

Space in Motion: Barcelona and the Stages of (In)visibility

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Amb molt de seny i força rauxa hem endreçat Barcelona....
—Miquel Domingo i Clota and Maria Rosa Bonet i Casas

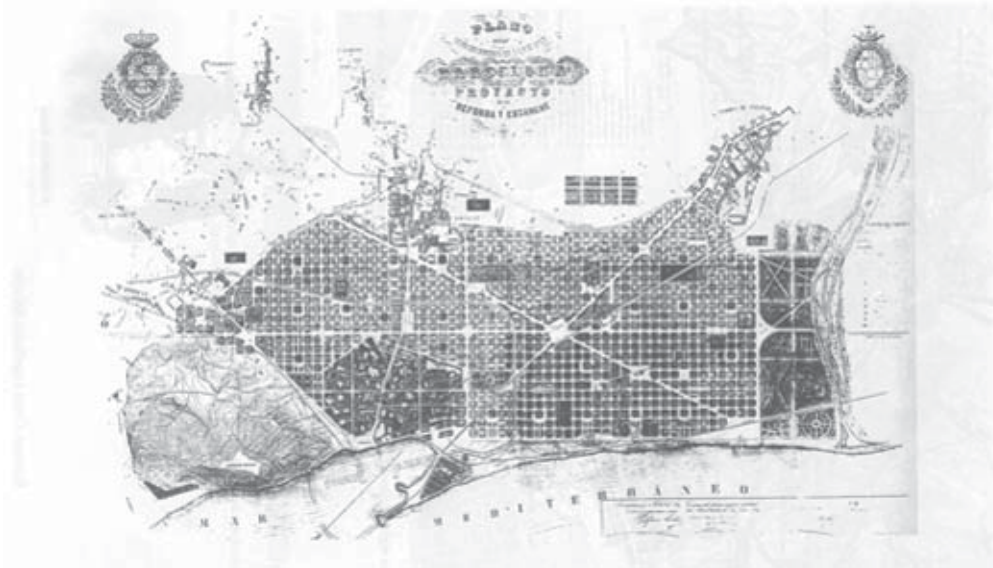
When Barcelona comes into view nowadays, it almost always seems to be shining. A rehabilitated waterfront; rapid expressways; a plethora of new and refurbished public sculptures, squares, and parks; gleaming new shopping complexes; sparkingly renovated Modernist façades; world-class festivals, swanky new restaurants, clubs, and bars, and masses of fun-loving people: such are the props of this city by the sea. Elegant, vibrant, sunny, sexy, and at times even a little raucous, but also ever so homey, practical, business-like, and controlled, Barcelona is a study in contrasts, at once a small town and a metropolis, appreciative of tradition and open to innovation, bilingual and multicultural in one complex sweep. But the city has other sides, far from the glitter and glamour, the kitsch and serialized vulgarity, of the tourist trade. Like any city, Barcelona can be dirty and dull and downright dangerous, indifferent to its local residents and rude to its visitors, prone to red tape, stalled public projects, and haughty market-oriented initiatives. What critic Llàtzer Moix calls the city of architects—and what architect Ricardo Bofill calls, more self-flatteringly, the city of the architect—is also, as Josep M. Prim reminds us, a city of the downcast and delinquent, of non-European Union immigrants, *okupes* and the homeless, the aged and the infirm. If many of the architects, urban planners, politicians, bureaucrats, and pundits invoke New



York City as a rather improbable model for Barcelona, it is often in ways that replicate and naturalize the sleek surface of a newly sanitized, increasingly homogenized, hyper-commercialized, quasi-Disneyfied, globalized place. Barcelona's beauty, its vigor and verve, is not the whole picture, in no small measure because the whole picture cannot but be fractured, shot through with something less than beautiful, other than beautiful, something that disrupts, complicates, and arguably alters the very sense, or knowledge, of the beautiful.

