The practices of the assembly, for instance, took place in the esplanade of the Plaza Catalunya, and were surrounded and overlapped by other practices unrelated to the assembly, such as street vending, strolling, and tourist activities, to name a few. In other words, the milieu of the assembly was porous to

other activities that did not affect it. This porosity is what gave the mobilizations of 2011 an enormous capacity of resilience. Potentially adverse encounters, like those described in the previous chapter, were filtered by this porosity. The assembly continued to happen among these external influences and inputs. Thus, the encampments were spaces in which people *moved* differently. This alternative motion coexisted alongside other ordinary activities (Fig. 12).

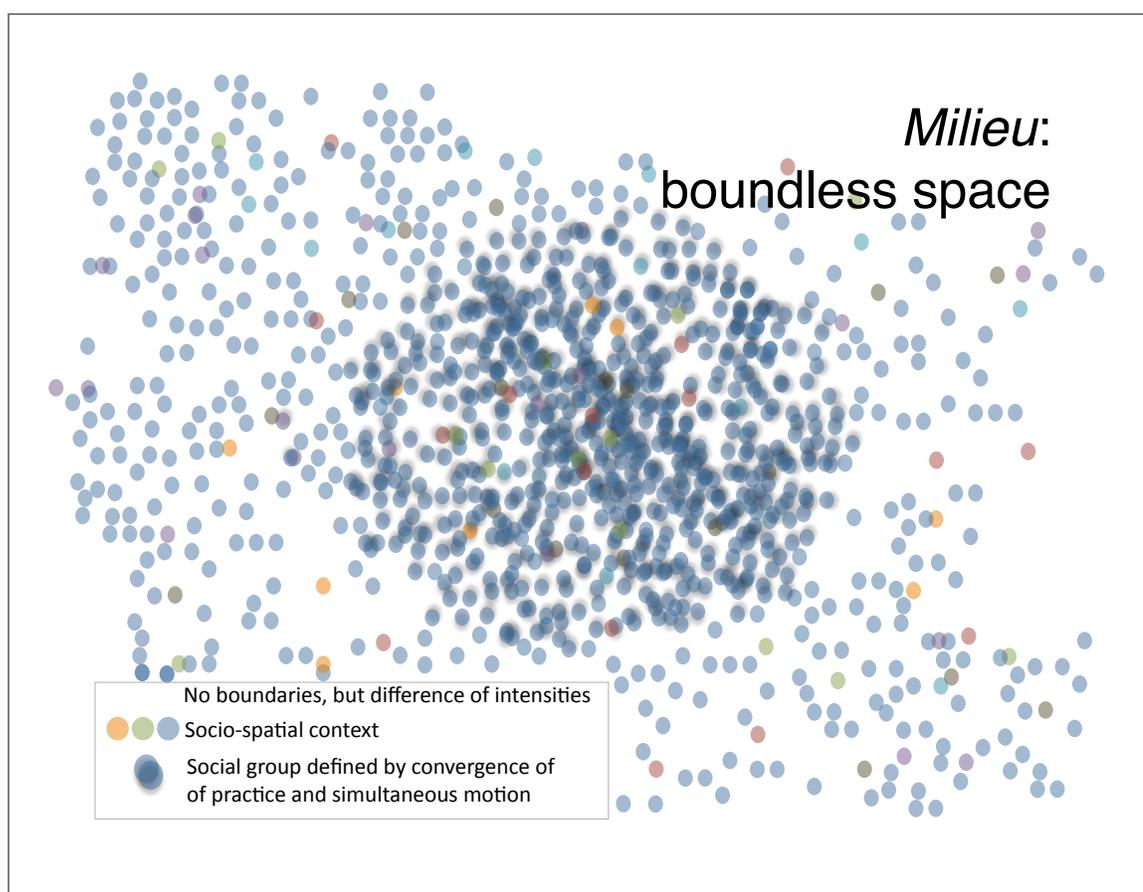


Figure 12. Diagram of a *milieu* (boundless space). The protest encampments, general assemblies and the movements largely operated similar to this diagram. The participants, represented by the blue dots, are no different from those outside the movement. The only thing that differentiates them is that they engage in common practices. The darker blue dots in the center represent people “moving” together differently. The movement is defined by this common motion. The lighter blue and other colored dots represent people that coexist or cross the milieu of the movement without engaging in the same practices. They could represent, for example, the street vendors who continued selling their products during the encampment, the tourists and the observers who do not engage in the same actions. They could also represent infiltrators or secret police. The integrity of the milieu is maintained even though it hosts unrelated activities. (Source: Author)

Practices took place in some spaces with more intensity than in others. In the case of the encampment, the practices related to the encampment were more intense closer to the center and more diffuse along the periphery. As they dissipated in the margins, they mixed with other practices until they completely disappeared or merged with the urban context bit by bit. This mixed realm in which the movement becomes the context resemble boundaries, but they are not boundaries, as there is no division. Nevertheless, it is the space in which penetration, infiltration and frictions take place and transformation as well.

The encampments consisted largely of individuals coming together in the same practices. They participated and performed together autonomously and independently of defined organizations, such as political parties, unions, churches, associations, and so on. In autonomous organization, people work together but “in no way [are] required to agree on everything, or to speak the same stereotypical language, [and] [c]ontradictions, even irreducible antagonisms, [are] allowed to coexist” (Felix Guattari in Lotringer et al., 2007: 110) – as was quoted in the previous chapter. This was most evident in the wildcat strikes that hosted affiliated (flagged) and non-affiliated (flagless) participants engaging in the same actions, regardless of their ideology (see section *Identity and complexity: The flagged and the flagless* in Part 1).

The encampment was a milieu where people participated in practices that challenged the relationships on which the system was based. The spirit of openness was the

practice that challenged these relationships most frontally. Exclusionary politics, representative democracy, entrepreneurial leadership, non-transparent corporate lobbying, and so on were all replaced by an approach that potentially allowed anyone to participate, especially those who had been particularly marginalized by the system (e.g., homeless, immigrants, unemployed).

The encampments generated seminal moments in the movements, and these moments in turn generated an alternative system of relationships that – in order not to be turned into substitute ideologies – were never officially proclaimed. Non-hierarchical relationships, openness, direct engagement in challenging power and enacting autonomous power (rather than demanding power from power) were among some of the relationships that were tested in the encampment. The boundaries of a movement that operated in such a way are difficult to trace, as the movement is defined by the convergence of disparate, diverse and autonomous “molecular revolutions”, as Felix Guattari (2007) described it. This means that people engaged autonomously and by their own initiative in alternative relationships that sought to radically challenge the system.

*A space of becoming* defined by the convergence of alternative practices and relationships (in different intensities) has no recognizable boundaries. Instead, it has margins capable of “proliferating” and expanding (Guattari, 2007) and alternative organization spreading as a “germ” to the context (Castoriadis in Chatterton, 2004). As the city governments came to realize that it was impossible to conceptually delimit

– let alone understand – these movements, they decided to contain them. As the movement potentially embraced anyone, the police imposed the boundaries externally (Fig. 13). The relationships and practices happening in the encampments were now occurring like controlled explosions surrounded by metal barricades, surveillance towers, control posts and tens of police cars, as happened in Zuccotti Park in New York City. Although these boundaries were only physical, as relationships, communication and interaction transcended the boundaries imposed by the police, they managed to stop this condition from achieving their objectives in space. Encampments were evicted, strikes were contained, and marches and protests were encapsulated. In that sense, the organization of space turned out to be a crucial component of power.

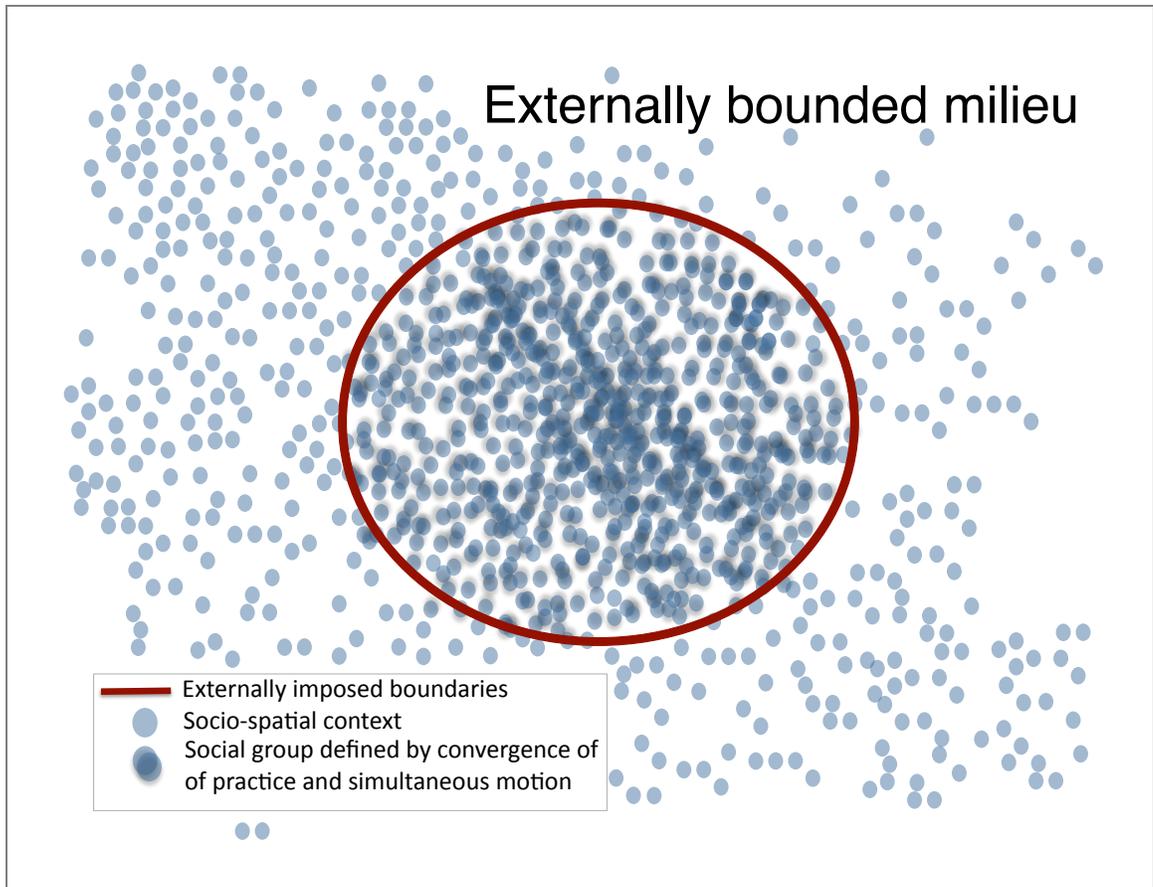


Figure 13. Diagram of an externally bounded *milieu*. This diagram illustrates the case of the encapsulation of the encampment at Zuccotti Park. The variety of activities taking place in the park constituted a boundless milieu; however, the boundaries were imposed from outside in order to contain the practices from expanding. (Source: Author)

Although spatial boundaries were imposed externally, temporal boundaries were not imposed, as the actions, organizations and relationships were taken elsewhere after the evictions and raids. In the case of Barcelona (and throughout Spain), the encampments were dissolved in favor of neighborhood assemblies that would operate as smaller localized versions of the one in Plaza Catalunya. In this way, the organization of the movement survived in time, though not in space (Bey, 1991). In the third section, the neighborhood assembly's discussion about whether to take the assembly indoors was

intense because keeping the spirit of the original encampment in Plaza Catalunya was key to preserving those relationships over time (Fig. 14).

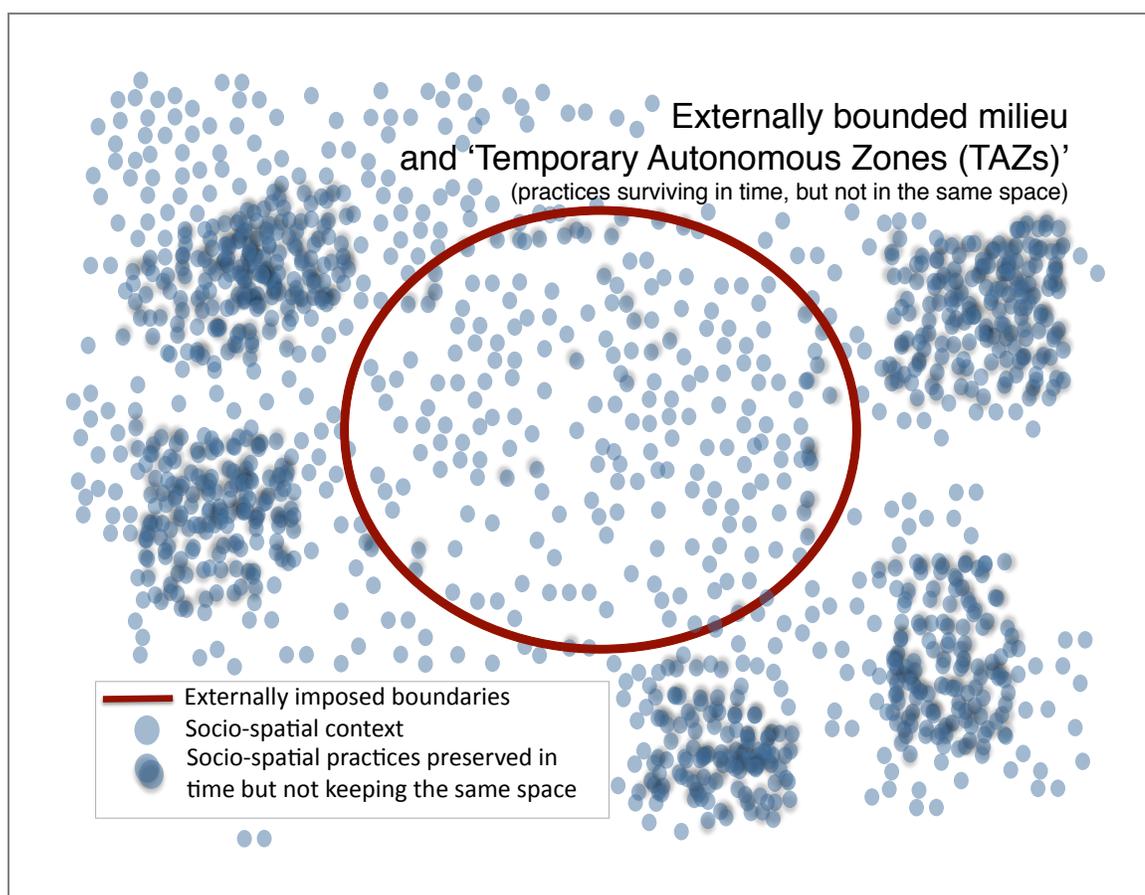


Figure 14. Diagram of practices escaping the bounded milieu. This diagram represents the aftermath of the dismantling of the Barcelona encampment. The space of the plaza was repossessed by the city, but the practices of the encampment (e.g., assemblies, debates) were taken to neighborhoods across the city. They continued meeting regularly in public spaces, thus engaging in the same practices on a smaller scale. Thus, the alternative “motion” that shaped the movement survives in time but not in space (Bey, 1991). (Source: Author)

The temporal dimension allowed action not only to transcend urban space, but also global space as well. The different movements of 2011 and beyond also converged temporally in common actions. The General Strikes of New York and Barcelona hosted simultaneous actions in different parts of the city and the “15-O/United for

global change” demonstrations (that were discussed in Part 1) did the same at the global level, engaging in the same actions at the same time but in different spaces.

The mobilizations of 2011 formed through actions that resonated at the same time, like two guitar strings tuned to the same note. The resonance of their actions operated beyond space and without hierarchical coordination (Situaciones, 2002). This notion of resonance has been explored by *Collectivo Situaciones* (2002) to understand how Argentina’s uprising of 2001 happened as a result of the reverberation of different movements of resistance throughout the country. This is a helpful concept to understand how boundaries (or the lack thereof) can operate to create identity across linking, and transforming space through solidarity.

The transcendence of space in time is arguably how these movements spread across the world and endured over time: the practices of the Cairo encampment inspired the occupiers of Plaza Catalunya, Zuccotti Park and recently of Taksim Square, in Istanbul. Since 2011, there has constantly been an active encampment in some part of the world, as a result of the resonance between movements.

Like dancers in a choreographed production taking place amidst a multitude of bystanders, the protest encampments, the assemblies and their actions moved in a coordinated fashion. After the participants were evicted from the encampments by the Barcelona Police, the participants were no longer in the same space but the movement

was still maintained and spread out into various different places at the same time.

Simultaneity is to time what convergence is to space.

Simultaneous engagement gives practical cohesion to the milieu. The social ties of the people engaged in these practices were defined by bonding – rather than by bounding – processes. The members of the heterogeneous multitudes of encampments bonded as they performed together.

The simultaneity of practices gave a collective identity, even when people did not share the same space. Performing together (converging in space, resonating in time) meant that people who joined the “dance” became part of the movement. With no nominal representation or belonging, performing was the only way to be part of the movement. In that way, the sense of belonging also ends when participation ends.

The encampments were spaces in which people engaged in the same processes, without worrying much about the outcomes. Even as these processes defined the movement, the participants embraced a sense of *unpredictability* (Forester, 1999) about the outcomes, not only of the movement but also about themselves. People were open about the concept and the objectives of the encampments. The encampments were not spaces to proclaim answers but to formulate questions. The questions became increasingly specific but remained unanswered. Moreover, people were also open about their own identities in the movement. They used the encampments as spaces to

pose questions about how they positioned themselves in the movement and what it meant to act together but autonomously.

In *spaces of becoming*, external contributions from newcomers constantly redefined the nature of the movement. The notions of equality, democracy, participation, regulation, and so on changed every time someone from outside engaged in the actions of the movement. Even though the cohesion and thematic coherence of the movement was compromised, each time someone new arrived, they embraced the transforming nature of this openness. The outcome of this process of becoming was as unpredictable and diffuse as the boundaries of the space where these processes took place.

The commitment to openness raises the risk of not being able to achieve objectives in the long run (in that sense, they operated tactically rather than strategically). The commitment to processes reveals a commitment to internal transformation rather than to external impact. Change and transformation really occurred as people converged and engaged in common practices.

In an interview with Alberto, a frequent visitor of the Plaza Catalunya encampments who defined himself as a dissident of the dissidents, he expressed the spirit of embracing transformations (i.e., becoming) of identity and sense of place. He said about 2011: “Yes, the world is changing, but what do you care if the world is changing if you are not changing?” (Interview with Alberto, December 15, 2011). In a *space of*

*becoming*, there is opportunity and agency (and unpredictability) to become something else and thus transform space rather than being reactive to how the spatial reality is changing people.

In the next chapter, I will explore how the notions of openness and permeable boundaries operated in the planning of the physical space of the encampment of Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona with the objective of drawing lessons from space-making processes happening in this context for planning and urban design practices.

## PART 3

### OPEN PLANNING: THE PROTEST ENCAMPMENTS AS URBAN LABORATORIES



3D Interactive photograph from the Plaza Catalunya (Source: [acampadabcn.wordpress.com](http://acampadabcn.wordpress.com))

“[we want to] open up to create something new. We are not even sure what that something is. We know we want to create open space. What that looks like we are discovering together, as we create, which is also how we create.” (Marina Sitrin, 2012)

The occupation of Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona lasted more than six weeks. During that time, the encampment hosted debate sessions, stencil workshops, impromptu music performances, poetry readings, film screenings, puppet theatre shows, an open library, a communal orchard, a kitchen that fed thousands twice a day, and a daily open-to-the-public general assembly. Occupy Wall Street’s encampment in Zuccotti Park lasted for two months with similar results. In this picture, it was difficult to identify any hierarchical organization or overarching spatial structure and even more so to pinpoint the planners of that event, but it was impossible not to recognize planning.

