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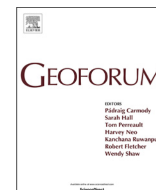
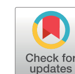


Beyond representation. Overcoming the *trap of representation* through autonomous organization and prefigurative politics in the square movements



Silvano De la Llata

Geography Planning & Environment, Concordia University, 1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd. W., Henry Hall Building 1255.27, Montreal, QC H3G 1M8, Canada

A R T I C L E I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

There is a historical debate that juxtaposes representation and everyday life as mutually exclusive. Consequently, refusing representation is interpreted as means to embrace embodied experience. However, this presents a contradiction: refusing representational processes, rather than leading to an unmediated reality, often leads to new forms of representation. This is what I call the *trap of representation* and it is the main topic of this article. To illustrate this, I analyze space and representational processes through the lens of the debates taking place in the context of the square movements of 2011–2014. These movements made the trap of representation their central topic of debate. Two main clashing visions (thesis and antithesis) arose: critical acceptance of representation and total refusal of representation. While the former sought representative legitimacy in the political arena, the latter focused on attaining representational autonomy in public spaces. Thus, the protesters experimented with forms of organization beyond representational processes. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork, I put the two visions in dialogue in search for a synthesis. The material analyzed reveals that, while facing a theoretical clash, these movements achieved practical synthesis thanks to three practical philosophies that were performed in their encampments and assemblies: *embracing conflict*, *creative resistance* and *critical proactiveness*. They propounded a politics of direct presentation (rather than *re*-presentation) and a prefigurative occupation of space through autonomous organization. I conclude by introducing the notion of *beyond-representational* processes as a way to transcend the idea that everyday life and representation are mutually exclusive.

1. Introduction

In 2011, streets in cities across Spain were inundated with the battle cry "They don't represent us!" This was the beginning of a wave of occupations, strikes, marches and protest actions that cropped up around the world for over 3 years. The slogan addressed partisan representation. But the critique was later extended to include all systems of representation – e.g. governmental, economic and labor – and it seemed to address representative democracy in general. In a later stage of the mobilizations in Europe (particularly in Spain), protesters started using the slogan "No one represents us!" Whenever the slogan "They don't represent us!" was heard in demonstrations, a second group responded "No one represents us!," as if they were debating about the issue of representation every time. This subtle difference was a manifestation of a clash between two main visions regarding representation that arose in the context of these movements: (1) critical acceptance of representation, and (2) complete refusal of representation. The *square movements* (Stravides, 2014) (i.e. the social movements between 2011 and 2014 that used public space occupations as their main form of protest) have been described as *non-representational* (Nail, 2013), *extra-representational* (Braun and Hutter, 2014), *anti-representational* (Teivainen, 2016, Fabian and Samson, 2016) and *post-representational* (Tormey, 2012), as they were the response to a profound crisis of representation. But beyond this crisis, they were engaging with a historical debate that juxtaposes life (i.e. everyday life, practice, embodied experience) with representations of life. Although this is symptomatic of the shift from structuralism to post-structuralism (Pugh, 2017) – especially manifest in non-representational theories and neo-pragmatism – this debate can be traced back to Nietzsche's antiessentialism (Jones, 2008) and even to Eastern philosophy, such as Zen Buddhism and Taoism. The objective of this article is not only to learn how the discourse of the square movements echoes the different voices in the historical debate on representation and space, but also to analyze the movements' discourse as a unique contribution to this debate.

The issue of representation was scrutinized not only in assembly debates but also in every step of the development of the encampments. More than, *who* should represent us politically? The question was, *what* does representation *do*? The encampments were spaces to challenge representative democracy (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulous, 2013; Hardt and Negri, 2012; Castañeda, 2012, Della Porta, 2012; Dufour and Nez, 2016) and to enact direct democracy. But they were also *urban laboratories* (De la Llata, 2016) to experiment with a form of politics and

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Fig. 1. Occupation of Barcelona's Stock Market in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street, on the same day of the occupation of Zuccotti Park. Barcelona, Spain, September 17, 2011 (Source: The Author).