The five essays assembled here, disciplinarily different as they are, present Barcelona, however beautiful, by way of the problem of the visual and the visible, still bound to the problem of the known and knowable. For Josep Miquel Sobrer, the interplays between Antoni Gaudí's still unfinished Sagrada Família and such symbolically laden mountains as Montserrat at once ground the city in a tradi-

tionalist, inward-focused Catalan nationalism and mobilize it internationally, providing visitors, both actual and potential, with a clearly identifiable image of the city. Sobrer follows the history of the temple's construction, from before Gaudí (Francisco de Paula del Villar y Lozano) to after him (Josep Maria Subirachs), and in so doing partially retraces the city's, and the country's, history. Surrounded by masses of tourists, large climate-controlled buses, and sidewalk stands peddling miniature versions of the building, the Sagrada Família at times seems to acquire the characteristics of an oversized trinket, a massive piece of merchandise with few appreciable links to such lofty, fraught ideals as God and country. But as Sobrer rightly insists, the "laic success" of the building "stands in some sort of tension with its purported religious intent, which was one of expiation or atonement for societal sins." Gaudí's messianic Catholicism, glossed over by touristic projections and avant-



The Plan Cerdá, 1859.

garde appropriations, continues to imprint, however weakly, the structure. Opposition to the construction of the Sagrada Família may presently assume a more aesthetically oriented guise, often out of a quasi-fetishized respect for Gaudí himself, but opposition to the temple and its architect was, as Sobrer notes, a fact of Gaudí's life. Opposition turns violent during the Spanish Civil War, entailing the destruction of plans of the temple and parts of Gaudí's workshop, but it had dogged Gaudí and the Sagrada Família from practically the very beginning. Even Joaquim Mir's *La catedral dels pobres* (1897-1898), a large painting which depicts a group of beggars gathered before the unfinished temple, and which Sobrer reads as endorsing a democratic or populist ethos, may constitute a subtle form of opposition. After all, as art historian Valeriano Bozal indicates, others have read Mir's painting as a critique of the massive amounts of money required to erect the building, money for which Gaudí himself practically had to go begging, money that would therefore *not* help shelter or feed the poor (68-69). Whatever the case, Sobrer's final dictum remains sound: the Sagrada Família, an "artificial mountain," serves as "a reminder of the complexities and contradictions of a city's life."

If the Sagrada Família, for all its contradictory significance, does its best to play the part of the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, or the Empire State Building, it is not, by any means, the site foremost in the minds of the city's residents. For the residents, such places as markets, schools, churches, cafés, bars, shops, and parks, sites of everyday life and its practices, tend to overshadow more recognizably monumental structures, whose role in everyday life

should not be discounted either. As Conrad Kent argues, parks, gardens, and other green spaces provide the residents of "Barcelona with a 'memory' of its deep structures and contribute to the city's ability to avoid much of the banality and anonymity that are the bane of cities everywhere." Part and parcel of the city's memory is, then, the fabrication of spaces in which collectivity, community, and civility—or at least some semblance thereof—can come to the fore. Kent's exercise in cultural archeology leads him back to the late eighteenth-century pleasure gardens of the privileged few and from there forward to the public parks and gardens projects of times of increasing, if extraordinarily embattled, democratization. Kent rightly understands that recent ties and tensions between proponents of more or less verdant parks and proponents of hard concrete, asphalt, and metallic squares (the "places dures," or "hard squares," of his title) have a fairly long and complex history. The mid-nineteenth-century Cerdà plan, which undergirds the creation of the orderly, tree-lined *Eixample*, comprised an attempt to reconcile nature and building, to bring the garden home. Rampant capitalist speculation soon laid waste, however, to the more bucolic aspects of Cerdà's utopian socialist-inspired vision. Instead of controlled dwellings set amid flowers, fruits, and vegetables, what ensued was a proliferation of structures that filled in each side of the blocks that Cerdà had so carefully, and rationally, designed to remain open to nature. Gaudí was clearly not the first to attempt to "naturalize" the city, and it may even be argued that his usage of biomorphic forms—in the dragon-like façade of the Casa Batlló or the gnarly columns of the Parc Güell—strives