Nevertheless, the conventional conception of space and time, the notion of objectives, and the positioning of the planner in the relationships of political and economic forces were frontally challenged in the making of the encampment. The physical space was shaped by organic and spontaneous processes that embraced and capitalized upon the collaborative and open spirit of the encampment.

The encampments functioned as true urban laboratories in which alternative forms of urban planning and design were tested. Since they were physical manifestations of the organizational and aesthetic structures of the movements, they experimented with the refusal of representative politics and with the commitment to open participation and permeability, as the two previous parts discussed, in regard to the physical space of the plaza.

In these two chapters, *Turning voices into spaces: The protest encampment as spaces of uncertainty and potentiality* and *Planning in open spaces*, we will explore the notion of *open planning*, understood as the organization of space in a context that is permeable to material, organizational and informational inputs from outside. In this part, the analysis will be based only on the fieldwork undertaken in the Barcelona encampment – and not in the Zuccotti Park one – as more material allows better documentation and understanding of how it was planned.

Drawing from interviews with people who were directly or indirectly involved in the planning of the encampment and analyzing the different media produced by the

movement participants during the occupation of the plaza (i.e., assembly minutes, maps, declarations, photographs and videos), Part 3 aims to follow the spontaneous evolution of the encampment and its representation since its foundation, in order to tease out the spatial and material criteria that implicitly guided its planning and understand the spatial structure of the encampment vis-à-vis its meta-spatial structure (e.g., social, political, identity). I will complement the text with diagrams, drawings and photographs that represent these structures.

## CHAPTER 5

### TURNING VOICES INTO SPACES: THE PROTEST ENCAMPMENT AS SPACES OF UNCERTAINTY AND POTENTIALITY

This chapter analyzes the space-making processes of the Barcelona encampment in order to understand its socio-spatial functioning as well as its physical planning criteria. It particularly focuses on an analysis of the interrelation between the interactions and communication processes (e.g., debates, conversations, performances) vis-à-vis the material planning of the encampment.

As discussed in previous chapters, the encampments were (1) spaces of refusal of representation (i.e., economic, political and social representation processes), (2) spaces of reflection, and (3) spaces of deliberation. These processes also happened in parallel to the construction of the encampment. It was a space in which the coding processes of external representation were replaced by a more direct, *in situ* and in-real-time form of representation (or, as discussed in the first chapter, “presentation”). This affected the way in which the space of the encampment was planned.

The encampment was not only a means to an end but an end in itself. Therefore, the interactions and their physical manifestations in the plaza also followed the spirit of openness that dominated the general assemblies. As we will see through the fieldwork material, the first encampment of Barcelona was planned without an explicit spatial program. The structure was discovered instead as the deliberation processes took

place. The decisions about where and how to place the different locales in the plaza (e.g., commissions' stands, orchard, space for film screenings, kitchen) were made in response to daily challenges as they were presented. Therefore, improvisation played an important role in the planning of the space.

In the first section, I briefly describe the planning of the second encampment that occurred in Plaza Catalunya a year after its predecessor in 2011. Then, looking back, I compare the planning of the two encampments and depart from the premise that although the physical outcomes of the two encampments are similar, the planning processes were very different in their conception of time and their approach towards experimentation.

In the second section, I analyze the evolution of the first encampment day by day, and describe how the encampment operated as a spatial version of the conversations happening in the plaza and online. For example, as questions became more specific, the spaces became more specific, and as questions remained open, the spaces similarly did not materialize into physically defined spaces. I analyze three figures operating in the plaza that later translated into spaces – namely, the general assembly, the agoras and the working commissions.

The objective of this chapter is to deconstruct the apparently random material processes that took place in the encampment in order to tease out the spatial order that structured it. As we will see, the encampment did follow the order of the “collective

mind” that resulted from the cloud of interactions and communications taking place online and offline.

### ***5.1 Planning the Barcelona Encampment***

From the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of May of 2012 (12M-15M), exactly one year after the initial occupations of Plaza del Sol in Madrid and Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona, the 15M Movement organized a series of rallies and actions across the country. The Barcelona city government declared the reoccupation of Plaza Catalunya illegal; however, the movement successfully established a 4-day encampment without significant police opposition. During that period, the encampment hosted a variety of causes that, after a year of organization, had consolidated into well-organized collectives.<sup>80</sup> The following excerpt describes the physical organization of the plaza during the 12M-15M encampment:

The commissions’ stands were established in the outer ring of the granite esplanade, thus leaving the center for the general assembly. They began building the stands early that morning in spaces that were previously designated after two months of planning the event. They consisted of about 100 square feet with working space in the back, with chairs, tables and sometimes printers and computers and a long table facing the square in the fashion of a “front desk”, for petition signing and the display of triptychs and handouts for visitors. Some stands extended beyond their spaces with exhibition and announcements boards that created circulation tunnels between this space and the stand. Behind the stands, there was grass space that was used to place the camping tents and sleeping bags in which people from the commissions spent the night.

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<sup>80</sup> There were many collectives (some of which have been cited in Chapter 2): *Rearguard in Movement*, *The Constituents*, *Feministas Indignadas*, *International Commission*, the branch that articulates struggles similar to those of the 15M worldwide (i.e., Occupy movements); *Audit to the Debt*, *Platform for Those Affected by the Mortgage (PAH)*, the 15M *Housing, Health and Education Commissions*, to address the dismantling process of the public sector; *Auto-organization (Autogestio)*, a collective that produced a half-million copies of the newspaper *Rebel!* from individual donations only; and *Real Democracy Now*, among many others.

The activities in the commissions also defined the physical display of each stand. For example, the education commission had a large space dedicated to watercolors and crayons for children as well as exhibition space, and another stand taught how to make stencils, so the space looked more like an outdoor workshop. The kitchen was located in a large space on the south side of the esplanade. With spaces for storage, preparation, disposal, dishwashing and serving, it was a system of its own. The space of the general assembly was open and the stage was only defined by a wooden board for writing out the session's agenda. Right next to the space dedicated to the general assembly speakers and facilitators there was an electric generator powered by a bicycle on which the participants took turns pedalling, in order to have energy for the sound system.

There was also a large group of people unaffiliated with any commission that also attended the encampment. There were performance actors intercepting passersby, people delivering flyers and circles of people sitting on the grass playing guitars and drums. Other people were building spider-web-like structures among the tree branches. At the gates of the plaza, there were information points and a van of the alternative TV and radio network "La Tele" that was covering the event. (Field notes from the 12M-15M Encampment, Plaza Catalunya, May 12-15, 2012)

After observing the encampment for four days, I realized that their participants acted like they knew exactly what to do. The commissions took their designated spaces and diligently built their stands, prepared their printouts, made pin-buttons and displayed their pictures and signs on the exhibition space (Fig. 1). Having a timeframe of four days, they did not want to waste any time. This picture looked nothing like the stories they had told me about the encampment from the previous year, in which people were spontaneously organizing the space and making decisions on the basis of experimentation.

Most of the material and spatial components of the 2011 encampment were present in this one too, but they were the result of the previous year's experience rather than experimentation. For instance, people put *Anonymous* masks on the faces of the

granite Venus statues, placed provocative quotes on the grass, and wrote poems on the electric poles, just as they had spontaneously done in 2011. The actual space of the encampment did not appear to be strategically important – but rather symbolic – for the movement as they had said it was a year before, when after two weeks of occupation, people resisted the riot police and were able to keep the plaza.

Conversely, in the assemblies, participants reported that it was a success to have been able to build and dismantle the encampment so efficiently. A woman, in the evening assembly of the last day of the occupation, said: “We were able to occupy this plaza for four days even though the city government declared it illegal. We put together the encampment so that we could discuss the progress of the movement in each barrio assembly and on each particular topic. Now we are ready to go back to our towns and barrios and continue working. Compañeras, this [the 12M-15M event] was a success, be proud of yourselves” (Field Notes, General Assembly, May 15, 2012).<sup>81</sup> The crowd of about two thousand sitting in the esplanade waved their hands in the air in a sign of agreement. Another woman told me something similar about the 12M-15M event: “We have proven that we are more than just an encampment. I know that people were disappointed after the eviction and they would like that we stay longer this time as well, but we have to change our tactics. The encampment was the right action when it happened, but now we have to move on and do something different. Or do the same thing, if it is the right action for that particular case” (Interview at Plaza Catalunya,

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<sup>81</sup> Unlike Barcelona, the 15M in Madrid was unable to reoccupy the Plaza de la Puerta del Sol. The plaza was under the control of the riot police during that time. There were beatings and mass arrests of protesters who wanted to enter the plaza.

May 15, 2012).

In my observations, the second encampment seemed to have resulted from the planning of the space, but the structure did not reveal how they arrived at that particular spatial program and organization. In order to understand this, I had to learn more about the physical evolution and spatial representation of the first encampment, from the documentation made by the movement itself and from interviews with people involved in its planning.

**DÍA 12**

**Salida**  
18h. Plaça Catalunya

**Recorrido**  
Pl. Catalunya – Balmes  
Balmes – Diagonal  
Diagonal – Passeig de Gràcia  
Passeig de Gràcia – Pl. Catalunya

**18h**  
Pl. Catalunya

**DESPUÉS DE LA MANIFESTACIÓN**

Empezamos la asamblea permanente de 3 días (12,13,14) para coordinar las acciones temáticas del movimiento 15M.

Estamos aquí para retomar nuestras vidas, para organizar las acciones continuadas que a partir del día 15 de mayo nos lleven a recuperar los espacios de vida y de justicia que se han arrebatado a la gente. Queremos dejar claro que el pueblo somos la solución.

**13-14M**

Nos organizamos aquí en esta plaza en permanencia durante 3 días coordinados en estos 5 espacios temáticos para la acción

• Ni un euro más para el rescate de los bancos.  
• Sanidad pública y de calidad.  
• Educación pública y de calidad.  
• Vivienda digna garantizada.  
• No a la precariedad laboral, renta básica universal.

En la plaza se constituyen estos 5 puntos de organización que trabajarán en permanencia cada una de las respectivas temáticas. El trabajo a llevar a cabo en cada uno de ellos es:

- 1 - Informar
- 2 - Decidir y organizar las acciones del día 15
- 3 - Plantear las estrategias de futuro para recuperar nuestros espacios de vida

**Forum dels Pobles:**  
Un punto de encuentro en el que se visibilicen y debatan las líneas de trabajo de los diversos colectivos para poner en común el trabajo realizado y reflexionar conjuntamente sobre cuál es el próximo paso. <http://forumdelspobles.wordpress.com>

**Asamblea general:** cada día a las 21h

**15M DÍA DE ACCIONES**

**¡ACTÚA!**

Figure 15. Flyer of the May 12-15, 2012 Barcelona Encampment in Plaza Catalunya. The drawings describe the route of the demonstrations (left) and the spatial distribution of the plaza (circle in the right). The commissions were established along the outer ring of the granite esplanade, leaving the center for debates and the General Assembly. They were distributed thematically. Housing, Labor, Communication, The Debt Issue, Education, Health, etc. were some of the thematic groups. They also placed information posts at the entrances of the plaza. (The objectives of the encampment, as it is stated in this flyers, were to “(1) Inform, (2) Decide and organize actions and (3) Plan future strategies to recuperate our vital spaces.” (Published in <http://12m15m.acampadadebarcelona.org/es/388/>)

## ***5.2 Spatial Maieutics: Evolution of the encampment***

The Barcelona encampment started without any specific spatial plan. In Barcelona, a group of about 150 to 300 people went to Plaza Catalunya motivated by a declared sense of indignation (Fig. 2). Two weeks later, about 12,000 people were participating in the encampment (Wikipedia.org, 2013) (See birds eye photograph of the encampment in Fig. 1 in Chapter 1). In the first days, there were only small groups of people sitting in circles talking about the foreclosure crisis, the privatization of public health and education systems, the labor reforms that had resulted in the reduction of worker's rights, and other causes, using sleeping bags to stay in the plaza overnight. By the time it was dismantled, though, there was a scene very similar to that of the encampment of 2012, with tarp structures, stands, camping tents, orchards and workshop spaces. How did the encampment achieve this level of spatial complexity in such little time, and what organizational and aesthetic structure supported the physical structure of this occupation?



Figure 16. First General Assembly in Plaza Catalunya, celebrated on May 16, 2011. People met in the esplanade, without any explicit intention of making an encampment. (Source: [acampadabcn.wordpress.com](http://acampadabcn.wordpress.com))

The majority of the people initially went to the plaza in 2011 with a sentiment of refusal about the general order of things. They approached the plaza with more questions than answers, and often said to the press they still had no grievances or demands that could be made public. Instead, they invited people to join the debates at the assemblies to discover together what the occupation was about. They also said they did not know how long they would stay in the plazas. The encampment was planned amidst a sense of spatial uncertainty, but also of potentiality. The minutes registered at the assemblies show the spatial planning of the encampment evolved as a physical metaphor of the movement at large.

The Barcelona encampment started hours after its counterpart in Madrid on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Lore, a middle-age retired woman, described the beginning of the occupation of the plaza: “We just decided to meet in the plaza because we’d had enough. Some people say there was a call for occupation, by some website [the collective Real Democracy Now from Madrid], and maybe there was... it doesn’t matter. We just thought we had to go to Plaza Catalunya, when we heard they had taken Sol [Plaza de la Puerta del Sol in Madrid]. We just came because we thought, ‘That’s it!, We’ve had it!’” (Interview with Lore in Plaza Catalunya, December 2011)

As discussed in the previous chapters, the motivation for the movement was a widespread sense of refusal, a notion of knowing what they did not want without knowing exactly what the alternative might be. According to the minutes of the first assembly, the protesters concluded the discussions with an open invitation:

We invite all the people of Barcelona, all social movements and struggling workers to make use of the plaza as a megaphone and as a space of encounter. The plaza is self-proclaimed as a free and peaceful space. Three commissions have been created – Communication [...] Logistics [...] [and] Art. This movement welcomes anyone who wants to defend his/her dignity, and it will not be co-opted by any institution, logo, [political] party or acronyms. (General Assembly minute, May 16, 2011)

This quote is a sort of birth certificate for the movement and the encampment in Barcelona. It is the first testimony of the thoughts and conversations that would become the 15M. These brief assembly minute has very strong spatial connotations. By declaring the plaza a free and peaceful space, a place of encounter, and a

megaphone for the people, they seek to recover the political dimension of the space. Plaza Catalunya, like many other public spaces in Barcelona, had been recurrently criticized by urban scholars, citizen collectives and activists as being a pacified and gentrified space in which only leisure and spectacle activities were encouraged. Even though the initial factors motivating the movement were the privatization of public services and the foreclosure crisis, the encounter, the conversations, the debates, the art and the music all made the protesters realize that meeting in the plaza could be not only a means but also an end in itself, as revealed by the testimony of the Bolivian activist in the first chapter. The activist initially felt depressed, alone and even ashamed, but when he encountered others like himself in the plaza, he began to feel again like his life had meaning. It is transcendence-in-rebellion that takes a person from individual absurdity to collective sense, as Camus says.

However, uncertainty is also manifested in the testimony. The phrases “we invite” and “we welcome” are statements that embrace uncertainty as an opportunity. It conveys a further implication: we have found ourselves here – in the physical and transcendental sense – and we have recognized that we collectively refuse, that we are outraged, but we do not know what is the next step, so we invite you to join us and find out together. This spirit of welcome is immediately transmitted into the physical space of the plaza. Therefore, the space is perceived as a blank canvas on which to rehearse and express a spatial alternative reality.

These conversations and debates would gradually turn into spaces in the plaza, developing into multiple thematic commissions, collectives and sub-organizations; however, in this first session, only three are mentioned. The Logistic commission was in charge of anything related to “eating, drinking, materials for signs and [...] the organization of sleepovers” ([acampadadebcn.wordpress.com](http://acampadadebcn.wordpress.com)) – that is, the physical planning of the incipient encampment. At that time, there was clearly no real plan for an encampment; there was no defined spatial program (as it is referred to in design disciplines), but only the enunciation of needs.

In architecture practice, the design of a space is usually preceded by a study of the needs for the space that subsequently becomes a spatial program. The users may suggest a program in the form of needs (e.g., a place for eating, sleeping) or in the form of the actual areas (e.g., a dining room, a bedroom). The encampment is the result of an interesting planning and design process, because it is not the result of specific questions about the space but of deliberately vague provocations. The figure of the invitation is recurrent in the discourse of the 15M mobilizations. This translated into the spirit of openness and permeable boundaries that dominated the movement. The space of the encampment became a physical representation of this – a space that was presented as an open question, without a prescribed program or layout. Marina Sitrin, who writes about the Occupy Movements of 2011, describes this approach as prefigurative:

[we want to] open up to create something new. We are not even sure what that something is. We know we want to create open space. What that looks like we are discovering together, as we create, which is also how we create: together, horizontally

and with affect. What we are doing and how we are doing it are inextricably linked, and both are part of this prefigurative movement. (Marina Sitrin, 2012)

Although this quote refers to horizontal movement in general, it resonates with the discussions on the first day of the occupation in Plaza Catalunya. The encampments were the spaces in which these prefigurative moments took place. The prefigurative approach refers to the idea of enacting, rather than demanding, change. The actions of the group seek to engage in the creation of a project that was prefigured. In this case, their project is defined by the refusal of a hegemonic project and the embracement of the uncertainty/potentiality that this refusal produces. It seeks to make new spaces “in the shell[s] of the old” (Ince, 2012).

To return to the “Do not name it” banner, the encampment’s spirit of potentiality is the result of this spatial-material refusal. This relates also to the movement’s slogan “no one represents us,” which was initially addressed to the Parliament, political parties and official trade unions; going forward, though, the refusal of names and representation seeks to function as a semiotic challenge. It seeks to recuperate the meaning of words – the signifier from the significant. Translated to urban space, it means that this is not “a plaza” in the traditional sense, it is whatever you want it to be – a free space, an open space, a space of encounter.

The condition of open space was sustained not only by this refusal of the plaza as a finished space, but also by keeping the conversations, debates and call for actions open. These communication and interaction processes were not linear, in the sense that they sought to reach conclusions, but rather cyclic. They asked questions that led to

new questions on which others could elaborate, build upon and explore further in a way similar to Socrates' *Maieutics*. This pedagogical method consists on posing questions that are then followed by other questions, which take the students continually deeper into the truth. Plato (in reference to his master, Socrates) often stated the truth is latent in every mind or, in his own words, "minds are pregnant with the truth." Therefore, the philosopher is like a midwife who assists in the delivery of the truth. In the case of the encampment, there were never leaders, only facilitators that helped the debates and conversations to carry on. The implicit rule, in the debates (departing from the spirit of refusal) was to question things radically (i.e., from the roots) in order to find true alternatives.

This way of communicating was also manifested in the space-making processes of the encampments. As we will see in the following sections, the encampment grew in size and complexity as more people joined the debates and conversations every day in the agoras and general assemblies. The space of the encampment mirrored this increasing complexity.

### *The Agoras: Space as an open question*

The plaza also became a space for brainstorming about what was being refused and what was being proposed and envisioned. It was a new public space for questioning what a space and a public is and could be. Nevertheless, the brainstorming gradually

started to define thematic clusters that were then further developed, resulting in actual proposals and projects.