to undo the damage wrought by excessive construction. For all of their ideological differences (and they are considerable), both Cerdà and Gaudí kept an eye on nature, its lush productivity, its twists and turns, and endeavored to make the city a bit less hard. That such “natural” objectives have not been achieved remains evident in current debates over the urban *environment* or, better yet, over the environmental costs of urbanization and the urban costs of environmentalism. However “green consciousness” plays in Barcelona, it is evident that even the trees that line the streets—largely plane trees, which Víctor Mora immortalized in his *Plàtans de Barcelona* (first published in French in 1966), but also palm trees on the waterfront—struggle to be more green than brown.

If Kent follows the trail of wealthy and influential private citizens, gifted architects, and imaginative urban planners, Donald McNeill, focusing more resolutely on the post-Francoist and indeed post-Olympic moment, sounds out the machinations of powerful and would-be powerful politicians. McNeill debunks the myth of the visionary genius, at least in the arena of urban planning, and examines the points of contact—at times to the point of collusion—between architects, engineers, and politicians. While generally supportive of what he characterizes as the relatively careful and coherent urban policy that three Socialist mayors (Narcís Serra, Pasqual Maragall, and Joan Clos) oversaw, McNeill is too discerning a critic to take hype as other than hype. Serra, Maragall, and Clos were all cited when Barcelona became the first city—as opposed to an individual architect or team of architects—to be awarded the presti-

gious Royal Institute of British Architects’ Gold Medal in 1999. The press release stated that,

the Jury felt that the regeneration of Barcelona in the last two decades since the restoration of democracy in Spain had provided such a shining example to other cities, especially London, that it was prepared to break with tradition in order to honour the city, its government and its design professionals. (<http://www.arquitecturaviva.com/News.html>, 8)

Barcelona’s exemplary status has become, by now, something of a truism, yet another reason to study, and love, the city, but also a way of closing down criticism, relativizing problems, and promoting politicians as ultimate urban planners. Pasqual Maragall, in his prologue to Domingo i Clota and Bonet i Casas’s study of social movements, states that,

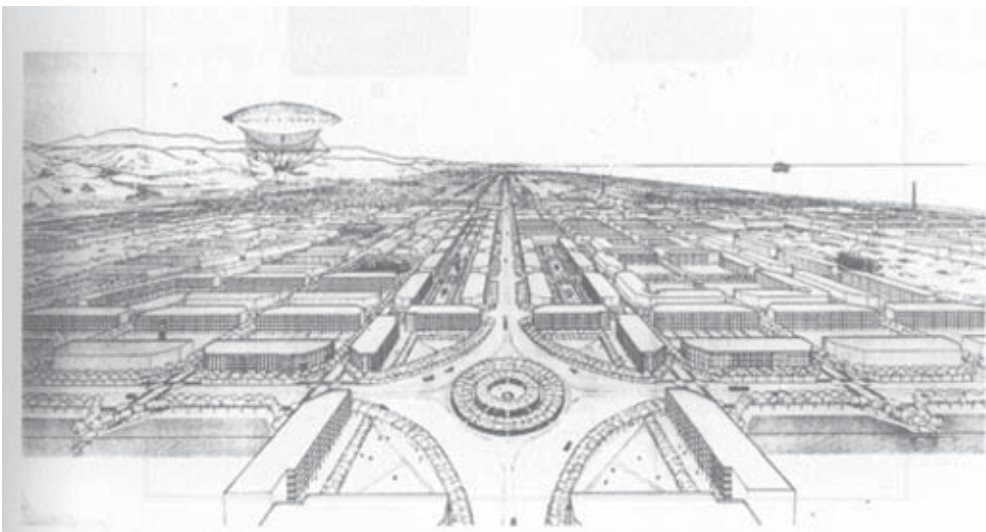
la durada inacabable del franquisme va convèncer grups cada cop més habituals de ciutadans que *calia començar a canviar la ciutat abans que el país no canviés*. (10, emphasis original)