In the encampment, this brainstorming about the overarching principles and spirit of the movement transformed into three thematic “agoras”, as they were called, or “open forums”. The spaces of the agoras were not physically delimited or designated, but only located vaguely as gathering places along the elliptic granite esplanade in the center of the plaza. They were spaces of debate and conversation, and they were not thematically specific like the commissions that later resulted from them (e.g., the commissions of environment, economics, media, housing, health, education) but rather were deliberately diffuse in their objectives.

The references to the Roman forum and the Athenian agora are interesting, as they are the epitome of public and democratic spaces, respectively. The agora, especially, was a space to which every citizen was invited to participate.<sup>82</sup> Naming these spaces as “open forums” defines them as “places of communication and performance” rather than as physical spaces. The vision of democracy as an ongoing conversation and debate and as a process and outcome at once was one of the unspoken commitments of the 15M. It was perceived as a power that is in constitution and not yet constituted. If anything, their design/planning programs are declared open questions. The space is conceived as a flow rather than as a crystallized material space, which is the ultimate objective of architecture and design. Democratic potential (*potenza*) as a flow is

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<sup>82</sup> Unlike the Greek agora – which excluded women, slaves and foreigners from participating – the Barcelona encampment and general assemblies were belligerently feminist and internationalist.

different from government power (*potere*) as a finished object: the latter is a frozen version of the former (Negri, 1999). This is particularly explicit in space. The agoras embrace this potential.

The three agoras were named after struggles that were considered inspirational to the movement and that were recurrent in the conversations in the encampment: (1) *Iceland*, in honor of the protests that resulted in a democratic revolution and the incarceration of the bankers and ministers that produced the economic crisis,<sup>83</sup> (2) *Palestine*, in honor of the endurance of the Palestinian resistance, and (3) *Tahrir*, in honor of the conquest of the public square that became an emblem of the Egyptian Revolution. The themes of the agoras were not considered as models for the movement but perhaps as “guiding stars” that vaguely suggested where to go, once it was clear where not to go (i.e., the refusal of the hegemonic order). The agoras convened on the granite esplanade to have conversations about the three inspirational causes, while the commissions were physically established with canvas stands along the perimeter of the esplanade.

The agoras operated in a way similar to think tanks<sup>84</sup> – a question was posed and participants had debates around it. They intended to function as seminars in the deep sense of the word (i.e., seedbeds). The outcomes of the debates at the three agoras in

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<sup>83</sup> The Icelandic Revolution was considered a referent for the 15M Movement. Protesters often carried the Icelandic flag or placed it in the hands of the equestrian statues of kings and princes on horseback, or sometimes they just carried signs that said “Iceland”.

<sup>84</sup> Occupy Wall Street also developed a project called *Think Tank*, in which several topics were discussed. Direct democracy, the idea of the commons and the notion of diversity of tactics were among many of the topics discussed in the Think Tank.

the early days of the 15M were more difficult to track than those at the commissions, most of which recorded minutes for each session. Perhaps they are only intuitable in the praxis of the movement at large.

The commissions, on the other hand, were much more hands-on and worked in stands comprised of canvas, chairs and tables; however, there was conversation and debate within the commissions as well. A woman in the plaza one year after the first encampment told me that, in the agoras and commissions, they talked about:

“everything: the economy, health, education, housing, etc. [...] but on the basis that these should serve human beings and not the other way around, on the basis that we [people] are not merchandise”<sup>85</sup> (Interviews in Plaza Catalunya, May 13, 2012).

The agoras produced no minutes to explicitly document the conversations that occurred within them. They were created days after the foundation of the encampment and lasted for a brief period of time. Briefly after the attempted eviction, they stopped being represented in maps. Having attended many general assemblies and observed how challenging it was to stick to the subjects of the proposals being discussed in the sessions, I suspect that the agoras were created as spaces to continue the conversations indefinitely; however, they did not operate entirely independently of the assemblies, as the people who participated in the agoras also participated in assemblies. The participants brainstormed about general questions about the struggle in general and later made proposals to the general assembly. They operated similar to students in a

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<sup>85</sup> A recurrent slogan of the 15M was “We are not merchandise in the hands of politicians and bankers.”

classroom that work in teams (i.e., agoras) of five with markers and sheets of paper on the floor and later presented their contributions to their peers (i.e., the general assembly), but at a massive scale. As mentioned in the previous chapters, this way of operating was a form of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) and deliberation-in-action (Forester, 1999), as the agora discussions only permeated, influenced and inspired the proposals of the assembly but did not dictate them.

Although those three agoras were dissolved shortly after the founding of the encampment, twenty to thirty people created a group called “Agora Barcelona”, which continued to meet in Plaza Catalunya even after the encampment was evicted. Six months after the eviction, Dogo, a participant of Agora Barcelona, explained to me the origin of the group: “The Encampment Barcelona is different from Agora Barcelona. We met regularly, but after it [the encampment] was dissolved we swore to continue meeting in the plaza every week at least, because there were things that were being discussed that were still pending. We couldn’t just dissolve” (Interview with Dogo, Plaza Catalunya, November 30, 2011).

I attended the meetings of Agora Barcelona for more than four months. Alberto, who had been a dissident since the times of Franco, invited me to join what he called “a true assembly” and introduced me to the small crowd as a “compañero from Nueva York”. Unlike other debate groups and neighborhood assemblies in which I also participated, Agora Barcelona was more open to newcomers and encouraged them to participate often. Even though, I was not present when the three agoras existed, my

experience in Agora Barcelona gave me a glimpse of what they might have been like. In these sessions, they talked not only about specific actions for the movement but also about the emotional side of the movement, about how they conversed, and about the meaning of dissent, among other concerns (See testimonies in Chapters 1 and 2, section on Self-accountability).

This collective discussed proposals and questions in the form of brainstorm sessions. For example, when the city government decided to build a for-profit skate rink (with public moneys) on top of the esplanade of Plaza Catalunya during the winter, the collective had a brainstorm session on how to stop this project, as it was an effective privatization of public space.

All sorts of proposals were made. Some suggested occupations and blockades of the construction site. Others suggested letting them finish the skate rink in order to later infiltrate the skating sessions and turn the space into a protest site “on ice”. “We should take our banners and maybe do a cacerolazo inside the skate rink,” said a woman. Another man suggested sabotage. “We should infiltrate it and then drop sacs of salt on the ice in order to spoil it”, said another woman. An elder man said “No, we should not wait until they make the skate rink, we should stop them before they do it. This is outrageous. This is a public space and they’re going to exclude us by charging us 12 euros for one hour?! I say no!” Later, I saw a man who had not attended the meeting sharing a wilder proposal: “We are seriously considering flying over the plaza in a delta wing and dropping the salt sacks on the ice surface,” said the man laughing,

amused by his own proposal (Agora Barcelona Assembly, November 30, 2011). None of these ideas ever materialized, but there was a protest on the day of the rink's opening.

The agora did not operate as an assembly, where one proposal is voted over another. The discussions were somehow left open, and actions such as the protest against the skate rink were undertaken as discussions continued. This spirit was manifest in the planning of the encampment in the first weeks. The encampment was built while people continued to question what to do in the space and while they continued to invite people to join with more ideas. As the conversations continued in the plaza, however, the questions started becoming more specific, and that was also reflected in the planning of the space.

#### *The Commissions: Asking more specific questions*

Every afternoon, after the conversations and debates in the agoras and commissions had finished, they were summarized in the form of proposals and presented in the evening general assembly, which was also at the esplanade. At night, this same space was filled with people in sleeping bags. This cycle repeated every day for more than six weeks, until the encampment was voluntarily dissolved (Fig. 1); however, the space of the encampment grew in population and complexity over those weeks. New commissions and collectives developed out of the early conversations at the assemblies, and others joined from outside.

The evolution of the questions could actually be mapped on a daily basis. The first day, people only gathered in the center of the plaza and had conversations that ended with a general assembly. Tasks were assigned, but they were still part of a single organization (Fig. 17). The second day, they started three commissions (Fig. 18). The third day, they broke into seven (Fig. 19). The next couple days, the three agoras (Fig. 20), met in the center of the plaza before the general assembly, and by the end of the week there were tens of commissions, collectives and action groups.

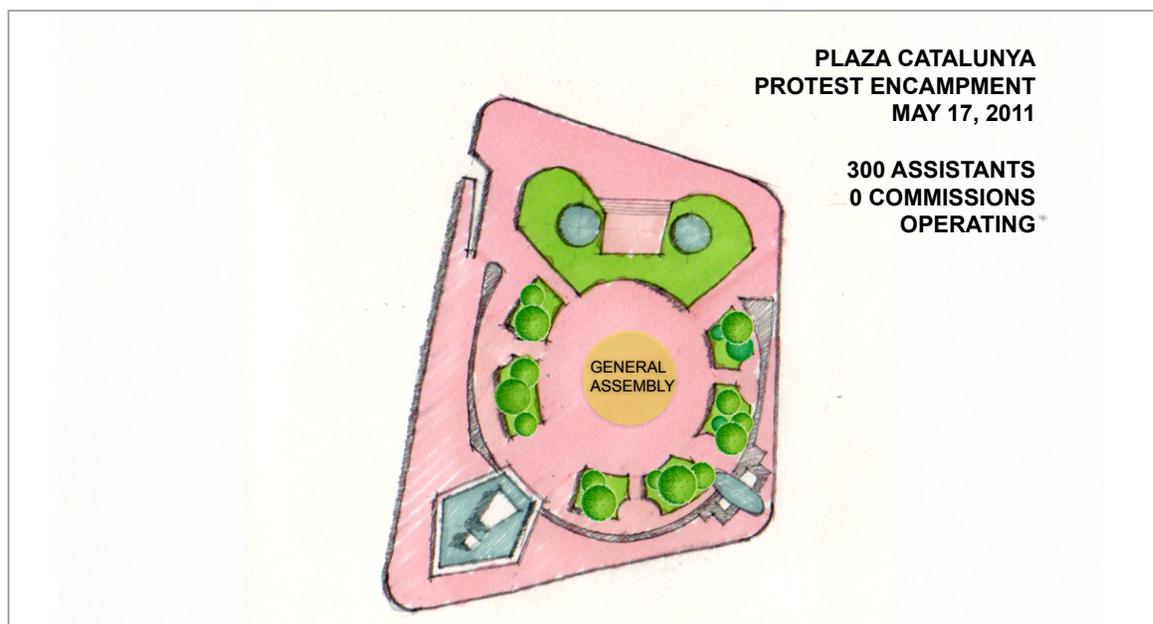


Figure 17. Protest encampment in Plaza Catalunya on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of occupation (Source: Drafted by the author with information from Barcelona General Assembly minutes from May 16, 2011, [acampadabcn.wordpress.com](http://acampadabcn.wordpress.com))

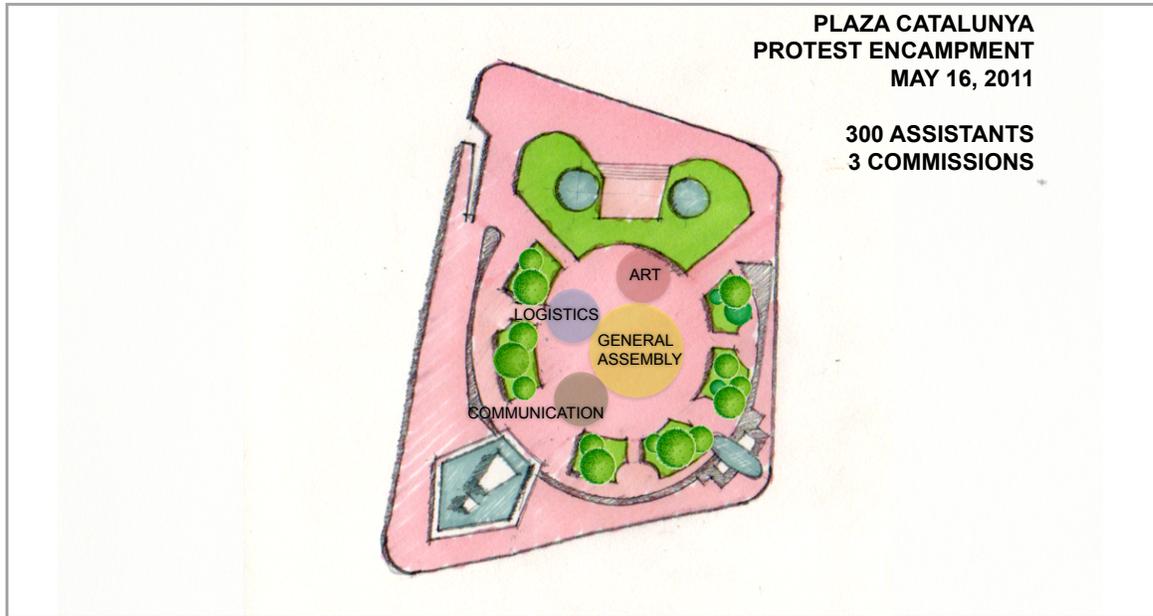


Figure 18. Protest encampment in Plaza Catalunya on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of occupation (Source: Drafted by the author with information from Barcelona General Assembly minutes from May 17, 2011, [acampadabcn.wordpress.com](http://acampadabcn.wordpress.com))

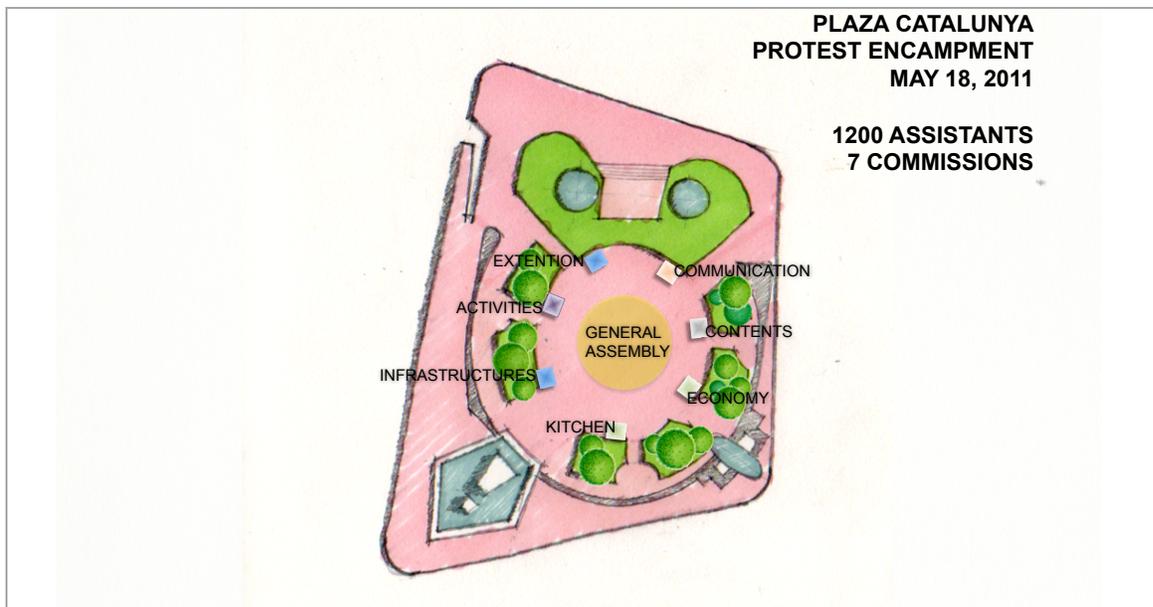


Figure 19. Protest encampment in Plaza Catalunya on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of occupation (Source: Drafted by the author with information from Barcelona General Assembly minutes from May 18, 2011, [acampadabcn.wordpress.com](http://acampadabcn.wordpress.com))

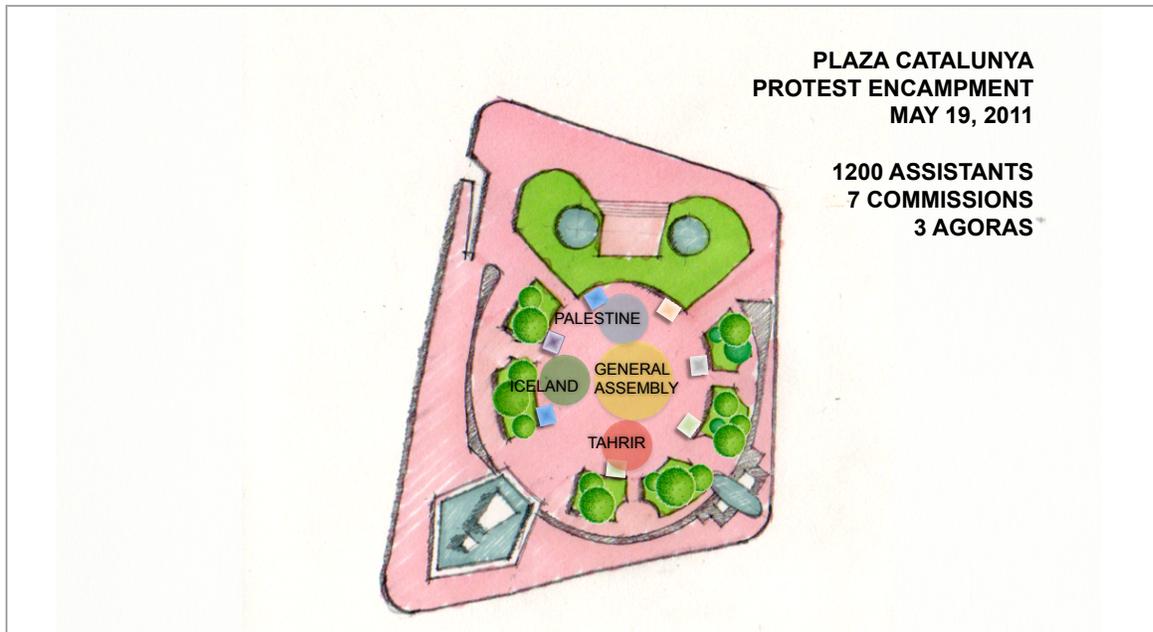


Figure 20. Protest encampment in Plaza Catalunya on the 4<sup>th</sup> day of occupation (Source: Drafted by the author with information from Barcelona General Assembly minutes from May 19, 2011, [acampadabcn.wordpress.com](http://acampadabcn.wordpress.com))

The third day, after several conversations in these groups, they decided to start the encampment but without any actual plan. The Logistics commission (now transformed into the Infrastructures commission) made a call for people to: “get an electric system with generators, crank chargers for cellphones and laptops [...] get sticks to make banners [...] and manage how to get public restrooms. [...] It was proposed to ask people nearby the plaza to let people use the shower and toilets” (Assembly minutes, [acampadadebcn.org](http://acampadadebcn.org), May 18, 2011). A Sanitation Commission proposed the creation of groups that would clean the space after the assemblies. The Kitchen Commission also made a call for the donation of food and cooking utensils.

Three days after the first assembly, the agoras and assemblies now amounted to about 2,000 people and seven commissions – Activities, Infrastructures, Kitchen, Extension,

Communication, Contents and Economy. By then, each commission had an allotted space next to each of the seven lampposts circling the granite esplanade. The commissions formed a circle (an ellipse actually) around the perimeter of the central granite esplanade, while the center continued to be used for the agora conversations during the day and meetings of the assembly in the evenings. As in the second encampment, the stands for each commission consisted of structures made of poles and canvases with chairs, tables and various forms of spaces for exhibition.

The evolution of the encampment happened in parallel to the discussions taking place *in situ* and in the different social networks and websites that both inspired and arose from the encampment. These included @SpanishRevolution, @15M AcampadaBCN, @Movimiento15M, @Democracia Real YA, @AgoraBCN, @takethesquare and the official site [acampadadebarcelona.org](http://acampadadebarcelona.org), which was considered the only official space for the movement's statements. As in the actual plaza, these spaces were also clusters of conversations about different approaches in the movement. This diversity on the Internet was not an exact copy of what was happening in the actual physical space, but it resembled the aesthetics of the spatial structure.

The different maps that the movement produced throughout the occupation of the plaza reveal how they evolved from non-identifiable and boundless clusters of conversations to more highly articulated and specialized working commissions. As the clusters of conversations became more thematically clear, the physical space also reflected this transformation. At first, these representations were not necessarily

spatial or physical maps, but thematic maps of conversations. Bubbles were used to represent the groups, but they were not grounded on an actual map of the plaza (See first diagram in Map Sequence, Fig. 8). As time passed, they started being represented as actual spaces in the plaza.

The first representation of the conversations was published on the encampment website and Twitter account, and hard copies were passed out to people in the plaza. The document is less a map than a diagram of the different conversations and commissions. Later that day, an actual map of the plaza was drawn on a canvas and displayed in the plaza. This map incorporated most of the thematic clusters described in the diagram. A day afterwards, the canvas map was digitized and more commissions were incorporated. The spatial division of the crowd into groups mirrored that which was happening in the online and offline discussions. For example, the collective “Indignant Feminists” was incorporated after joining the conversations at the encampment. A member of the feminists asked to be incorporated and have their collective represented in the next map. Her comment was followed by one from a man who said that he disagreed with the feminist approach. This was both a conversational and spatial split in the encampment. Finally, a new version of the map was produced after the riot police tried to evict the encampment on May 27. Most of the commissions remained in the same place as before, but now sub-commissions and associated collectives were incorporated into the space of the commissions (follow the sequence in Fig. 21 and see in more detail Figs. 22-25).

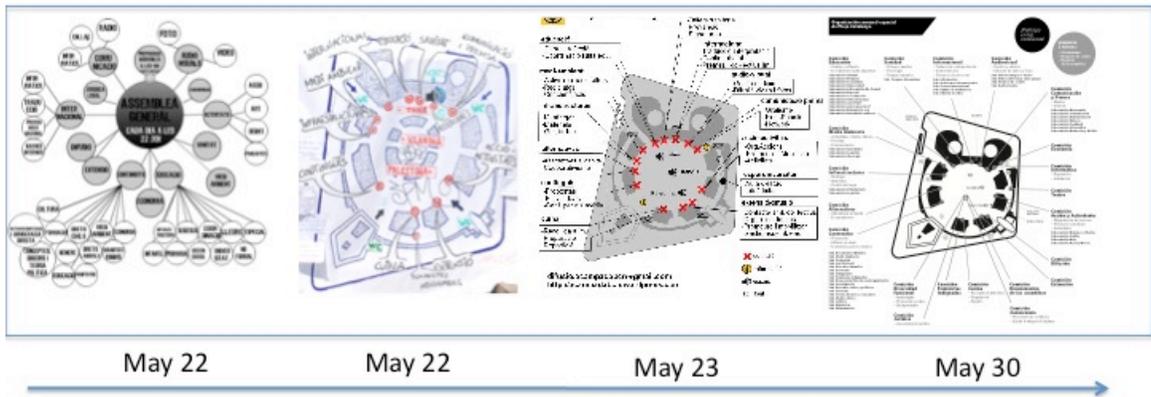


Figure 21. Evolution of the Barcelona Encampment in May of 2011. The representations show how the space was initially represented as a diagram of the different debates and conversations happening in the plaza (May 22). Later, as the conversations and agoras became more thematically specific, they started occupying specific spaces in the plaza (May 23). Ultimately, they became commissions that established themselves with canvases, wooden boards and other forms of light structures (May 30). See sources in picture captions of Figures 22, 23, 24 and 25)

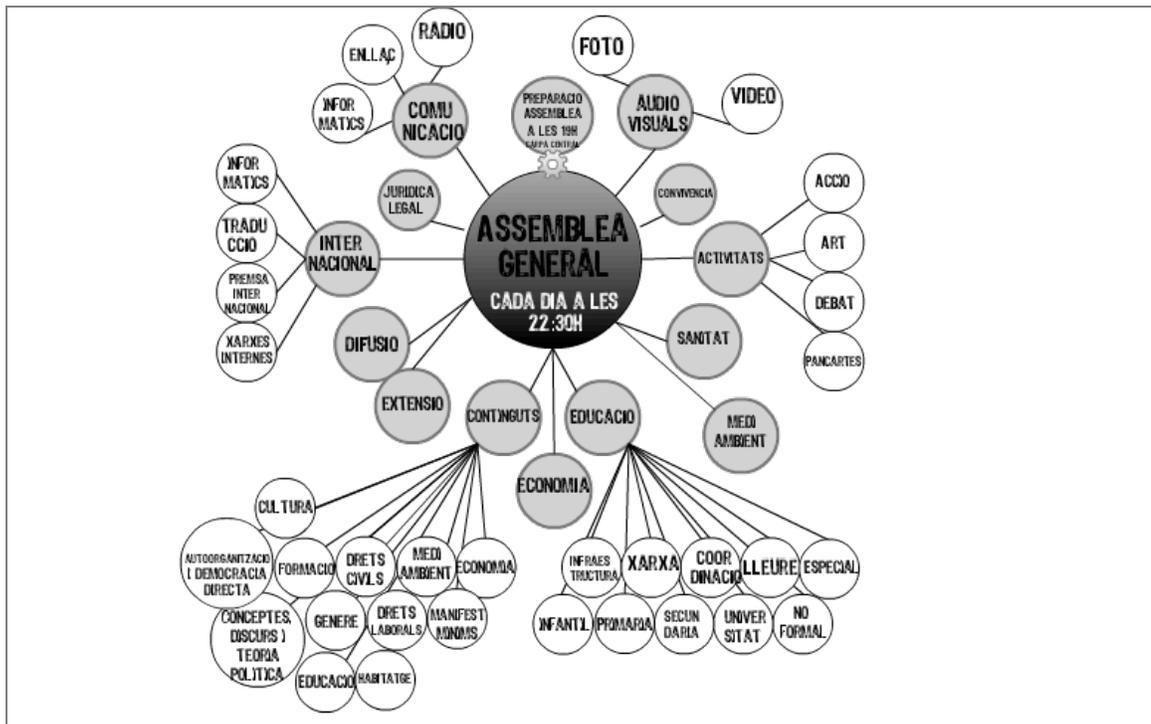


Fig. 22. Bubble diagram of the Barcelona encampment. May 22, 2011. (Source: Image from file “Guia informativa acampada Plaça Catalunya 23m”, published on May 23, 2011)

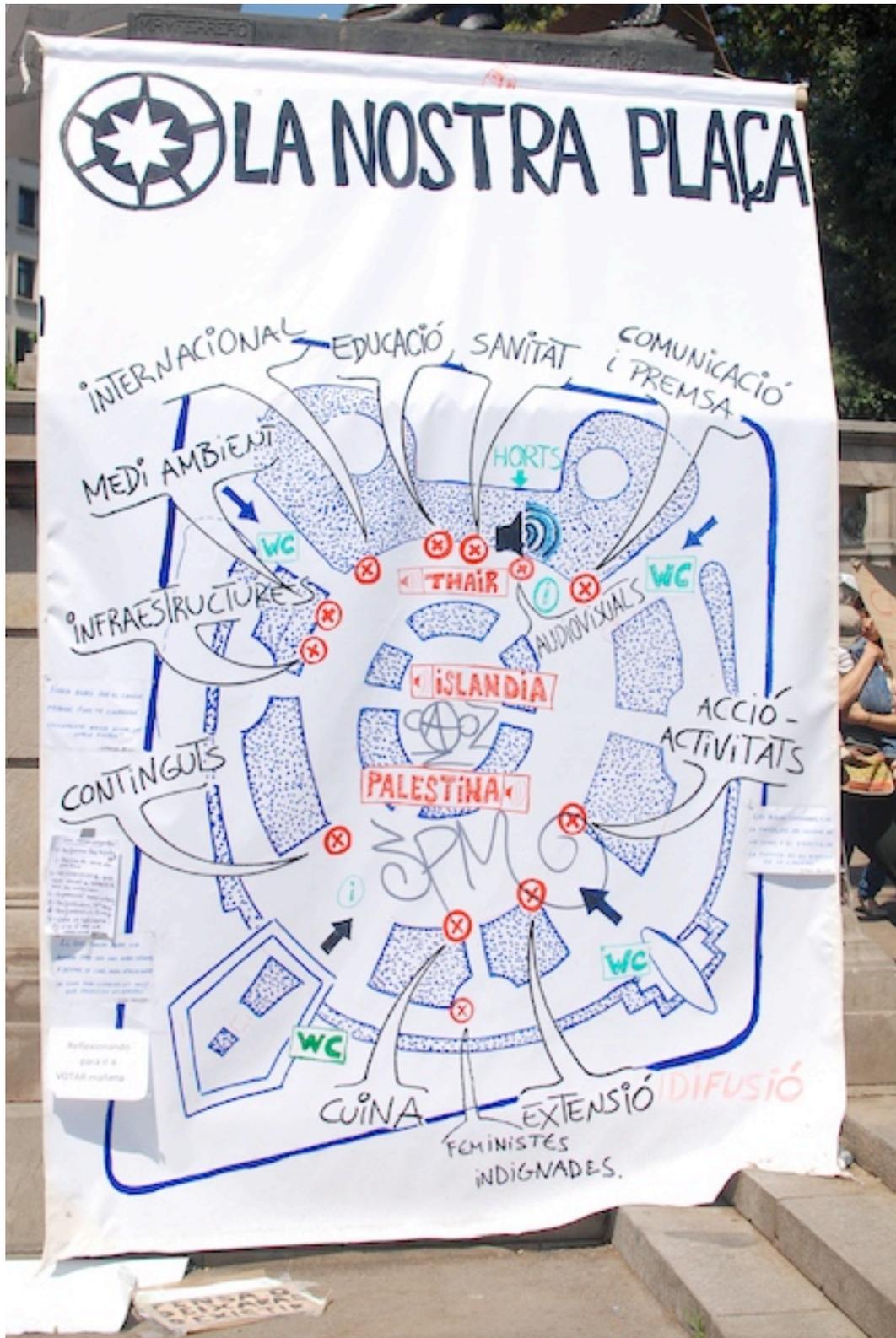


Fig. 23. Picture of the map of the encampment on a canvas entitled “La Nostra Plaça” (in Catalan, “Our Plaza”) (Source: Picture by Marta Farràs Drago, All sizes of this photograph are available under a license of Creative Commons of Marta Farràs, May 22, 2011)

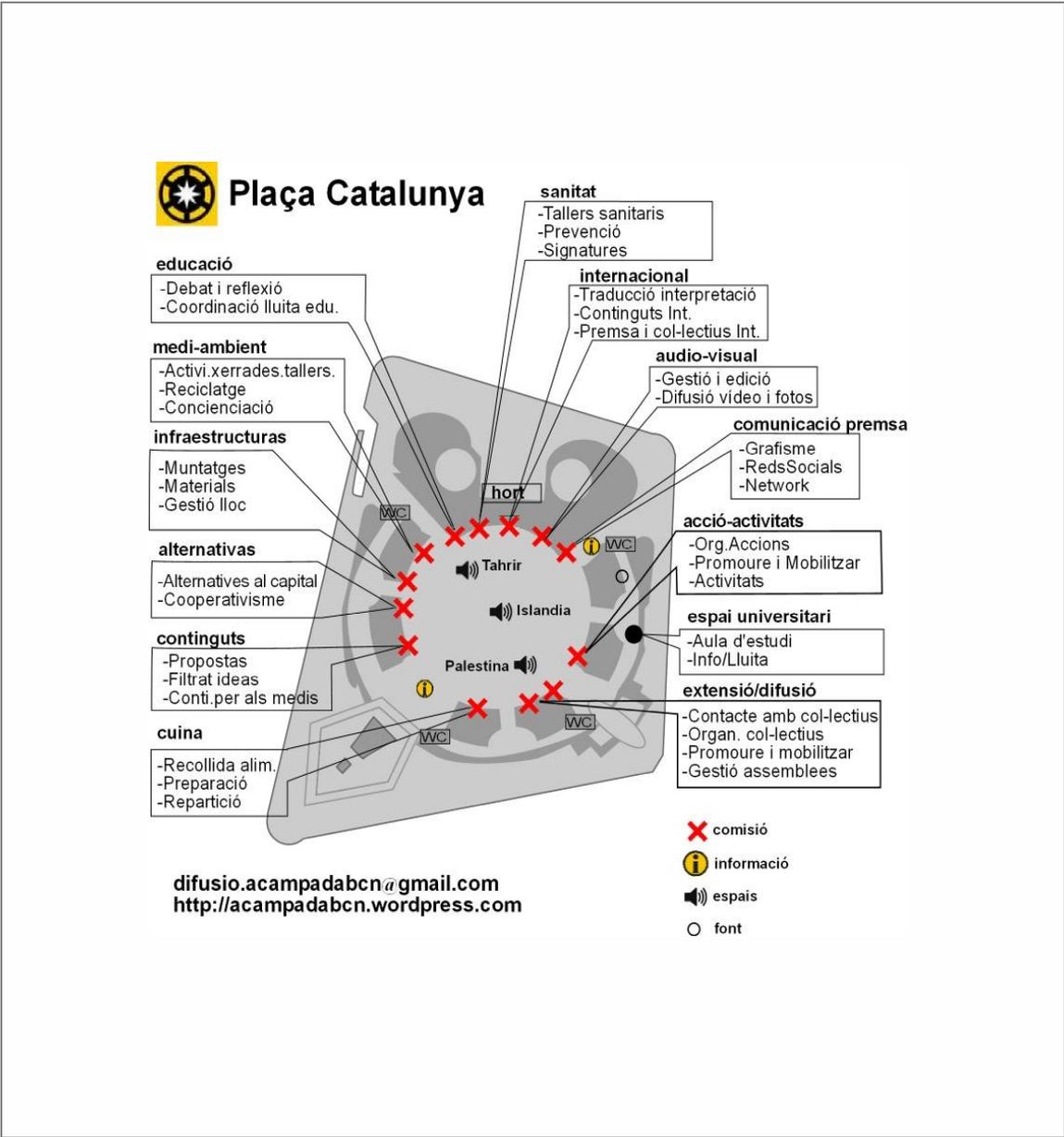


Fig. 24. Spatial organization of commissions and agoras in the Plaza before the attempt of eviction on May 27th (Source: Image from file Hoja Informativa CASTELLANO, Published on May 30, 2011). Official Material for Public broadcasting. Legend on website: Here you will find the material that is produced at the Barcelona Assembly. Copy it, print it and disseminate it!

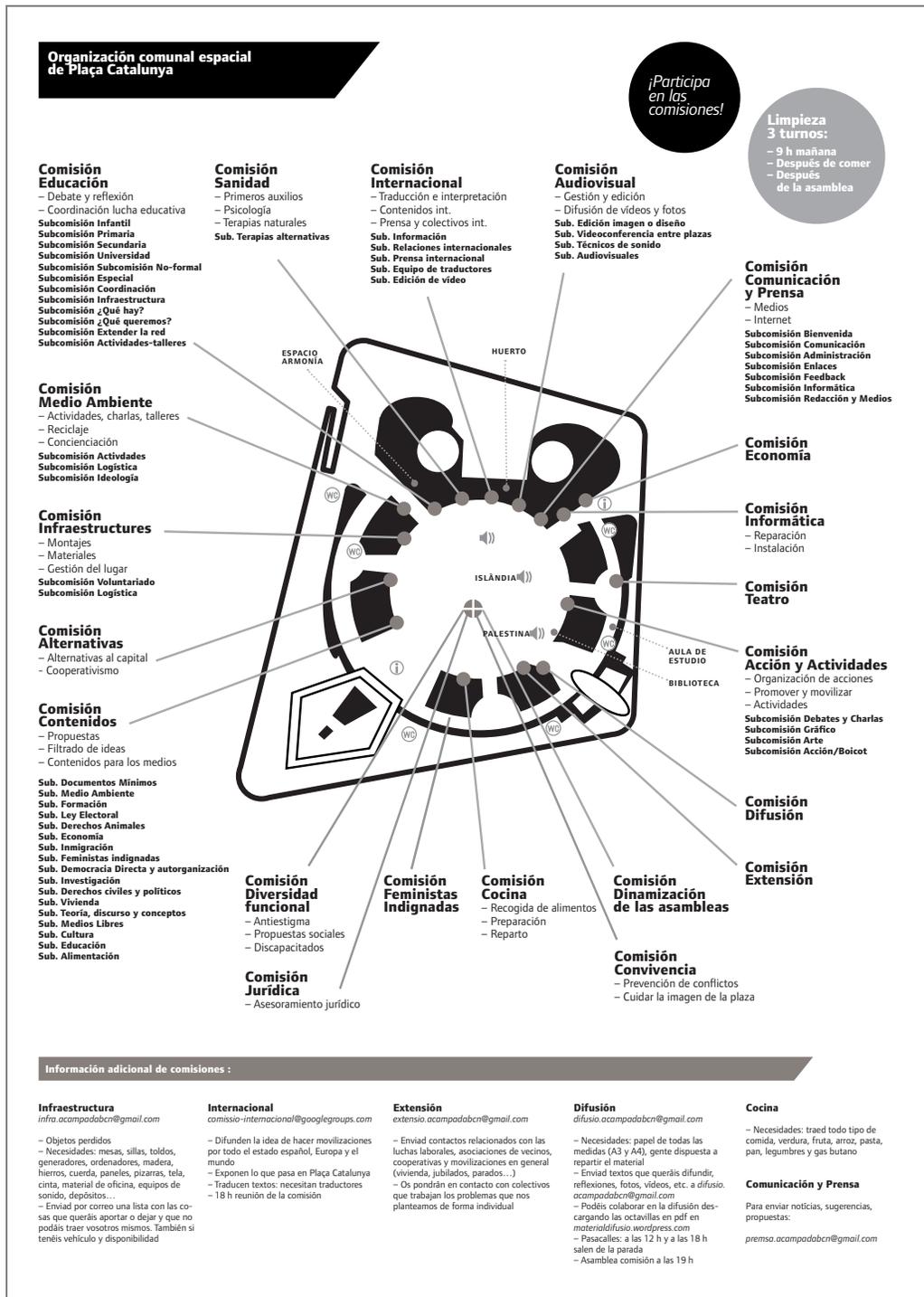


Fig. 25. Spatial organization of commissions and agoras in the Plaza after the attempt of eviction on May 27th (Source: Image from file Organització communal de la Plaça Catalunya (Published on May 30, 2011, published at <http://materialsdifusio.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/organitzacio-comunal-plc3a7-catalunya.pdf>) Official Material for Public broadcasting. Legend on website: Here you will find the material that is produced at the Barcelona Assembly. Copy it, print it and disseminate it!