Maragall’s invocation of groups of concerned citizens fighting Francoism by transforming the city in which they lived is not without foundation, but it risks covering over the power plays of those who, like Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee, had far from insignificant ties to the dictatorship. In fact, citizens groups have frequently found themselves at loggerheads with politicians, whatever their stripe (left, right, or center), and have taken pains to assert a view of Barcelona that is not in

thrall to tourists and multinational corporations. The task has not been easy. According to McNeill, Maragall's successor, Joan Clos, spearheaded "a far clearer opening to foreign capital," an opening made manifest in the establishment of multinational chains—Habitat, McDonald's, FNAC, and so on—throughout the city.

Nothing fails like success: such is the message, a virtual cautionary tale, that McNeill and, somewhat differently, Josep Maria Montaner and Zaida Muxí derive from their examination of current urban projects, most notably the massive construction that attends the *Fòrum Universal de les Cultures-Barcelona 2004*. Located in an area where the Besòs river and the Diagonal—one of the major avenues of the city—meet the Mediterranean sea, the Forum attempts to recapture and reposition the transformative energy that accompanied the 1992 Olympic Games. The difference, of course, is that while the Olympics were planned against a back-

drop of extensive urban decay, including a sluggish waterfront and an inadequate highway system, the Forum is planned against a backdrop of extensive renovation and construction. The very success of the Olympics and the urban transformations effected in their name give way to the consolidation of tourism and to growing gentrification, to what McNeill, by way of Thomas Bender, calls "city lite," a presumably kinder, gentler, more glittery place geared to visitors and shoppers. Although McNeill points to "a relatively healthy and active set of grassroots movements which closely examine the [city] council's policies and the plans of developers" and which help to put the brakes on the implantation of a "city lite," he is clearly concerned by the effects of massive consumerism on the city. Citing writer Quim Monzó and cartoonist Nazario, McNeill refers to the "Lloretització" of Barcelona, a process by which the Catalan capital, reopened to the sea, comes to resemble, in practice if not in design, Lloret



Reconstruction of Cerdà's ideal Barcelona.

de Mar, a beach resort on the Costa Brava known for its commercialization and chartered tours. Tourism remains a vexed phenomenon, and the often elitist maneuvers by which grades of tourism are established (with the lowest being “turismo basura”) at once coincide and clash with more populist maneuvers by local residents. The tensions between the local and the global have, in other words, significant material and symbolic repercussions on the configuration of the city. As McNeill rightly notes, recent controversies over nightlife, noise, and trash of a more literal sort in the Born, an historic neighborhood in the “ciutat vella” (old city) feed in and out of controversies over similar issues in a considerably different neighborhood, the Raval, on the other side of the Rambla. The Raval, long marked by poverty, prostitution, and crime, and presently home to many North African and Pakistani immigrants, remains one of the most degraded sections of the city, with recent efforts to open and clean it up sparking a variety of contestatory responses. Urban reform here must contend with the reality of global movements of a decidedly less touristic sort. These “other” residents, from places far beyond Catalonia, Spain, and the rest of Western Europe, frequently inhabit a vague terrain between transience and citizenship, passing and belonging. The “right to the night” entails, that is, other rights, other restrictions, other challenges.

Though not explicitly addressing questions of rights, Josep Maria Montaner and Zaida Muxí do address questions of relationality: between structures, sections of the city, and people. Examining “el modelo Barcelona” that arises, internationally, in conjunction with the Olym-

pics, Montaner and Muxí argue that post-Olympic urban projects, especially the aforementioned Fòrum 2004, fracture the ever so figurative fabric of the city by privileging “objetos autónomos firmados por arquitectos globales.” Barcelona, in their view, is increasingly driven by an architectural star-system that risks setting at naught the concerns, hopes, and experiences of residents on both sides of the Rambla and indeed throughout the city. The signature of the architect, the fame of a name, does indeed impress Barcelona, pressing it into a dizzying international circuit in which buildings move as so many signs of power. If Frank Gehry’s design of the Guggenheim Museum has thrust Bilbao onto the world architectural stage, generating a sort of touristic frenzy in the process, an array of foreign-born architects, including Richard Meier (Museu d’Art Contemporani), Norman Foster (Telecommunications Tower or Torre de Collserola), and Arata Isozaki (Palau d’Esports Sant Jordi) have participated in the internationalization, indeed globalization, of Barcelona. Gehry, already awash in awards, even received a prize for the “international promotion of Barcelona” (“premi a la millor tasca de promoció internacional de Barcelona”). Gehry’s enormous gilded sculpture of a headless fish, popularly known as “La Daurada” or “La Dorada” and situated at the foot of the opulent Hotel de les Arts (designed by the firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill), is only one among various public sculptures, such as Roy Liechtenstein’s *Cap de Barcelona* (near the post office), that dot the renovated waterfront. This is not to say that a cadre of famous foreigners has come to dominate a city laid open to them, but rather that the city has be-

come veritable showcase of individual talent. Enric Miralles, Ricardo Bofill, Oscar Tusquets, Helio Piñón, Albert Viaplana, Oriol Bohigas (personally picked by Serra to head the Olympic transformation of the city), and other more or less local stars with global connections have had a tremendous impact on Barcelona. Still and all, it is in the wake of the Olympics that, at least as Montaner and Muxí contend, individually marked structures with often little if any relation between them come to the fore.

According to Montaner and Muxí, themselves architects, the post-Olympic urban planning is diffuse, fragmented, cryptic, and opaque, negotiated behind closed doors and not made public until after the decisions have been made. Montaner and Muxí are particularly critical of the Fòrum 2004, more so even than McNeill, and contrast it with the Plan 22@, a project focused on old industrial areas of Poblenou and that is, at least in their analysis, versatile and flexible, “dialectically” respectful of the preexisting environment. For Montaner and Muxí, the Plan 22@, which attempts to build a bridge between nineteenth-century industrialism and twenty-first century information technology, functions, however, as the exception that proves the rule. And the current rule, the new, *imported* “modelo Barcelona,” is, in Montaner and Muxí’s felicitous phrasing, more of a prosthesis, a *product* appended to a damaged body, than of acupuncture, a carefully oriented *process* by which individual sites are targeted out of respect for the body as a whole. The corporeal metaphors, which are only implicit in Montaner and Muxí’s writing, are nonetheless motivated by the metaphors of surgical intervention. Mon-

taner and Muxí are concerned with something very much like the mutilation of the city’s history by way of “una arquitectura que se quiere autónoma, impositora y en cierta medida mesiánica.” Lamenting the planning, approval, and construction of imposing buildings by famous and would-be famous names, they advocate a more transparent, public process that would undo what they present as the division between a representative city, under the sway of the spectacular, and a marginal city, given over to service. In a way that at once intersects and differs from Kent, Montaner and Muxí show themselves to be skeptical of “la magia del verde” that, to their eyes, merely “camouflages” the lack of relations between diverse urban projects. Lest their skepticism be taken as a repudiation of ecologism, it is important to keep in mind that they denounce the dearth of effective public transportation—and the concomitant reliance on the private automobile—as well as the dubious “rescue” of land from the sea. In a curious reversal of Olympic fortunes, Atlanta, a city without a real residential center, functions, in Montaner and Muxí’s assessment, as a model that, already amply impugned in the United States itself, is applied to significant areas of Barcelona.