*Unmapped Spaces: Everyday life and experimentation in the encampment*

The “no-one-represents-us” approach was translated into the aforementioned spatial divisions. In other words, the space of the plaza as a whole does not stand for the movement at large; the 15M is, as described in the former chapter, a mobilization rather than a homogeneous movement. A feminist participant of the movement in an online conversation describes his opinion about how this approach should operate in the encampment:

We can state in a variety of sectors that our representative figures “do not represent us,” but the freshness that the encampments bring will rapidly deteriorate if we start to adopt the representation of all the society [...] This is why I believe we have to pay attention to this aspect. I believe the beauty of this movement is that each person represents him/herself. For example, taking into account another aspect, I believe it is important that we speak in terms of *people* [italics by the author] [regardless of sex] and with a non-sexist language, so that women can be part, instead of being “represented” in the movement. We feminist people – women as well as men – do not feel included in the masculine gender [a language figure in Spanish] of clear patriarchal content. I also believe it is important that we try not to represent people who are in trade unions but to seek a collective reflection with *them* [italics by the author] [with people regardless of organizations], and only in this way can we have truly democratic collective actions. (Online testimony, reflexión potenciales y riesgos (reflections about potentials and risks), [acampadadebcn.wordpress.org](http://acampadadebcn.wordpress.org), May 31, 2011)

These discussions online and *in situ* immediately translated into the space of the encampment. The space is not perceived as homogeneous or as defined by overarching principles; rather, it is atomized by a collection of different visions of the space coexisting in the same space. As the testimony says, they are seeking to redefine how to represent themselves as multiple agents, while at the same time achieving collective action through democracy.

This is evident in the evolution of the maps, which are only simplified representations of what actually happened in the space. Nonetheless, the commissions, agoras and assemblies all coexisted with people who were involved in other activities, such as music and drama, happenings, films screenings, people sleeping in the plaza, as well as impromptu workshops for painting and printing signs to be used in demonstrations, not mention the street vendors and people visiting the plaza for recreational purposes.

All the people involved in other activities that are not mapped in the drawings are actors that escape the representation (graphic, political and organizational) of the movement, as they are non-named. This group is the most heterogeneous of all. They were the ones attracted by the phenomenon of the encampment, rather than by the political movement. Examples of this were uncountable. There were, for example, a stand-alone magician who explained the economy using a card game, a group of mimes that intercepted tourists and passersby, clusters of people dancing in circles around drums, flute musicians, a meditation group meeting every day in the very center of the esplanade and a twenty-person marching *batukada*<sup>86</sup> band, which was part of the collective *Take the streets*.<sup>87</sup> This heterogeneous group interpreted the encampment as an opportunity to test different kinds of relationships and interactions.

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<sup>86</sup> *Batukada* is a traditional Brazilian rhythm, often associated with carnivals and soccer culture and widely adopted in Catalan working-class neighborhoods.

<sup>87</sup> This collective is similar to the group *Reclaim the Streets*, a British collective that advocated for a city that is not only oriented toward work and business, but that is also the result of play and spontaneity. They are also related to the Situationists, who in the 1960 and 70s proposed the planning of cities based on situations and experiences. Constant, their most important exponent in the field of planning and design, called this approach *psychogeography*.

They somehow resembled the activists from the 1968 movements in Paris that criticized the so-called poverty of everyday life created by Modernity (Debord, 1967, Vaneighem, 1967). Two women after a general assembly spoke with me about the encampment of 2011:

“The encampment was a microcosm. Everything was recreated in the plaza. We made our own food, we danced, we played... There was a little cinema! You know?...What else? [she asked the other woman]... Well, a garden. We were growing our own food, remember?... And at night, well you know? How can I say it? There were children that were conceived in the encampment... You know Javi and Montse? They just had a little one! Where do you think he was conceived? He’s one of the 15M children,” the woman said to the other in a gossipy tone, forgetting about my presence. “The children of the revolution!” answered the other one, and they both burst into laughter. (Interview at Plaza Catalunya, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011)

This testimony describes how, for many, the encampment was not merely a political platform but also a cultural phenomenon, a space to test different ways of relating and communicating with each other. Of course, these unmapped relationships also had an impact on the physical planning of the encampment. In the center of the plaza, there were structures built with stretched canvas and tarps that were used to display signs and photographs and to protect from the sun (Fig. 9). This constituted another great planning agent of the encampment.

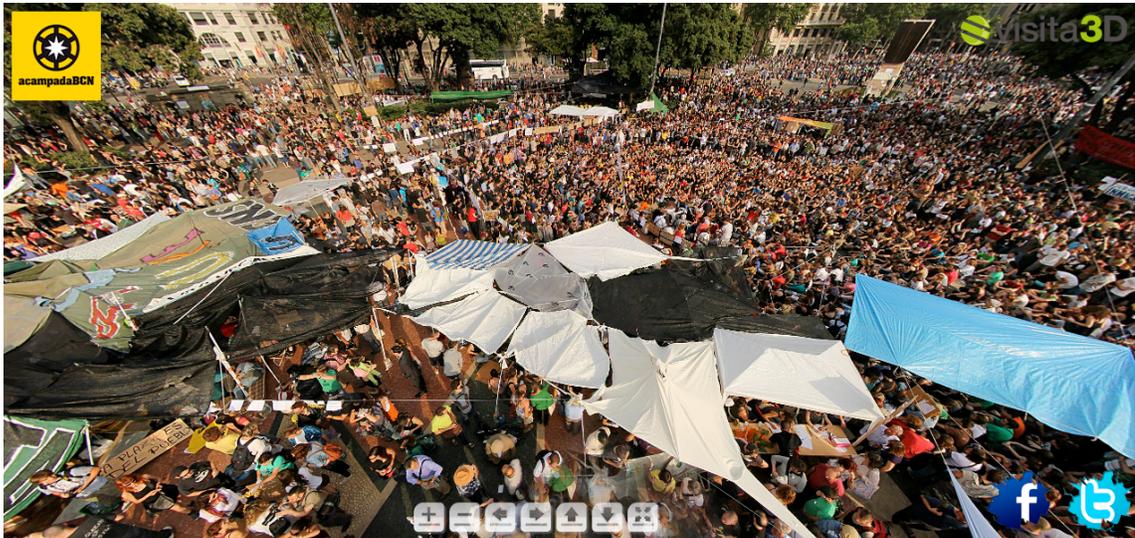


Figure 26. 3D Interactive photograph from the Plaza Catalunya encampment in its second week. This picture shows the structures built in the center of the esplanade which do not correspond to the working commissions. They were spaces that hosted different activities that were not usually mapped or registered in the minutes. (Source: [acampadabcn.wordpress.com](http://acampadabcn.wordpress.com))

A testimony of a girl working in the encampment orchard describes quotidian life in the plaza and what she thinks this symbolizes on the larger scale:

I like [...] the solar panels, the medical attention, the dance workshops, the children's space, the house of bio-construction, the photographs in copyleft, the vegetarian food. I like that the people are trying to live the plaza with organization, creativity, cleanliness and minimal comforts. And I like it because I think it is consistent with a movement that rejects so strongly the representation of the political class and opts for self-representation – in other words, for being able to self-manage something of all that we are demanding. (Testimony from the encampment called: "What is an orchard doing in Plaza Catalunya?", May 2011)

Similarly, during the second encampment in 2012, a man in his fifties explained to me what he called "his modest contribution to the movement":

"I've been very busy during the past year. But I am happy, you know? I am an organizer. The last month I have been putting together a music festival in the subway system. I organize the musicians and performers. At the same time, I am in the movement."

"What do you do in the movement?" I asked.

“The bikes. I am in charge of the bikes,”

“What bikes?” I said.

“All the pedal-powered generators. When the encampment started a year ago, we didn’t know what to do about the energy. It was a real problem. We had more and more demand for energy, and I came up with that idea. I brought the stationary bikes and we figured out how to make the generators. It was very symbolic: generating the energy of the encampment with our own human power. That’s what I do. That’s it. That’s my contribution. Maybe it doesn’t show much, but it was a lot of work putting together that system.” (Interviews at Plaza Catalunya, May 12, 2012)

These two testimonies are good examples of the alternative life going on in the encampment and how people got involved in the planning of the space through contributions like this. In the girl’s testimony, she described how those small spatial gestures had a huge symbolic impact, as they were congruent with the larger point they were trying to make. As they refused the manifestations of the larger order in everyday life, they sought to enact, rather than demand, something different. In this sense, they are, to borrow Gandhi’s concept “being the change they wanted to see.” This is yet another example of the prefigurative nature of the encampments.

There were, however, some commissions and organizations that were more involved in the physical planning of the encampment. After reviewing the assembly minutes, attending to encampments and interviewing people who were involved in its planning, I discovered that there were at least three commissions that had a significant impact (area-wise) on the management of the material flows and structure in the plaza – namely, the Infrastructures, Kitchen and Orchard commissions. In the next chapter, I will draw from interviews and online and offline representational instruments, such as

videos, maps, pictures, drawings and flyers, to understand how these commissions operated as the main physical planning agents of the encampments.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

As the planning of the space relied upon the practices of reflection, deliberation and improvisation, we learned that it was an open urban laboratory. The plaza was a space of encounter for people to discover what the place was for, what it was about, and who they were as a public. In other words, it was a *space of becoming*.

The encampment of Plaza Catalunya was the physical translation of the communication happening in the 15M movement into space. As the movement resulted from a crisis of representation and meaning, the communication produced within it sought to critique language<sup>88</sup> – not just verbal but also spatial. The effort to re-appropriate and restore the meaning of words resulted in the general refusal of names (hence, the statement “do not name it”) as representational instruments and carriers of meanings. When the movement started, the cries, “they do not represent us” and “no one represent us” were addressed to institutional representation, such as that which was embodied in political parties, the parliament, and official trade unions. This refusal was later tested in space as well.

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<sup>88</sup> For more on the notion of rethinking language as a form of resistance, see Sitrin, M. and Azellini, D. (2012) *Occupying Language* (Occupied Media Pamphlet Series), Zuccotti Park Press, New York.

Design and physical planning are mechanisms that codify spatial and material flows, in the same way that written and spoken language codify flows of meaning. As in many other languages, design is based on processes of representation and abstraction. A program of functions in design and architecture delimits what can happen in a space; just as naming a space the “dining room” dictates what can happen in that space, naming a public space “park”, “plaza” or “garden” suggests how the space should be used. Space, read as conventional language, is a text. The encampment, as a refusal of spatial representation, became a critique of the urban text.

The notion of *occupy*, that was the main theme of the 2011 movements across the Atlantic, refers to the idea of restoring, reclaiming, redefining and rethinking a space through insurgent uses, but it fundamentally means to re-signify through de-naming. The occupied space is, as Sitrin describes, a prefiguration of the alternatives that these movements are seeking to build.

Beyond discussions about the positioning of the planner in planning processes, the encampments tested processes in which the planner, as a leading figure, is absent. Here, Planning as a formal discipline and professional practice recedes in favor of planning with a small “p”, in which people embrace the organic and spontaneous potential that lies inherent in public space. The role of a planner, if anything, became that of a facilitator, who moderates, provokes and joins the conversations, debates and negotiations about space. In this kind of planning process, there is no solo authorship. To borrow from Barthes, the author (i.e., the planner) disappears in favor of the text

(i.e., the space) and this is constructed collectively by the multitude (in Perez, 1990). The encampment sought to remain as a permanent invitation and an open question. In this case, the text takes over the communication processes.

Professional designers and architects seemed to have paid attention to the encampment as a design phenomenon that arose without any authoring designers. In 2012, the European Prize of Urban Public Space was symbolically awarded to the Encampment of Puerta del Sol in Madrid. It was described as an ephemeral installation with the quality of being a participatory and collaborative space (Public Space, 2012). The prize was of course not actually awarded to anyone, as the encampment had been collaboratively built by all of its participants, but it recognized the planning achievements that the encampments represented.

The refusal to name the encampment was an effort to keep the flow of material and meanings free of representational containers. This is one of the reasons why the second encampment seemed so planned and why everybody seemed to know what they were doing, as the space had already been named and mythified by that point. It was not the same open space that had been declared free for anyone to join the conversation about what this space was; rather, it was now *The* Encampment, with capital letters. In the first encampment in 2011, people improvised structures resembling spider webs by tensing ropes and covering them with canvas and tarps in order to protect themselves from the sun. As the second encampment began, people went straight to the trees and began making spider-web-like hammocks and canopies

with elastic ropes. That structure had become a “signifier” in the now coherent text of the encampment. The encampment after one year of being repeated in most major cities around the world had become more of a means than an end in itself, as in the case of Barcelona. It was experimental as a political instrument of protest, but it was not a spatial experiment. To borrow Nietzsche’s words, “that for which we find words is something already dead in our hearts.” Similarly, we can say that the experimental spirit of the encampment, as the ungraspable and unspoken force (and as flowing meaning), disappeared when words were found for it. This process of erosion of meaning did not stop the protesters, though. It made them realize that the encampment had become a space of learning, reorganization and retooling, no longer an end in itself. As the woman in Plaza Catalunya said a year after, they were “more than just an encampment” and they would make use of that tactic only if it was necessary.

As the making of the encampment happened in parallel to these communication processes, this approach of recapturing meaning through enacting alternative ways of relating had consequences in regard to the planning processes. It translated into lessons and questions for planning and urban design.

First, we learned that the planning/design of the encampment was a spatial version of Socrates’ *Maieutics* method, which involves responding to a question by raising another question that is critical of the former. In the first encampment, people who raised questions were joined by others who raised more questions. The question of

establishing three commissions was revisited the next day, and seven commissions were proposed. The encampment was the result of reflection-in-action and deliberation-in-action, and incremental processes. This form of “spatial Maieutics” served to work out a program-in-construction that was constantly rethought and modified according to specific challenges. This was, of course, possible because the encampment was planned with light structures, such as tarps, canvases, wooden skids, web-like pergolas, and so on. Accordingly, there was a successful balance between the planning approach and the material conditions of the encampment. This raises questions about the need for malleability that our increasingly changing cities pose and how the flexibility of planning processes, such as those used in the making of the encampment, could be helpful to meet such needs.

Second, we learned that uncertainty (about a crisis, problem or spatial program) is not necessarily negative. As we discussed in the previous chapters, individual sense of hopelessness and meaninglessness can be overcome when people come together and transcend it through collective articulation. Similarly, the uncertainty that the economic crisis represented to the protesters sparked an inquiring and experimental spirit which in turn resulted in the creation of encampments. Getting together with a sense of uncertainty enabled the creation of an open space for testing alternative forms of communicating, relating to each other and physical planning. Considering planning as responding to uncertainty makes us question how stakeholders (e.g., activists, neighbors) can come together and create open space, to reflect and deliberate about their neighborhoods, communities and organizations not only as problems but also as

opportunities to redefine through social articulation what their spaces are and who they are.

Third, we learned that improvisation played an important role in the making of the encampment. The encampment resulted from a tension between the spatial needs and the material conditions of the space. Therefore, sometimes the participants posed certain material needs and sought materials to meet those needs, while at other times, they designed their spaces on the basis of the materials that were available.

Thinking of city-making not as a reactive discipline that works on the basis of problems and feasibility but as a responsive practice that searches for what is available and links it to reflective and deliberative processes that result in foreseeing potentialities (e.g., through prefigurative, bricolage approaches) can provide new avenues for more inclusive, interactive and engaging planning and urban design.

## CHAPTER 6

### PLANNING IN OPEN SPACES

In this chapter, I analyze three commissions that participated in the occupation of the plaza – the Kitchen Commission, the Infrastructures Commission and the Orchard Commission. These commissions illustrate the practices and mechanisms that participants engaged in to shape the space of the encampment. Here, I describe how the encampment shows similarities with its counterparts on the Internet, working as an open-source, open-ended system operating *in situ* and offline.

In the last section, I discuss how the encampment became a physical manifestation of the communication that originated it. Drawing from the notions of permeability, openness and refusal of representation, as developed in the previous chapter, I argue that the encampment was a challenge to the urban text as the movement sought to challenge the representational character of the political text. I then analyze the different approaches that were implicit in the planning of the encampment, such as bricolage, prefigurative politics, insurgent planning and the notion of wiki systems. I conclude by pointing out potential implications that the experience of the encampment could have for planning and urban design.

## **6.1 The Infrastructures Commission. A Planning Platform**

After the first agoras were established in the plaza, a commission called *Infrastructures* was organized to deal with the physical organization of the plaza; however, they did not actually plan the space of the encampment but only provided other commissions with tools and materials to build their stands and workspaces. The Infrastructures Commission continued managing most of the physical planning of the plaza until the encampment was dismantled. A participant describes the work and objectives of the commission thus:

[T]he objective of the commission of infrastructures is that the materials that we get from donations or that we collect ourselves are managed for the needs of the commissions. At the same time, if the needs of the commissions can't be satisfied at a particular moment, we look for resources. If someone needs a table, we look for someone who can give us a table and then we give it to whoever needs it.

The commission was founded since the first day when the first commissions were founded to respond to the needs of infrastructure (of canvas, tables, paper, etc.). From there, we evolved and we have taken different tasks, and others we have delegated to other commissions. Like the Commission of Security, which we were running, but it later became the Commission of Coexistence.

When it [The Infrastructures Commission] was created, we were 10 people. Now, we are about 25 that work in our stand, taking turns. We have created different working groups and we decide in small meetings. We have decided that the responsibility of each is defined by our responsibility to the other, and that is what makes the commission work. Therefore, there are many decisions that are made individually by the person who is responsible in turn.

Most of what we have is from donations, but we have also bought some stuff with the money from the encampment... We have spontaneous phone calls from volunteers, saying: I was walking by Plaza Gaudi and I saw a couple of wood boards, do you want them? We go there and pick them up...

Our great problem is storage. We put stuff where we can. Some of the materials stay here for a while and then are taken out... We do what we can. They ask us for more and more of everything. In the beginning, they wanted canvas, tents... Later [they requested] paper, pencils, and now they're asking for printers, computers, etc. They want electricity! ... we have evolved! Though we want to keep in mind the idea that we are in this place only temporarily, and [so] we are ecologically sustainable,

therefore it is not imperative that we all have electricity or that we all have a computer. We need to keep the balance; we are not in our homes. For example, today we had a donation of two pink tables...” (Excerpt from Interview with the people from the Infrastructure Commission, 15Mbcn.tv, 2011)

The testimony of this participant describes how the space of the encampment grew in complexity over time. Similarly, this commission evolved into a more specific organization. At first, it dealt with security and collaboration among the commissions. In other words, it dealt with most of the aspects of spatial planning in the encampment; however, it gradually turned into a neutral organism that only provided the commissions with resources, no longer intervening in discussions within the commissions about how to manage their space. The materials they received had to be adapted to the changing needs of the commissions. At the same time, the commissions adapted to what was available (Fig. 27). There were some restrictions, however, that they tried to suggest to the commissions – i.e., that they must not serve as a storage space and do not approve the waste of energy. From the first week of the encampment, they suggested that people bring their own crank generators for laptops and cellphones to connect to the Internet. The fact that they did not want materials being stored in their commission suggests that they were seeking to ensure the flowing nature of the encampment rather than turn it into a finished object.

The Infrastructures Commission worked as a constant, while the materials and information of the other commissions worked as variables; it bypassed these flows without actually codifying them into design or planning programs. In the previous chapter, I describe how the movement operated as what Deleuze and Guattari (1977,

1983) call a *body without organs* – a boundless milieu that is permeable to external flows. The encampment was a physical representation of this concept, which is why it was difficult for the people of the commission to prevent unwanted materials from entering the plaza.

This permeability was visible in all aspects of the encampment. Food was brought from nearby markets. People used the toilets of the surrounding businesses and took showers in the apartments of people who were in solidarity with the movement. The encampment itself was built with recycled materials from all over the city. It extended beyond the limits of the plaza, and the surrounding context penetrated its milieu. The protesters marched and demonstrated across the city, and the tourists and street vendors passed through the plaza.