As important as architecture, urban planning, design, and politics are to a city, they are certainly not the only practices at stake. Sharon Feldman, moving from the street to the stage, recognizes that the move is rarely complete, not only because the street can be a stage but also because the stage, as a space within a space, can rarely, if ever, leave behind the streets and spaces outside it. The architectural aspects of the theatre, indeed the theatre as ar-

chitecture, are not simply matters of material construction. The transformation of the Teatre Lliure from a Catalan workers' cooperative in the popular district of Gràcia to a state-of-the-art space in the reconverted Palace of Agriculture, built on a flank of Montjuïc for the World's Fair of 1929, has symbolic ramifications, Feldman suggests, on the performance of plays. The Lliure is now part of a major public project designated as the Ciutat del Teatre. The city of the theatre stands alongside—but also within and, more interestingly, without—the city of architects; and both cities, or both concepts of the city, remit to yet another city, Paris. Although critics adduce both Atlanta and New York—the latter, for all its problems, still more positively than the former—as points of comparison with Barcelona, Feldman knows that Paris, the much-ballyhooed capital of the nineteenth century, still retains much of its aura, especially in the arena of cultural production. Upon the invitation of Pasqual Maragall, director Lluís Pasqual, founding member of the Lliure in 1976 and director of the Odéon-Théâtre de l'Europe in Paris from 1990 to 1996, returns to Barcelona after triumphing in France. Pasqual is one of a number of highly visible Catalans who, like Ricardo Bofill and actor, director, and producer Josep Maria Flotats, garnered fame in France and returned to their native land amid considerable hoopla. If Llàtzer Moix has likened Bofill to Norma Duval descending the stairs of the Folies-Bergères (26), others have likened Flotats to anything and everything self-absorbed and self-serving, an egotist destined to collide with other more politically positioned egotists, a true recipe for disaster. Trailing clouds of glory, and ignominy,

Bofill, Flotats, the somewhat more discreet Pasqual, and select others have contributed to the ongoing, and historically anxious, Europeanization of the Catalan capital. But the Catalanization of Europe, let alone the rest of the world, remains another matter. In what might serve as a convoluted confirmation of Montaner and Muxí's view of imported North American models as effectively eclipsing the Barcelona model, Feldman observes that Catalonia in general and Barcelona in particular are largely erased from the stage.

"Barcelona," Feldman writes,

is continually reimagined and envisaged in the minds of architects, politicians and urban planners, and yet, it has taken on a nearly invisible, ghostly presence on the contemporary stage. (272)

Advancing the notion of an "aesthetic of invisibility," Feldman nonetheless attempts to render visible the city and country in which most contemporary Catalan theatre actually takes place. According to Feldman, "one of the primary geopathological obsessions of contemporary Catalan drama is the limit of cultural specificity." Said "obsession," whether or not "pathological," spurs an anxious attempt at attaining—whether by erasure, denial, or other related means—a limitless state, or non-state, of meaning, a sort of supernationality by which the Catalan might circulate in concert with the French, the Spanish, the American, and so on. And yet, if "traditional geographic place markers of a Catalan imaginary have all but vanished from the settings of contemporary drama," and if they linger as oblique and general references to the Mediterranean, it might just be because the city "outside" the theatre continues to be so

marked. For all the fretting and fawning over models imported from Atlanta or New York, the emblematic structure of the city continues to be the Sagrada Família, which continues to be caught, as Sobrer insists, in a relay with the very mountains that figure so alluringly in Àngel Guimerà's theatre. In some respects, it is as if geography were always already mediated, constructed as a temple and staged as a play in the street, in such a way that the presence of geography, indeed of nature, might seem redundant in the space of the theatre itself. Be that as it may, the relative absence of Barcelona from the Barcelona stage leads Feldman to deploy, by way of Julià Guillamon, Giulio Carlo Argan's concept of the "interrupted city." Fluctuating between the closed and the open city, the interrupted city is marked by inconsistencies, insufficiencies, and gaps that shadow it forth, in its fractured entirety, as if in a glass darkly.