The lack of names and representation that is proposed in the plaza is different from what designers and architects usually do when they present a project – that is, delimiting spaces and “decreeing” the possible activities for each space through names (e.g., a bedroom is a place to sleep, the park is a place for recreation). As described in the first chapter, representation bounds and bonds groups of people, identities or spaces – in the case of planning and design. As words are instruments to code flows of meaning, similarly planning and design are instruments to code material, spatial and organizational flows. The lack of representation ensures the flow of space and meaning. Like the testimony of the feminist in the previous chapter, who said they

should deal with people and not with representing organizations, the encampment deals with practice-in-space rather than areas designated for specific activities.

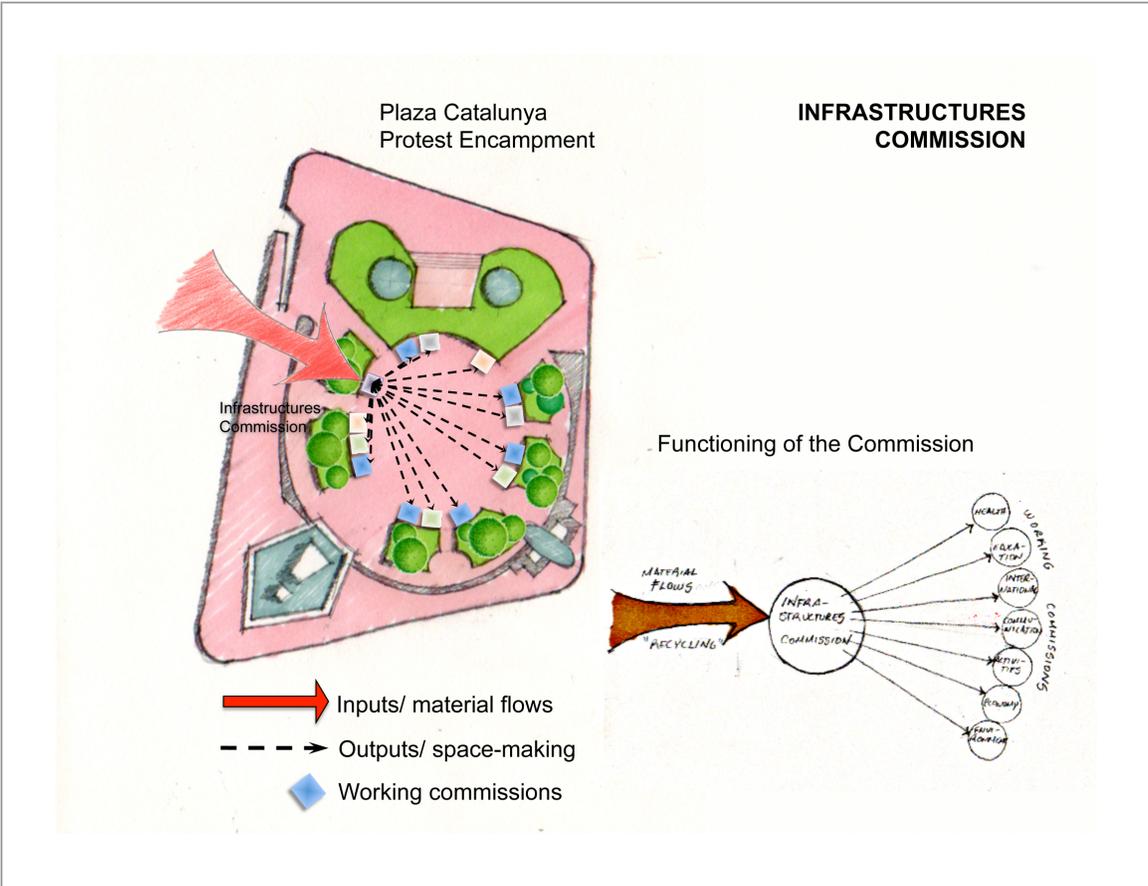


Figure 27. The Infrastructures Commission. Diagram of material flows. The commission receives donations and gives them to other commissions according to their needs for the construction of stands and structures. (Source: Author)

This also reflected the online interactions of the movement. The commission worked similar to an Internet platform in that they did not provide “content” to the encampment but rather helped manage the inputs coming from outside. They were open to almost any material contributions from sympathizers and participants. Thus, the encampment embraced potentiality, as it was not clear how it would transform. This way of operating was a reflection of the commitment to openness that the

encampment showed in their assemblies and agoras, in which potentially anyone was allowed to participate, regardless of affiliation, nationality, or political inspirations. This parallel was no coincidence, as the physical space was evolving in tandem with the conversations that were taking place on the Internet.

The Infrastructure Commission also adapted to the changing circumstances. They took action as they reflected on each issue (Schön, 1983). The participants worked as they could and with what they had – i.e., using *bricolage* approaches (See previous chapter and the introduction to the dissertation). They made decisions based on the resources available and the challenges posed day by day. In that sense, they worked prefiguratively. In other words, they tried to build something new in the context of what was already available (Ince, 2012). They also worked tactically, rather than strategically, as they operated within short-term and small-scale frameworks. In addition, the encampment operated as an open-ended organism – that is, the time for implementation was not separate from the planning process. They asked questions that remained opened and that transformed into spaces. This created a new form of open participatory design that undergoes a process of deliberation and, after questions are answered, is implemented in space. In the case of the encampment, they implemented as they planned (See comparison between open planning/design and linear participatory planning/design in Fig. 28).

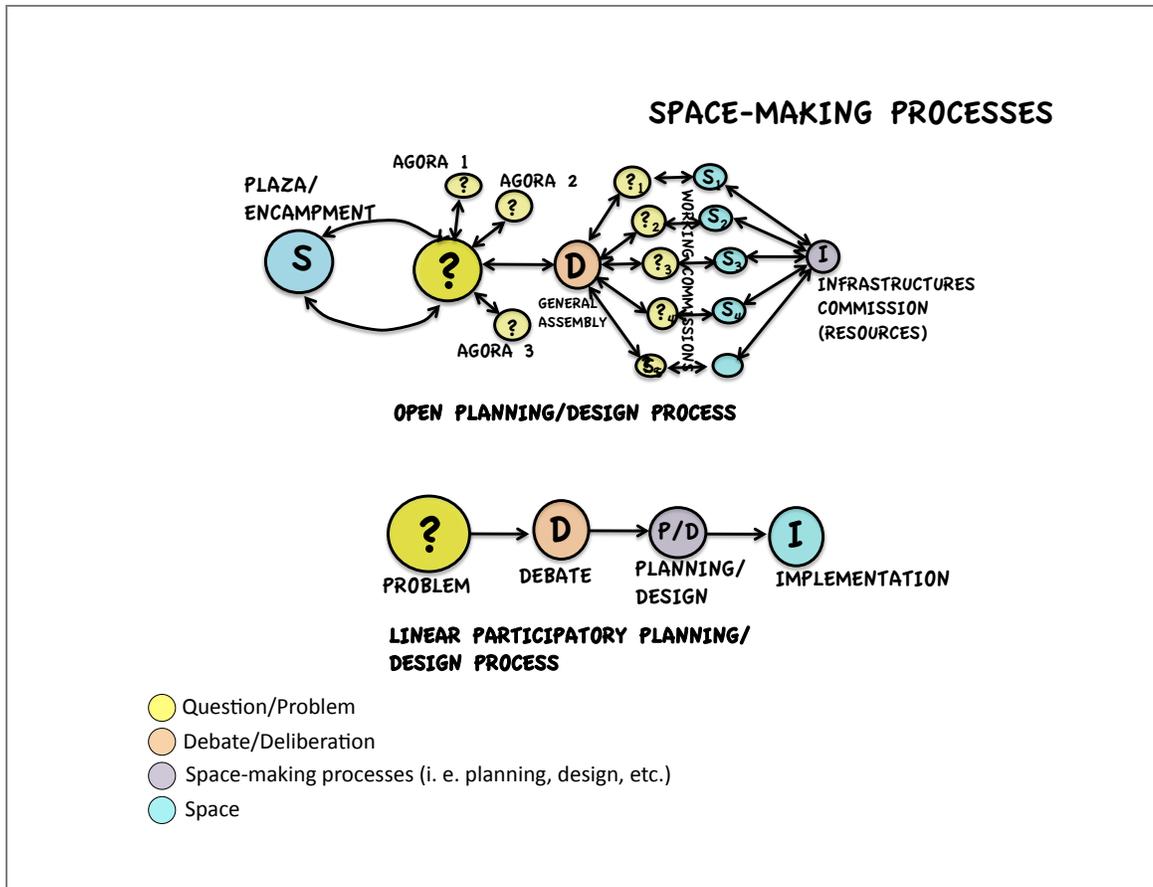


Figure 28. Diagrams of open planning/design vis-à-vis linear participatory design processes. The latter incorporates participation and deliberation but this ends in order to give space for implementation. The former is a cyclic process that implements in parallel to deliberation and reflection. (Source: Author)

## 6.2 The Kitchen Commission: Of paellas and planning

These spatial and organizational logics were also present in other commissions, especially in the general assembly. The flows of information and communication resembled the material processes happening in the plaza. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Kitchen Commission, which I will analyze in this section.

In the 2012 Plaza Catalunya encampment, established exactly a year after its predecessor in May of 2011, I waited in line for the paella and lentil stew being served by the Kitchen Commission. On the other end of the plaza, the general assembly was finishing as a young woman thanked other commissions and neighborhood assemblies. When she mentioned the Kitchen Commission, there was a general ovation across the plaza. A man waiting in line in front of me cheered along and addressed me: “That rice smells great! Did you know half of all the food in the world is wasted?”<sup>89</sup> He went on to tell me that everything they served in the kitchen was made with “recycled” ingredients. And as we approached to the bar, the young woman serving the paella, assented: “Everything indeed.” “What do you mean by ‘recycled’,” I asked. “Everything is made with would-be wasted food from local markets,” he replied, as the girl concurred with a proud smile (Interviews at the 12M15M Encampment, May 12, 2012).

In the Kitchen Commission, everything was made on the basis of volunteer work and donated materials. From cooking to peeling potatoes and washing dishes (though they suggested that people brought and washed their own dishes), this commission was one of the most dynamic of the encampment. The supplies for the kitchen were, as the man in line said, “recycled” from the local markets, restaurants and cafes. Some food was donated by waiters, cooks and owners who sympathized with the movement, and other food was simply taken from disposal bins outside the city markets. On some

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<sup>89</sup> In an article recently published at *The Guardian*, it was mentioned that indeed half of the world’s food is wasted every year. <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/jan/10/half-world-food-waste>

occasions, the employers of the markets stopped them, but it was largely tolerated.

The food was collected by the so-called “recycling brigades”. They were formed by different groups of volunteers who picked up the food from the local markets. The Kitchen Commission posted signs with instructions for recyclers: “Food recycling. Go [to collect food] after 8 PM, when businesses close,” and it pointed out what markets to visit in each neighborhood. In a later assembly, a girl who participated in the brigades during the occupation of the plaza shared slices of salami that she was cutting from an untouched piece. “This was going to go straight to the garbage!” she said to me shaking her head. The salami seemed as good as the paella and the lentils I had in the encampment. The brigades, she told me, collected not only food but also other items that could be used at the encampment. “We didn’t know what we were going to get at the markets. We always came back with something completely different, but the people from the kitchen always figured out what to do with it,” she explained (Interviews at the Pre-election Encampment, November 15, 2011).

At the encampment, a volunteer of the kitchen explained to a journalist how his commission worked:

[W]e have mountains and mountains of food, that we get from people who come to donate, [for instance] two apples, a kilo of rice, two chocolate cakes, and so on. Over and over until we end up with piles of food that as soon as it is brought to the encampment is immediately processed [...] We are having around five hundred to one thousand people for lunch, and for dinner we have... well, pretty much everyone you see here at Plaza Catalunya<sup>90</sup> [...]

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<sup>90</sup> In the first week of the encampment, it was estimated that a crowd of 2000 thousand people was continuously at Plaza Catalunya (La Vanguardia, 2011, <http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20110518/54156645645/la-acampada-de-barcelona-gana->

There is always something to do in this commission. We feel like we are working endlessly. If there is a person that knows how to cook well, this person goes to the stove to cook, because that's what (s)he does best. If there is a person that has great organization skills, (s)he goes to the storage [...]

About the goods, we post what we need in a Twitter account or in posters here in the plaza. We have thirty or forty people working in the commission, but the number of volunteers fluctuates... We are even considering starting a second kitchen on the other end of the plaza. (Excerpt from interview with people from the Kitchen Commission, 2011, released by <http://comissiocuina.wordpress.com/2011/05>)

The plans for the second kitchen were never realized; however, after the encampment was dissolved, the commission continued collaborating with the movement, occasionally providing food after demonstrations.

The paellas and dishes made by the Kitchen Commission also became a metaphor of the encampment. The official story about the origin of the Spanish paella is that it evolved from other dishes brought by the Arabs in the Middle Ages, and the ingredients were incorporated throughout history; however, the popular version, and the one that most people tell in the streets of Barcelona, is that the paella was the result of community collaboration. In times of scarcity, they say, everyone brought leftovers that were not enough to make a dish otherwise and mixed them together with rice in a huge pan. If this is true, the mythical paella always involved some uncertainty and its outcome depended on whatever food was available each time. The preparation of this dish works like an open system. The kitchen capitalized upon and embraced the spontaneous spirit of this traditional dish. Fittingly, the planning of the physical space mimics these logics.

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adeptos.html); However, this figure fluctuated a lot greatly, and some state claim that at some point the Plaza and its surroundings hosted around approximately 50,000 people.

The testimony of this participant in the Kitchen Commission is very similar to that of the participant in the Infrastructures Commission. They worked with whatever they had and never really knew what the menu of the day would be. The recyclers also described how they did not know what they were going to find at the markets. The volunteer cooks were also changing continuously, so the decisions about what and how to cook were made day by day. They described how goods were brought into the encampment and then immediately processed. They used the same criteria as the Infrastructures Commission; however, the Kitchen, unlike the Infrastructures Commission, codified these material flows and turned them into prepared food, but this is another example of a permeable system that can be penetrated by anything (i.e., food) or anyone (i.e., volunteer work) from outside.

The kitchen is also a good example of the encampment's two levels of meaning. It not only provides food for the encampment, it also challenges larger hegemonic processes by proving that thousands can be fed with food that would have otherwise gone to waste. It serves both an immediate and a symbolic purpose. The person waiting in line with me as well as the girl serving the food took pride in this symbolic function as well.

Therefore, the kitchen worked like an open system – or an “open-source system”, to use informatics language – open for inputs of goods and materials that are processed differently every day. The complexity of its processes increases as more people join

the encampment and more commissions emerge from the conversations in the plaza. Similar to the information flows happening online and in the physical space of the plaza, the kitchen became more efficient and sophisticated as the interdependencies became clearer and more specific (Fig. 29)

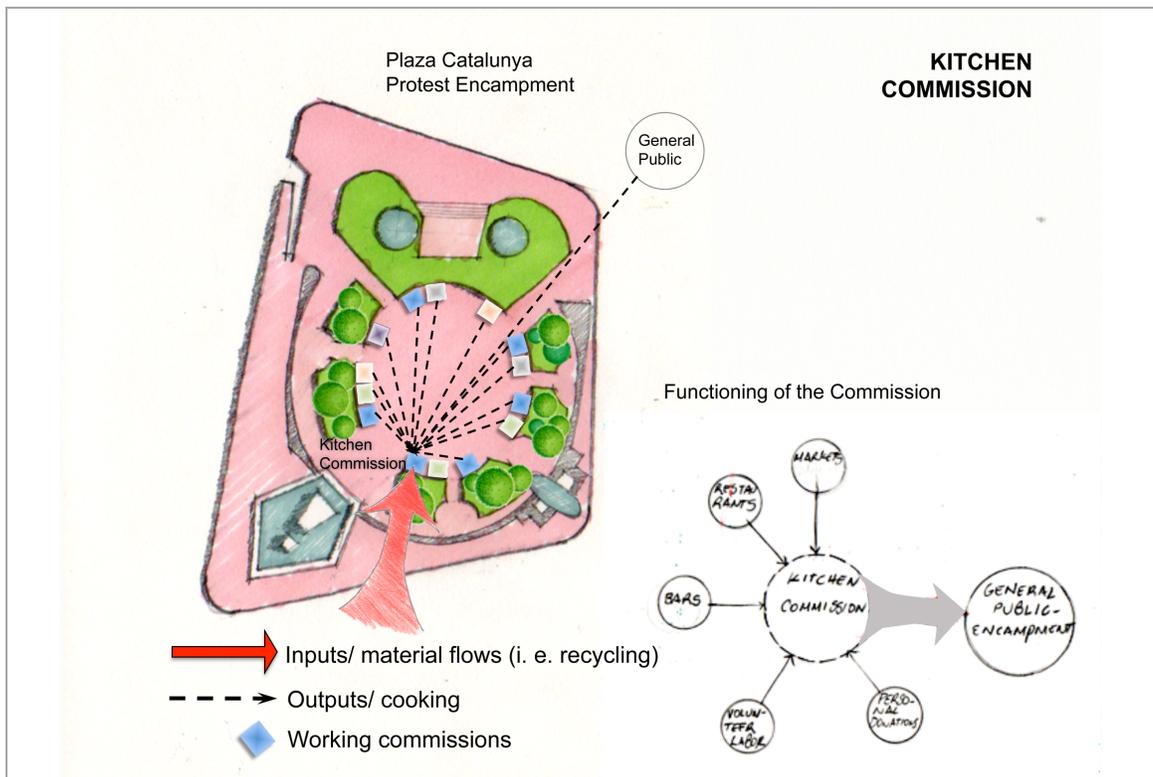


Figure 29. The Kitchen Commission. The commission is permeable to anyone who wants to participate and to any food brought from donations or “recycling”. The meals are prepared based on whatever is available each day. Source: Author.

### 6.3 The Orchard Commission: Open-ended urbanisms

The so-called Orchard Commission of the Barcelona Encampment was no less illustrative of the space-making mechanisms going on in the encampment than the Kitchen and Infrastructure Commissions.

The orchard was the largest space occupied by a single commission (about 400 square meters). It was proposed to the General Assembly by a group of people in the first week of the encampment's establishment. Initially, the objective was to replant the flowers in the green space between the two fountains that had been spoiled after a week of intense assembly activity, without changing the landscape or urban furniture; however, it was later decided to turn the space into an actual orchard. Thus, like the central esplanade, which was declared a free space for anyone to join, the garden was also declared an open space. No consensus was reached about the action of the orchard, but they made the call to start the action two days after it was proposed. The commission describes how people started mobilizing: "different communal orchards in Barcelona donated seedlings, tools and materials, and so did an agroecologic store, as well as people that participated independently" (Hort Indignat, 2011, <http://hortdignebcn.wordpress.com/documents/proposta-dhort-indignat-a-la-placa>).

One participant described seeing a man standing in the green space holding a sign above his head that simply asked "Orchard?" (Fig. 13). He describes how he felt intrigued and provoked by this call: "I saw people coming closer to the place, and I was over there eating a sandwich and I thought 'Damn! an orchard... an orchard in Plaza Catalunya, that's going to be fantastic', 'Count on me!' I said."