The interrupted city may be, paradoxically, the only city imaginable, but for Argan it refers specifically to the effacement of Rome from the Roman stage in the late 1970s and to the city's concurrent "surrender" to technocrats. Guillamon notices a similar phenomenon in late twentieth-century Barcelona, and it is this phenomenon that Feldman relates to the aforementioned aesthetics of invisibility. The "gap" that Feldman identifies between

the fictionalized [theatrical] representations of the city and the images conjured during the post-Franco reconstruction [...] by politicians, urban planners, and architects, (276)

also separates—and of course links—the "real" map of the city" and "a personal-mental imaginary." A subjective mapping,

whether quotidian or artistic, accordingly overlays and displaces the purportedly objective mapping of surveyors, engineers, governmental officials, and others who attempt to account for the city in more rational, and rationalized, ways. Then again, even those engaged in the rational planning and reform of the city have recourse to personal-mental maps. Agustí Rubio, for instance, cites an activity with which a professor of urban planning, Albert Serratos, begins his introductory courses: the students are asked to draw Barcelona from memory. Almost invariably, such geographical markers as the sea, mountains, and rivers appear, but also the *Eixample* and, to a lesser degree, the old city. What does not quite figure, or what figures only sporadically, are the outer limits, the periphery, the often far from orderly sprawl of the metropolis. The gap, betwixt and between, bears something excessive, in a manner that brings to mind Elizabeth Grosz's self-avowedly uninitiated view of architecture from the outside. In Grosz's formulation,

architecture and conceptions of space and habitation always contain within themselves an excess, an extra dimension, that takes them above and beyond the concerns of mere functionality, their relevance for the present, and into the realm of the future where they may function differently. (151)

Grosz's open-ended appeal to the future risks consigning the past to an order of functional sameness, as if excess lay "ahead" rather than "behind." Her avoidance of specific existent and projected sites, of named and unnamed structures, of *examples* in short, and her reliance on established philosophical and theoretical

thinkers (Bataille, Deleuze, Irigaray, Lacan, and so on), gives the impression that architectural excess, or an outside, *must not* assume any identifiably visible form. Architecture is thus adumbrated by way of erasure, avoidance, and foreclosure, all of which twirls, once again, around and back to Feldman's reading of a city, capital of a nation *without* a state (an internationally invisible nation), that is adumbrated by similar means, by way of an aesthetics of invisibility.

Feldman, unlike Grosz, does not grapple with excess and invisibility by merely reiterating them, but by naming, in an almost exemplary fashion, works that represent by way of absence a (not so) particular milieu, one whose past is arguably as excessive as its present and future. It is along these lines that Feldman "sees" the relatively sparse and spatiotemporally indefinite plays of Lluïsa Cunillé as "instilled with identity and meaning, for cultural identity in her plays is inscribed not through location, but through its avoidance or displacement." Dislocation, dislocation, dislocation: the current state of the real, at least in much so-called high theory, is such that established senses of location, of *real estate*, of identifiable design, come undone and float in a conceptual, ahistoric void. For others, who might be understood as practicing a theory that exceeds the citation of specific theorists, the excessive and invisible are not always and everywhere the same. Indeed, the reiteration of excess and invisibility, the refusal of any location as if it always entailed a benighted concession to empiricism, has effects that resemble Marc Augé's concept of a *serialized* "no-place." Whatever the resemblances, Feldman indicates that, for many viewers and critics,

Catalunya is displaced by that paradigmatic place of non-places: the United States of America. Feldman specifically cites Josep Maria Flotat's controversial production of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (controversial because it was a non-Catalan work staged in the newly inaugurated Teatre Nacional de Catalunya) but also in Sergi Belbel's allusions to New York City skyscrapers in *Després de la pluja*. The presence, oblique or not, of New York and the United States is, of course, relative. After all, the Teatre de Catalunya is designed by an architect who came to prominence in France—again, Bofill—to resemble a classical Mediterranean temple and has little specifically to do with Catalonia. For that matter, as Feldman rightly notes, Catalan theatre, indeed modern Catalan culture in general, has cultivated an international, transnational, and even supernational ethos. If Pasqual Maragall invokes New York City, a place that Bofill calls one of "his cities," it is worth remembering that none other than Enric Prat de la Riba, in *La nacionalitat catalana*, calls for the engagement with an American "model" by which Catalonia might come into view. European displacements, particularly into France, are also prevalent, and to such a degree that an anxious provincialism, which Feldman notes by way of Jordi Coca, punctuates an anxious nationalism.