Other people joined the activity by bringing crops, digging holes, loosening the soil and watering the plants with cubes they had filled at the fountains. Another participant

explained how the watering of the orchard was done: “There was a proposal for canalizations of water, someone said he could design the whole mechanism, but we decided that the social value of going to the fountain to collect water should not be substituted by the convenience of mechanized canalization” (Excerpts from Interviews with people from the Orchard, 2011, <http://blip.tv/friction-films/llevame-al-huerto-1er-capitulo-de-las-historias-de-un-huerto-libre-5535033>) (Figs. 30, 31 and 32).



Figure 30. Hort? (“Orchard?” in Catalan) Img\_1438. Fotomovimiento, 2011. Barcelona, May 21, 2011 (Source: All rights reserved by Fotomovimiento, email consent to release photograph with condition of attributing authorship to *Fotomovimiento*)

The spatial development of the orchard differs from that of the Kitchen and the Infrastructure commissions. As these participants describe, the orchard was perceived as a spatial speculation rather than an answer. The person responding to the call to

make an orchard, in the form of the sign, shows how it was not clear what they wanted to pursue. Nevertheless, he joined the enterprise in order to find out.

In that sense, the space of the orchard was an open-ended system. It was unclear what would come of it, as it was a question that remained open. The collectives and independent participants that joined the project brought different crops and seeds, and based on that, the space was planned (Fig. 31). Nevertheless, unlike the encampment in general, which was declared an open space without a program, asking the question “orchard?” suggests a program. It does not say how the orchard is going to be, but it does suggest a function. Unlike other commissions, which established themselves in stands very similar to one another, and that were only differentiated by the conversations happening within them, the Orchard Commission asked a question about the space itself (Fig. 32).

Similar to the Kitchen, the orchard was a space that worked at two simultaneous levels in the encampment: it was a space that involved people in communal work, and at the same time it sought to symbolically contest larger hegemonic issues.

A participant of the commission explained to me the objectives of another pop-up orchard placed on top of the esplanade of the Arc de Triomf monument, in the context of the global demonstration of October 15 in 2011, exactly 5 months after the foundation of the first encampment:

What we are promoting with this action is local agro-ecologic agriculture and that food doesn't have to travel thousands of kilometers across the planet to pollute it. Instead, we want to promote traditional markets, preserving local cultures [...]

This is a symbolic day, in which we present a symbolic action, we are not going to achieve anything with this action. This is something that has to be done on a daily basis and try to grow-up together, little by little, to make links with people that are in this cause and with people who have no idea about this, but that could know about this little by little to sum up to this cause. (Interview with people from the Orchard Commission, October 15, 2011)

Next to us was a man planting crops in the impromptu orchard. There were also signs that read "Ruralize the city," "Don't mess with our food," and "Underneath the pavement lie the orchards." Talking to a camera, the man said as he continued working:

"We are here making, out of the sterile surface that is Barcelona, a productive space for planting, in order to defend the peasantry. [We are also] against all the politicians and planners that have wasted the land, stripping it from the potential to produce food." (Excerpt from Interviews with people from the Orchard, 2011, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8FO\\_YLEApY&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8FO_YLEApY&feature=player_embedded))



Figure 31. People working in the orchard at Plaza Catalunya. MG\_3755. Fotomovimiento, 2011. Source: All rights reserved by Fotomovimiento, email consent to release photograph with condition of attributing authorship to *Fotomovimiento*. May 25, Barcelona.

This participant, by emphasizing the tensions between rural and urban space, also focuses on the orchard's symbolic dimension. He mentions how planners are responsible for what he considers the wrong management of urban and green spaces. The commission, on many occasions, described how the space of the orchard was a fundamentally symbolic space. When the action was proposed to the assembly, they described their reasons thus:

[The orchard] is a symbol of peaceful resistance and of our permanence in this plaza. We believe that what we have built here is not [only a] physical [action, but rather a symbol] of how the movement of the plaza blossoms like the [orchard] that we have planted. [...]

It is a symbol of the re-appropriation of public space, that we have collectively transformed into a space of our own, as we are doing with the rest of the plaza [...] it is a symbol of the insertion of nature in the city, the demand for more green spaces

and the recuperation of empty spaces [...] It is a symbol of the recuperation of the civism in the Ordinances of Civism.<sup>91</sup> We are re-appropriating the value of words, and we are deconstructing the conception of public space [...] it is a symbol of intergenerational, intercultural collective creation [...] it is a symbol of environmental education and awareness [...] it is a concrete symbol of actions that create the opportunity to reflect through practice about the model of society that we imagine and dream about [...]

It is another form of attracting people from outside of the plaza to invite them to rethink, reflect and take action together. (Proposal of an “indignant orchard” at the plaza, May 22, 2011, <http://hortdignebcn.wordpress.com/documents/proposta-dhort-indignat-a-la-placa>)

According to the organizers, the reasons for the establishment of the orchard were more symbolic than immediate. The actual value of the orchard in the encampment, according to many, was that of engaging people in communal work – people found a place of encounter there. The symbolic reasons included the invitation to reflect and rethink the notion of public space in the city. Thus, it sought to be a space of both production and reflection: a space that embraces transformation by remaining open and physically permeable to external contributions.

The orchard is perhaps the most graphic example of the no-one-represents-us spirit of the encampment. When they say “we are re-appropriating the value of words and we are deconstructing the conception of public space,” they are explicitly challenging representation not only at the political level but also at the semiotic level as well. As discussed in the previous chapters, the movement believed that words were

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<sup>91</sup> The *Ordinances of Civism* are the Barcelona city government’s laws to regulate “informal” uses of public space, such as graffiti, skateboarding, public urination, public nudity, drug and alcohol use, vandalism, prostitution, and street -vending, among others. These laws have been very unpopular in Barcelona and have generated mass mobilizations and demonstrations since they were promulgated in 2005. Many involved in the 15M had participated in those protests 6 years before, and the movement was deeply critical of the ordinances in general.

insufficient and equivocal. One of the most emblematic songs of the movement illustrates this critique:

“They call it democracy and it’s not,  
they call it democracy and it’s not,  
oh-eh oh-eh oh-eh, oh-eh oh-eh oh-eh  
they call it democracy and it’s not...”  
(Spanish protest song, popular domain, 2000s)

The people of the Orchard Commission wanted to make this statement at the spatial level – the orchard itself serves as a statement saying: “they call it public space and it’s not.” And as the participants called the plaza a space to “rethink, reflect and take action together,” they invited people to pose the question of what does “public space” actually mean. We think of public space as public property, as a neutral space in which people can be but never do anything that alters that space, as a space that supports the urban infrastructure of the city, and as a space for leisure and relaxation, but can public spaces be spaces that the public can transform (in real time)? Can they support the rural region surrounding the city? Can they be spaces of work? The orchard does not seek to definitively answer these questions but rather to provoke people to rethink the potentiality implicit in the notion of public space.

The sign “do not name it” was originally produced by the people of the orchard and later placed in other spaces throughout the encampment. In space as in political representation, this statement seeks to invite people to concentrate on the practices, actions, and relationships taking place in the plaza rather than on trying to capture them by representing them. As the feminist commentator said above, they want to

think beyond institutions and organizations and concentrate on the people performing independently, despite and across these institutions.

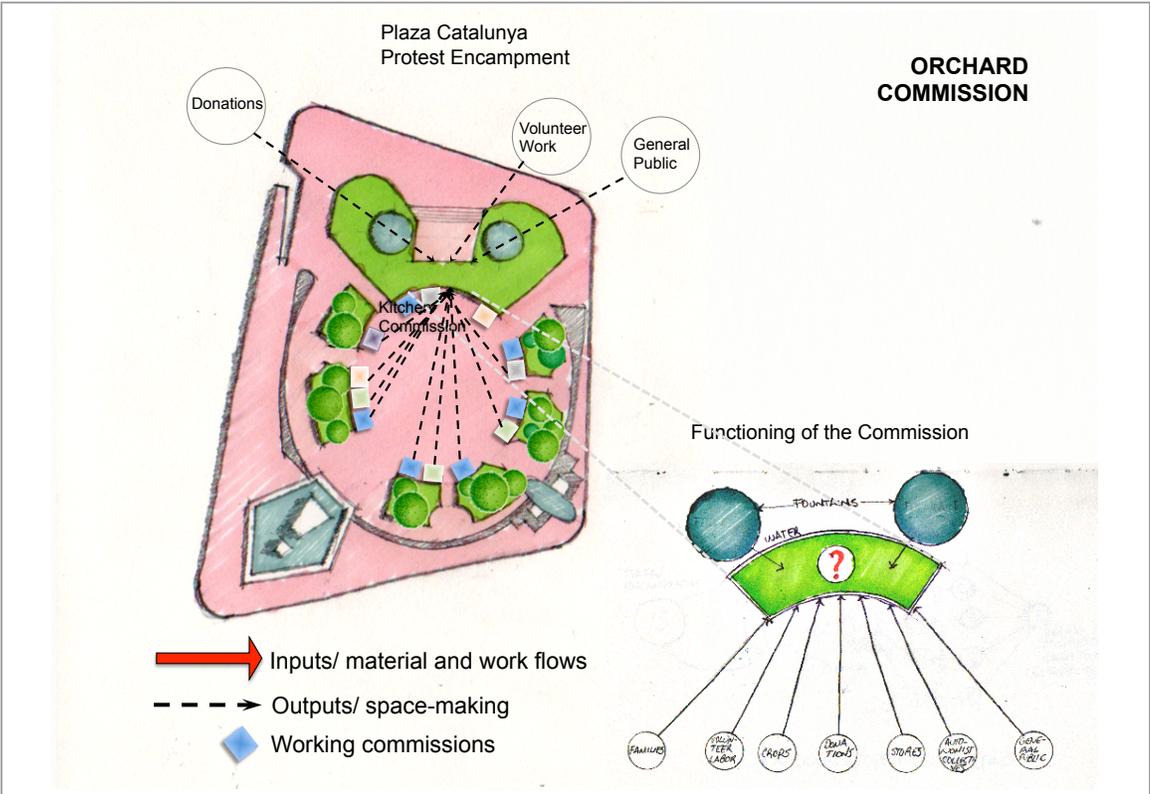


Figure 32. The Orchard Commission. Diagram of its functioning. Source: Author.

**6.4 Conclusions**

The encampments of 2011 served laboratories to test planning processes in the context of open space. As we learned in Part 2, open space is a condition that is permeable to external flows. Therefore, we can say that one does not plan open space but rather *in* and *through* open space. Nevertheless, open space can be facilitated by collectively

enacting the refusal of boundaries. The open call for actions that gave birth to the encampment enabled the creation of an open space in the plaza.

As we learned in the previous chapter, the encampment was a challenge to the urban text. It sought to liberate flows of meanings that constitute the city. When planners, designers and city governments plan the urban text, a readymade vocabulary usually structures the mindset of city-making processes. They usually think in terms of infrastructure, transportation, buildings, and housing, instead of thinking, for example: What does infrastructure do and mean for the city? How do people dwell in space? How do people move across urban space? Questions like these were posed and enacted all the time in the encampment. For example, the orchard questioned the notion of public space by proposing that it could serve also as a space for encounter through collective work and learning.

Going forward, we can say that at moments in the encampment, even the text (i.e., space), not just the authors (i.e., the planners of the space), was appropriated by the spontaneous flows of meaning. In the realm of theatre, Antonine Artaud viewed actors as vehicles or receptacles of performance.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the encampment was a “stage” that was a permeable vehicle of material and information flows, as in the case of the Kitchen or Infrastructures Commissions, which did not want to retain the flows of donations of food or materials for the encampment: as the Kitchen participant said “as soon as things enter the encampment, they immediately go out.”

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<sup>92</sup> Delueze and Guattari actually borrow Artaud’s figure of the *Body without Organs (BwO)* and apply it to space.

The open nature of the meaning and the space of the encampment were directly permeated by the Internet culture. As Bifo Berardi (2012) has said, most of the people involved in the 2011 movements were “Internet natives”. These movements were “drafted” in the social networks before they actually took to the streets. The conversations that took place on Facebook, Twitter, and other online social networks about what to do in regard to the foreclosure crisis and the privatization of public services eventually resulted in the encampments, almost as a natural next step only this time directly in space – i.e., the analog, the offline sphere. Thus, it is no surprise that the planning processes of the commissions analyzed in this chapter resemble social media.

As if in a laboratory, the encampment tested the approach of open planning, which was spontaneously discovered by the participants of the agoras, assemblies and commissions as they enacted it in space. How they did it informed what they wanted to produce in space. These experiments provide implications for planning and design practices in several ways.

First, we learned that we could think of public space as a “platform” (as it is referred to in Informatics) on which material, informational and organizational flows take place. We learned this from the case of the Infrastructures Commission, which was relatively constant in respect to the other commissions and independent of material flows, which were variable. Therefore, it worked as a platform. Information and

material moved and flowed through it but did not modify the platform. Information was also not codified but only passed through. Similarly, the Kitchen Commission worked as a codifying device that accepted everything that was donated (i.e., it was permeable) and discovered what to do with it on a daily basis. Therefore, these two commissions worked like an open-source system.

Second, we confirmed that, as we discussed in the previous chapter, planning could be the result of improvisation, understood as responsive-to-the-context interaction. The “paella approach” – i.e., that of using whatever is at hand to mix into something that makes sense – is a proof of that. The notion of “making sense together” (Forester, 1989) discussed in the Part 2 in reference to the organization of the movement, is applied to the space of the encampment; however, in this case they seek to make sense out of experimentation. Another useful concept is that of *bricolage*, i.e., the act of using “whatever is at hand” and defining its use through its potential (Levi-Strauss, 1966 in Rowe, 1973). This is exactly how the Kitchen and Infrastructures Commissions operated. The person from Infrastructures concluded his description of how his commission worked by saying: “For example, today we had a donation of two pink tables...” He then smiled and shrugged, as if he knew that he had no idea what to do with them at the moment but would eventually find a use for them.

Third, by analyzing the case of the Orchard Commission, we assessed the implications of planning as an open-ended process. In that case, a program was suggested by the organizers in the form of a question: “Orchard?” So, it was not only open-source, but

also explicitly open-ended, as it did not seek to become a finished space. It declared itself a free space – as the encampment also did – in the moment that they presented themselves as an open question. The provocation opened possibilities to “rethink public space,” as they said.

Fourth, we learned that the space of the encampment mirrored the virtual flows of communication happening in the infosphere. Therefore, we also learned that thinking of space as a *wiki* system – open-source and open-ended – is not only a powerful metaphor but also an actual materialization of how communication is structured in these kinds of social movements. In Wikipedia, for example, the texts of entries can be modified by anyone (i.e., open-source) and at any time (i.e., open-ended). The entries are constantly being modified and altered to the point that the initial entry can transform into something completely different. As time passes, the text becomes longer, more detailed, more debated and more complex. The encampment sought to embrace these kind of logics. In fact, the *wiki* concept was present in the assembly discussions in the 15M across Spain. The Sevilla branch of 15M (which was in constant communication with the Barcelona and Madrid branches) even proposed the creation of a “Wiki-Parliament”, in which people could participate in real time. In Barcelona, the publication *Rebel!*, which emanated from the 15M, discussed this approach:

In the historical context of the systemic crisis in which we find ourselves, our options are limited: to restore the values that define us as cooperative beings and the necessary means for the construction of new common spaces or to face how these values are merged in the magnanimity of the State-Capital order, in which case we would have to

empower ourselves to write our own history to share it and open it to collective mechanisms that lead us to a wiki-History (one written by all). (Rebelaos, 2012: 11)

Thus, rather than being spaces defined by consensus, the encampments embraced dissensus. In fact, these spaces were in a perpetual state of contestation, similar to how in Wikipedia controversial topics develop in to different versions every day in real time. The more public – and open – in the collective imaginary the space is, the more contested it will be. In that sense, the encampments stressed the public character of public spaces as they turned them into spaces in which not everyone agrees and anyone can participate. Thus, the space remains in a process of constitution, but it never becomes fully constituted (Negri, 1999).

The open planning approach offers provocative lessons for planners and designers. The encampment was an ephemeral experiment that tested this approach at a scaled-down version; however, having teased out the actual processes involved in its material production, it could then reproduce this on larger scales as well. The notion of open-source or open-governments is already being debated for application in London, New York, Singapore, Buenos Aires and Mexico City; however, the notion of being open-ended poses real challenges. Now we can imagine physical urban systems like plazas or road networks that can be modified in real time – as some routes remain open to vehicles, some close to become pedestrian or bicycle paths, and so on.

These approaches present great challenges and provoke big questions. A space planned on the basis of openness grows in size and complexity every time new inputs

are incorporated from outside. This goes beyond the approach of participatory planning and design, in which the stakeholders of space (e.g., neighbors, users) contribute their opinions until they reach a working consensus and a plan or design is implemented. In spaces that have symbolic significance to virtually everyone in the city, such as the Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona or Puerta del Sol in Madrid, anyone is potentially a stakeholder. Thus, conclusive or “permanent” decisions about the space become almost impossible and the space remains an open-ended proposition that embraces transformation, as it is permeable to information, participation and material flows. Thus, the space becomes a milieu that lacks defined spatial and temporal boundaries.

This calls for debate on the role of time in space-making processes. Because planning and design disciplines arguably deal with the future by definition, future research should explore the challenges of planning spaces in parallel to open debates, rather than planning after debates have closed or “finished”. In the same way that this dissertation seeks to contribute to questions that remain open about these topics, spontaneous and organic planning is already taking place independently and in parallel to academic debates about it.

## CONCLUSION

The encampments of 2011 prompted new debates about how we perceive, conceive and live the relationship between urban space and the public. Public space is usually addressed as a conceptual unit (public and spatial) in which it is often taken for granted that the space shapes the public. The stories and debates analyzed in this study deconstruct this unit by showing how the public(s) and urban space play out in a dialectical binomial relation. On the one hand, urban spaces produce and induce certain uses and welcome certain users; on the other, users reproduce, re-appropriate and reinvent space through unforeseen uses. The work of planners, architects, urban designers and city governments often fosters the former view. The empirical observations presented here, however, provide an outstanding opportunity to explore the latter. We discovered that public space is able to support more complexity than normative planning and design often advises and prescribes. Furthermore, we found that as spaces remain open to new publics, they tend to create self-regulated environments that are resilient to continuous transformation.

The protest encampments served as laboratories in which people (1) questioned what representational processes do for people in space, (2) challenged the identity and spatial boundaries that these processes create, and (3) tested alternative ways of planning space and relating to each other through *open space*<sup>93</sup> – i.e., beyond material,

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<sup>93</sup> *Open space* is a spatial-organizational condition that allows for any potential contributions. One does not plan or design open space but rather *on and through* open space. For more on the politics of open

representational and hierarchical boundaries. Although these events are somewhat anomalous, unusual and temporary, they constitute moments in which the political and creative dimensions of public space are intensely tested. In that sense, these experiments deserve to be studied as they reveal the potential for new forms of living public space that could in turn inform a planning and design that is responsive to that potential.

We began with an analysis of stories that illustrated how the identity of a public is constructed spatially when representational processes are refused and when the participants commit to processes rather than to outcomes. As individuals and collectives from different backgrounds – even conflicting ideologies – engaged together in the same practices, an identity based on performance (i.e., an *organic solidarity* in Durkheim’s words) was created in the protest encampments, general assemblies and protest actions of the movements. *Becoming present* in space (i.e., becoming public through action in the lived present) created an identity that sought to contest political representation (i.e., not being present but being *re-presented* by someone who is). We then analyzed the challenges entailed in creating open space and how it is socially constructed through constant tensions with its context. Drawing from this analysis, we explored *the dilemma of openness*: when space is permeable to newcomers, the public grows in size, complexity and diversity but coherence is compromised; in contrast, when space closes to exterior entrants, the public achieves

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space, see Sen, J. (2010). On Open Space: Explorations Towards a Vocabulary of a More Open Politics. *Antipode*, 42(4). 994-1018.

coherence but lacks heterogeneity. The encampments and the movements – socially and spatially constructed as open spaces – faced this dilemma constantly, but rather than trying to solve it once and for all, they embraced the complexity that came with its transforming nature. Focusing on the development of the protest encampments, we next explored how space can be planned as an open system. By analyzing the learning processes and spontaneous space-making mechanisms of the working commissions as well as the evolution of the encampment, we learned that the movements embraced a planning approach of *uncertainty as potential*. These processes provokes us to reflect upon – rather than simply dismiss – the challenges of planning public spaces and planning *in* public spaces, *through* open space and the in-real-time use of incremental participatory processes that are open to the public. These are provocations to think of public spaces as *spaces of becoming*.

Throughout the stories, the notion of *becoming* is prevalent. The permanent call for action in public spaces creates a public in transformation – a *becoming-public*. This processual nature of the movements ensured that the space and the publics using the space were transformed in parallel. Therefore, the occupied parks and plazas turned, at the same time, into *becoming-spaces* and *spaces of becoming*. Tracking and analyzing these transformations was a difficult task, as the publics and the spaces were not only subjects but also agents of transformation – they transformed themselves as they transformed their environment. These processes were unidirectional neither in space nor in time. Thus, to return to the initial dialectical tension posed in the introduction, *spaces shaped publics* and *publics shaped spaces*.

The first part assessed the construction of publics (a becoming-public) through the occupation of space. More specifically, Chapter 1 analyzed how the movements originated from a call for action in public spaces and, throughout the development of the encampments, refused to deliver conclusive statements that provided a reductive “about” for the movement. The movements transformed incrementally, as individuals and collectives constantly joined them, into entirely new struggles every day. These spaces were not only *lived* – in Lefebvre’s words – as *representational spaces* (i.e., spaces in which people represent themselves) but also sought to “skip” representational processes in order to become “spaces of presentation”, in which the identity of the movement developed as people *became present* in the plaza.

The public that emerged in this processes was, as James Holston (1996) puts it, an “insurgent citizenship” – a citizenship that refuses to be classified, codified, institutionalized and therefore also co-opted, formalized and reduced. The warning they made to the media and the government about not trying “to classify the unclassifiable”, like the “do not name this” sign in the Barcelona encampment, summarizes this spirit. Chapter 2 analyzed the operational and accountability conflicts that arose in the movement from having multiple publics and senses of identity sharing the same space. The stories show that, most of the time, they managed to overcome these conflicts through constant reflection, deliberation and commitment to performing together – regardless of their ideological differences.

The second part continued to explore how space is constituted and shaped by these emergent publics. It particularly focused on analyzing the role of boundaries in the social construction of open space – which implied that potentially anyone who wanted to join the struggle was welcome. Chapter 3 analyzed how the general assemblies and the encampments operated without boundaries and in tension with their context. They remained resilient to these tensions and maintained a fragile balance between inclusiveness and permissiveness, diverseness and dispersion, trust and ingenuity; however, creating such spaces did not come without great conflict. The actions undertaken by the movements showed that conflicting publics as Guattari foresaw four decades ago, people “with differences and irreducible antagonisms will be allowed to coexist” (2007: 1). They showed that such a multitude could work, as one of the protesters said, “together but not mixed.” Moreover, it shows that heterogeneous – and even clashing – publics can plan when the debates are aggregative rather than mutually exclusionary and dismissive. In most of the debates analyzed here, conflicting voices were often incorporated into the general narrative; and when they could not be incorporated, they at least remained in the same space – however, as part of a different identity narrative. In this sense, the space was self-regulated through spontaneous rearrangements between strangers and acquaintances.

Chapter 4 sought to explore a theoretical framework to analyze open space and boundless social structures as well as to understand the conflicts that they entail. The *dilemma of openness* is most recurrent in the stories of these conflicting events. Based on Delueze and Guattari’s (1977, 1983) concepts of *becoming-* (e.g., becoming-space,

becoming-publics), the *Body without Organs (BwO)* and *milieus*, I developed three approaches of boundary conceptualization to study public space – namely, *compartmentalized spaces*, *permeable spaces* and *milieus*. These concepts begin to show how public spaces function as realms that can potentially merge with and be penetrated by their contexts.

The third part analyzed the notion of *open planning* – i.e., planning and space-making processes that take place in the context of *open space*. It particularly focused on the space-making processes used in the protest encampments and the lessons that can be drawn for planning and urban design. Through an analysis of the development of the encampment, working commissions and their Internet activity, Chapter 5 explored how the plaza occupiers created mechanisms that enabled physical planning processes to happen in parallel to the debates and that were resilient to the ever-growing complexity of the movement. In Chapter 6, through an analysis of three working commissions – namely, the Infrastructures, Kitchen and Orchard Commissions – we learned that the encampment was permeable to all kinds of material, organizational and informational participation. The stories revealed that the encampments operated as open spatial and organizational systems that allowed anyone to participate in their planning, in real time.

This understanding provides multiple lessons and questions for planners and urban designers as well as opportunities for future research. First, we learned that *open spaces* pose great challenges to those seeking to create a manageable environment in

which a coherent form of planning can arise; however, that does not mean that planning and design processes are impossible. The kind of planning that emerged from the protest encampments was undertaken by a growing body of planners (i.e., anyone who contributed toward transforming the plaza) that constantly adapted their objectives to the changing circumstances. Their planning processes relied upon responsiveness and self-reflectiveness. The constant incorporation of new voices into these open spaces ensured that the processes – and not the outcomes – were the actual objectives of the planning. Experimenting with open spaces showed that public spaces could host much more complexity than traditional planners usually warn against and accept in practice. The condition of openness proved to be resilient to conflict between the groups and individuals who were constantly incorporated into the groups, as the movements embraced an aggregative – rather than exclusionary – identity. The constant incorporation of voices resulted in an aggregative planning of space. This was evident in the incorporation of more and more working commissions and collectives, each of which created its own space in the encampment. The problems of coexistence created by the growing congestion in the plaza were most often self-regulated and negotiated without major conflict.

Second, we found that uncertainty could be understood as potential when it results from an open question or an open call for action. The encampments, for instance, were the result of the aggregation of collective uncertainties (e.g., economic, social, cultural) that came together in search for alternatives. Two unrelated figures serve as metaphors to understand how the encampments were planned – the *paella* (the

Spanish dish, which traditional history says came about in times of scarcity when people got together and mixed leftovers that otherwise would have been insufficient for a meal) and *wikis*.<sup>94</sup> The aesthetics and pragmatics of the *paella* – the organizational basis of the kitchen commission – illustrate how articulated uncertainties can be turned into potential. Similarly, *wiki-systems* are based on entries that are permanently open for transformation to anyone who wants to contribute.<sup>95</sup> However, this naturally clashes with the normative notions of planning and design, as they are arguably disciplines and practices that in principle deal with the future. Planning based on *paella*-like logic or *wiki-systems* must be open-ended; therefore, the “future” would be in a state of perpetual change and uncertainty. Furthermore, the implications for the temporality of planning processes are important – when space remains open, debate remains open. Thus, planning can only occur in real time. These findings contribute to a body of literature that recognizes the potential of spontaneity and improvisation for design and social organization.<sup>96</sup> We also learned that these kinds of logic, which often leave the media and city governments confused, did not seem problematic to a generation of “Internet natives”. The open-source and open-ended approaches influenced the spatiality and temporality of the encampments

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<sup>94</sup> A *wiki* is a “web application which allows people to add, modify, or delete content in collaboration with others” (Wikipedia.org).

<sup>95</sup> Taking the metaphor further, in *Wikipedia* there are controversial topic entries that are almost “battle grounds”, as they are constantly edited and reedited to the point that the narrative of the entries shifts completely from time to time (e.g., the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Abortion, Global Warming). Similarly, there are some urban spaces that are more contested than others, as more people claim rights over their occupation, planning and regulation.

<sup>96</sup> To learn more about improvisation and comedy as design strategies, see Inam, A. (July 01, 2010). Navigating Ambiguity: Comedy Improvisation as a Tool for Urban Design Pedagogy and Practice. *Journal for Education in the Built Environment*, 5, 1, 7-26. To learn about organized anarchies, see Cohen, M. D., March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (March 01, 1972). A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17, 1, 1-25.

because their makers practiced, embodied and internalized the ethics, aesthetics and pragmatics of the Internet. Ultimately, the encampments were but a metaphor of the virtual public sphere and – arguably – a prelude to what public space could become in the future.

Third, we learned how voices and performances turned into spaces, and that conflicting voices are not only able to coexist but even work in parallel without cancelling each other out. The encampments operated through deliberative and reflective direct action; they used the parks and plazas as spaces to reflect and “make sense together” (Forester, 1989), not necessarily through frontal debate between conflicting parts but through a communication similar to Socrates’ *Maieutics* – in which a question is posed and other participants contribute with more questions that deepen joint inquiry and so on. Thus, a process of collective learning occurs without necessarily reaching a conclusive answer. Even when the multiplicity of questions – responding to other questions – can conflict with the initial question, they all share the fact that they remain as open questions. And, as they share a collective sense of refusal of and reflection upon the general order of things, they seek to create and enact alternatives to this order. They are united by, to borrow a phrase from Kingsnorth, “one no and many yeses.”

Understanding these kinds of processes makes it possible to comprehend how our increasingly interconnected and interdependent cities actually work. Conceiving planning as being open to real-time civic participation and as systems in

transformation will have important impacts on the democratization of city making. Nevertheless, this approach poses significant technological, organizational, political and cultural challenges that will need to be addressed by planners, activists and citizens. These challenges arise in the form of tensions between normative kinds of planning and the alternatives that refuse such planning.

Specific challenges for alternative urban design and planning processes confront the implicit values that normatively define these disciplines – 1) the hierarchical relationships within firms and institutions (e.g., the head of the firm, associates, assistants) and between firms and the public (e.g., the experts, clients, lay public), 2) decision-making processes that are exclusionary and not aggregative, as one idea is chosen over – rather than incorporated with and articulated in relation to – another, and (3) the need to suspend debate at a certain point in order to begin implementation. Implementing open-system approaches in design firms and planning institutions would require more experimentation. These experiments could reproduce scaled and controlled environments like those of the encampments in design schools or in dynamics organized in design collectives (e.g., from firms and think tanks to neighborhood associations and activist organizations). They could also incorporate digital tools such as *wiki* systems and other open-source resources<sup>97</sup> to test how different voices can be incorporated into design processes in real time.

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<sup>97</sup> Recent online publications have also mentioned the potentialities of open-source and “wiki” approaches for urban planning and design (opensourcecities.tumblr.com, 2013, Polis, 2010, Merchant, 2011, Coren, 2011, Vallejo, 2012, Niaros, 2012). There are also projects and theories seeking to incorporate these approaches into planning and design, such as The Open Planning Project (TOPP), the Peer-2-Peer Lab (Niaros, 2012) and MIT’s Urban Network Analysis software.

The relationships, interactions and debates happening within the spaces and publics studied here do not happen in a conflict with their contexts, but as Deleuze describes, through a “difference of intensities”. In the open entities that were the encampments and the movements, the processes of becoming were not only constant across temporal boundaries (as debates continued beyond and in parallel to implementation) but also across spatial ones – as the relationships and articulations that constituted the milieu of the movement were more intense closer to the center and less intense further out. Thus, as this case involves a diffuse object of study, the questions that arise from this conclusion also appear in the form of tensions and differences of intensities.

The first question that suggests directions for new academic inquiry is that of the tension between *anomy and autonomy*. This is a question about the organization of space (i.e., anomous vs. autonomous space) as well as the creation of subjectivities (i.e., becoming free from external control over one’s own life vs. losing complete control over it). The notion of autonomy (Greek: *auto* = self, *nomos* = order), understood as the self-organization of space and social groups, was always implicit in the development of the encampments. Indeed, the encampments worked as autonomous entities.<sup>98</sup> The stories analyzed here show how an alternative social order

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<sup>98</sup> Lotringer gives a description of autonomy that is illustrative to the 2011 movements: “Autonomy is the body without organs of politics, antihierarchic, anti-dialectic, anti-representative. It is not only a political project, it is a project for existence. Individuals are never autonomous: they depend on external recognition. The autonomous body is not exclusive or identifiable. It is beyond recognition. A body of workers, it breaks away from labor discipline; a body of militants, it ignores party organization; a body of doctrine, it refuses ready-made classifications. [...] Autonomy has no frontiers. It is a way of eluding the imperatives of production, the verticality of institutions, the traps of political representation, the virus of power. In biology, an autonomous organism is an element that functions independently of other

(i.e., *nomos*) can be self-produced by its stakeholders; however, a (mis)interpretation of this approach, that was not absent in the movements, is that of *anomy* (Greek: *a* = without, *nomos* = order) – the lack of capacity to produce or adapt to any kind of order. Autonomous organizations have long been studied (Hard and Negri, 2000, 2004, 2012; Lotringer, 2007, Castoriadis in Chatterton, 2005, Guattari, 2007, Deleuze and Guatari, 1977, 1983) often in contrast to heteronomy (i.e., an order imposed from above and by strangers). Recent planning literature shows an interest in the importance of autonomous organization and social movements as planning factors (Chatterton, 2005, De Souza, 2006, Marcuse, 2013). The tensions between anomy and autonomy and its implications for the planning and organization of space invite future theoretical explorations to provide conceptual frameworks to study similar movements, planning processes and public spaces.

The second tension that emerged in this dissertation is that which exists between *debate and implementation*. Planning – no matter how participatory and democratic – is nevertheless a process that concludes at a certain point in order to give space for implementation. This transition is always a source of conflict in the practice of planning – voices are left out of the process, arguments do not receive the opportunity to be fully developed, and proposals do not get incorporated. This becomes more pronounced when it comes to design and physical planning, as the outcomes of these practices involve the construction of structures that are intended to last for many years

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parts. Political autonomy is the desire to allow differences to deepen at the base without trying to synthesize them from above, to stress similar attitudes without imposing a ‘general line’, to allow parts to co-exist side by side, in their singularity” (Lotringer et al., 2007: 1).

and that require an immense amount of material and human resources; however, in the encampments, the participants explored planning and design processes that allowed for implementation to happen in parallel to debate.

These kinds of spatial-material dynamics were only possible due to 1) the ephemerality of their structures and 2) the immediacy of the debates, communication and articulation happening in the encampment. This was perhaps one of their most interesting provocations for planning practice – not because massive steel and concrete structures cannot be modified in parallel to real-time debates but because city making can potentially benefit from a softer and less invasive use of space than more permanent infrastructures. The key issue here is to explore what and how much of the city should be permanent (i.e., the platform) and what and how much should be ephemeral.

This leads to the next question and avenue of research: If a supposedly informed public is in charge of the creation and transformation of the soft part of the city, as happened in the encampments, then who should be in charge of the creation of the platform?

This question leads to a tension about the *positionality of the planner*. The encampments tested space-making processes that capitalized on leaderless and horizontal organization. In such a system, everybody – at some space and time – was potentially in charge of planning. The figure of the facilitator in the general assemblies

was the closest to a leader, and facilitators were constantly rotated (sometimes even within a single session). The planner has traditionally been associated with leaders, organizers, mediators, negotiators and educators depending the case; however, in a planning practice that is process-centered, the figure of *the* planner disappears, thereby allowing many planners to engage in the planning process in an open system of decision-making. This does not mean that “anything goes” but rather that more voices, and more diversity, can at times produce stronger and more creative results.

The debates about these tensions in the encampment revealed that the protesters cherished certain implicit values that conflicted with normative planning values. More specifically, the efficiency, sense of permanence and effectiveness that is implicit in the fruits of conventional normative planning conflicted with the desire for transparency, spontaneity and openness that was professed in the encampments. New avenues of research could explore the scale and reach of an open system, process-centered planning as well as the implications for space-making in larger contexts and longer temporal frameworks, focusing especially on the relationship between self-organized spaces and their contexts.

The initial motivation of this dissertation to understand how publics shape themselves and thus shape their spaces came from the acknowledgement that an urban design piece (e.g., infrastructure, public space, urban furniture) always has an afterlife that transcends the spatial program. The question of how “misuses” of space inform urban design must be studied in each particular case, as each space has different intended

uses and invites certain users. The Barcelona and New York encampments showed that spaces designed and regulated for recreational and touristic use possess a latent potential to become spaces of public assembly and creativity.

These kinds of transformations are not new in public spaces. Many plazas have acquired the aura of parks, promenades and malls over the last thirty years. Each space provides a certain kind of being-in-the-world (Richardson, 2003). But these transformations do not necessarily happen in detriment to public space and the public realm, as the *narratives of loss* suggest (see Introduction chapter); they can also be the result of political and creative activation. In Barcelona, some people started calling the encampment “Agora Barcelona”. This (re)presentation of the plaza contested the program of a pacified space and suggested that these public spaces offered other possibilities.

This potential did not die with the dismantling of the encampments. After the participants were evicted – in many cases violently – the movements matured into robust networks of solidarity that operated at the neighborhood scale. They were genuine examples of “Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZs)” (Bey, 2011) – practices of self-organization that survive in time but do not hold the same space (see section entitled “Three approaches of boundary conceptualization” in Chapter 4). The experiments with alternative forms of interaction, encounter and planning expanded beyond the spaces of the encampments. This is arguably how they spread across the world and endured throughout time: the practices of the Tahrir Square encampment

were subsequently adopted by the occupiers of Plaza del Sol and Sintagma Square, adapted in Zuccotti Park, reinterpreted in Taksim Square, and so on. In all of these cities, people gathered in parks and plazas to debate the bases of an emergent transnational citizenship of resistance, one that perceives that local problems are often different manifestations of the same socioeconomic system and thus recognizes the potential to articulate a network of solidarities. In fact, those networks remain today beyond the dismantling of the encampments – in the form of neighborhood assemblies, art collectives and civic associations. They are the result of these seminal moments of resistance and experimentation.

By analyzing debates, conversations and space-making processes in these social movements, we have learned that open space creates the possibility for *open planning*. This kind of planning creates enormous cultural, political and social challenges for its organization as well as logistic and material challenges for its implementation, if we think in terms of the objectives and reach of normative planning; however, if we challenge (or refuse) those planning processes and open a discussion of alternatives as was done in the plaza, then we can foster unforeseen possibilities for public space.

This work does not suggest that the encampments are reproducible or that they should necessarily substitute for the existing order in public spaces. Instead, it seeks to reveal the values implicit in the movements' practices – which, at the same time, made the values of normative planning visible – that can inform different kinds of planning processes. It seeks to provoke new research about the challenges of planning *through*

open space and the possibilities for a planning practice that can potentially engage the broader public in the planning of public space. The most important lesson of the encampments for planners and designers is that of “resistance as creativity” (borrowing Deleuze’s phrase “to resist is to create”). True creativity and innovation implies a dose of rupture from dominant structures. In order to create something new, one must depart from the processes that perpetuate a normative system. At the same time, experimentations with alternative aesthetics and forms of organization are in themselves acts of contestation, even if unconsciously so. The encampments operated as spaces of resistance-through-creativity – and creativity-through resistance. Therefore, the most important challenge to incorporating these lessons is to continue experimenting with these space-making processes and design practices so that they can be adapted to each particular space and by each particular public.

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