Amid all the twists and turns of nationality, the use of the Catalan language, on stage as in the street, continues to constitute a sign of resistance, perhaps less aggrieved after Franco than under him, but nonetheless still powerful. As Spanish, French, and English all vie for prominence, each one wielded by its champions as a universal language, a sort of "natu-

ral” Esperanto, the minor or “minoritized” language of Catalan inflects the stage and the street in ways that are doggedly difficult to determine. The past imposes itself, again, with all its excess. As Temma Kaplan observes,

community consciousness, preserved in cultural life ranging from ordinary interaction in public plazas and cafés, to rituals and festivals, to theater and dance, helped Catalans survive the brutal repression of the Franco years. (189)

Kaplan focuses on what she calls “Picasso’s Barcelona,” the city of a famous artist from the south of Spain, and hence an immigrant’s city, a city of immigrants. Picasso’s now past city prefigures (and yet never really prefigures) the current city, just as late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reforms and debates over cultural heritage—“patrimoni nacional”—that Ignasi de Solà-Morales examines prefigure late twentieth- and early twenty-first century reforms and debates. Many of the reforms and debates then, as now, hinged on the demolition of “historical” sites and structures. Feldman refers to Josep Maria Benet i Jornet’s *Olors* as a work that effectively “returns” to the city and renders it visible, but that does so amid demolition, which, according to Feldman, the playwright understands as a “disfigurement of historical memory.” Whether demolition can ever be a refiguration of historical memory, or whether historical memory may constitute a disfigurement, or whether the “literarization” of history—by which human subjects experience the present through past experiences and, more uncannily, past representations of experience—may constitute yet another

sort of disfigurement, remains unclear. But demolition and disfigurement are among the most persistently constructive figures of the city, effecting, both visibly and invisibly, its functionality, its fame, its beauty.

The city of architects, the city of theatre, the city of reforms, and the city of marvels (as in Eduardo Mendoza’s best-selling novel, *La ciudad de los prodigios*) may also be, in Oriol Nel.lo’s estimation, a city of cities. For Nel.lo, *la ciutat de ciutats* is not, however, limited to Barcelona, but encompasses an ever-expanding urban area that includes the Barcelonès, Baix Llobregat, Garraf, Alt Penedès, Maresme, Vallès Occidental and Vallès Oriental (194). Nel.lo recognizes, in other words, that a city is not determined by its juridical limits, a view that is shared by, among many others, Tomàs Vidal Bendito, who affirms that “els barcelonins *de iure*, els que figuren a les estadístiques del municipi, són només una part dels *de facto*” (17). Barcelona is always, that is, in excess of itself, as practically every modern city is. Its specificities, its particularities, its details, remain, however, as so many gaps in a worldwide web, some more recognizable than others are. After all, if the Sagrada Família, looming over a part of the Eixample, is buzzed by global tourists and local officials into a place of prominence, the ramshackle buildings and cramped streets, the architectural renovations and new urban openings, that comprise the Raval also comprise the city. Something similar, it would seem, obtains for the land and people before and beyond the Besòs, the Llobregat, and even the mountains. Barcelona not only need not always be shining, it also need not even quite ever come entirely into view.

Notes

¹ The status of the public is intricately bound up in the history of the law. As Jordi Borja and Zaida Muxí remind us, “l’espai públic és un concepte jurídic” (46). And, of course, juridical conceptions do not account for public space in its *fractured* entirety. “La dinàmica pròpia de la ciutat i els comportaments de la seva gent poden crear espais públics que jurídicament no ho són, o que no estaven previstos com a tals, oberts o tancats, de pas o reivindicats per l’ús social. Pot ser una fàbrica o un magatzem abandonats, o un espai intersticial entre edificacions” (48).

² For a detailed account of the Olympics and their significance for national (Spanish and Catalan) politics, see Hargreaves.

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