performance beyond representational processes. However, as these ideas were tested, the protesters realized that it was not so easy to escape representation. The contradiction of challenging representation while at the same time engaging in yet new forms of representation was often pointed out in assembly debates. Thus, the question became, Is representation inevitable? And, Is it possible to articulate a discourse around the refusal of representation without mirroring representative politics? (Tormey, 2012). This is what I call the *trap of representation*, and it is the central question of this article. To understand this, we must ask, what does representation do as a *dispositif*? (Deleuze, 1992). That is, what do representational processes *do* as discursive, institutional, spatial and administrative devices in society? This is where the case of the square movements contribute to a better understanding of the ontological – not only the political – dimension of representation. I analyze this issue through the lense of the debates between those two main clashing visions – *They don't represent us* and *No one represents us*. These two not-easily-identifiable stances on representation (and too complex to be clustered as political factions) actually entailed very different ways of interpreting politics and space. I situate the debates in the framework of *representative legitimacy* and *representational autonomy*. The former was concerned with political representation and legitimacy, as they considered that those in power at the moment did not represent the people well enough and therefore needed to be removed. Their goal was exposing the shortcomings of representative democracy and reclaiming legitimacy through direct democracy and horizontal organization. Therefore, they gave great importance to the general assemblies. The latter group questioned the whole notion of representation *and,* by extension, the legitimacy of representative bodies in turn. Consequently, they focused more on the tension between everyday life and representation than between direct and representative democracy. Their main goal was the creation of autonomous spaces. Therefore, they saw *all* the activities in the encampments – not just the assemblies – as expressions of a desire to reclaim public space through self-management. They did not see a separation between political representation and representational processes in everyday life, and operated – not necessarily against but – beyond representation. They questioned a sort of "representational regime." The first group has been taken relatively seriously, and have sparked discussions about the importance of democratic engagement in politics. But the second has been often dismissed as non-political. Their objectives were perceived as unclear, unattainable or often just too abstract. Each side developed discourses that are informed by very different bodies of literature that intersect debates in geography, political theory, philosophy and urban studies. These two visions would rarely share the same spaces in academia and even less so in traditional politics. But they did so in the occupations of most of the square movements. As the two groups shared the same spaces and engaged together in the construction of the protest encampments, they conflated the political and philosophical interpretations of representation and often used them indistinctly. So, it is worth exploring potential connections between the two. This was arguably the only debate that was transversal across the square movements and therefore reveals the historical and philosophical significance of these events.

These movements could be interpreted at first glance as the antithesis of representative democracy, as they refused to accept the power that representatives have over the represented, considering it illegitimate. However, the two visions analyzed in this article – *They don't represent us* and *No one represent us* – were in fact more an antithesis to one and other than the whole movement was to representative democracy. The former actually sought to recapture the thesis of representative democracy through *refounding* representation (thesis). The latter dismissed representation in general (antithesis). By putting these two visions in dialogue, this article interrogates if any kind of synthesis was achieved.

This article draws from ethnographic fieldwork undertaken between the years of 2011 and 2013, mainly in the *Indignados* movement in Barcelona and Occupy Wall Street (OWS), as well as brief participant observation in similar movements in Paris, Mexico City and Montreal, all of which exhibited a sense of global solidarity (see Fig. 1). It analyzes texts and conversations that actually took place in these mobilizations. From here, it expands onto larger discussions about representation in politics and philosophy. The debates and practices that took place in the context of these movements offered a distinct theoretical approach, because they drew from practice. They challenged representation while enacting the politics of *direct presentation* in public space – rather than *re-presentation*. This unique interpretation of space and their commitment to practice was boldly tested in the encampments. They were prefigurative in essence. I argue that the square movements developed three unwritten practical philosophies – *embracing conflict, creative resistance* and *critical proactiveness* – that allowed them to achieve a practical synthesis beyond the theoretical conflict entailed in the *trap of representation*. Everyday and represented life is often portrayed in the literature as mutually exclusive. The case of the square movements shows that is not necessarily the case.

2. Refusal and the trap of representation

What does it entail to refuse representation and what are its political and discursive implications? Refusal[1] and, more specifically, refusal of representation was a central concept in the development of the square movements (Hessel et al, 2011; Comrades from Cairo, 2011; Kingstnorth, 2012; Sitrin, 2012; Tormey, 2012; Hardt and Negri, 2012; Flesher Fominaya, 2015; Van de Sande, 2013; Farr et al., 2013). Refusal was the response of "a generation [that saw][…] no future in the current order of things" (Comrades from Cairo, 2011). And, even though the "order of things" varied from one country to another in the square movements, there was a shared sense of unity on the refusal of representation. But refusal meant different things to each group. The first group refused parliamentary representation (the slogan "They don't represent us" was mainly addressed to parliamentarians). They saw the assemblies taking place in occupied squares as true and legitimate spaces of representation because, unlike the parliaments, they were potentially open to anyone. The *No one represent us* group focused, not only on political representation, but on symbolic representation. They saw all actions in the encampment (including the music, performances, dance, art, etc.) as political. They engaged in debates about representative legitimacy and representational autonomy – the implications of the former are political and the latter are ontological.

2.1. Legitimacy, space and politics

The *trap of representation* is a problem about legitimacy and space. One kind of representation regarded as illegitimate is replaced with another that automatically becomes legitimate. This issue is inherent to modern politics. The problem of spatial and representational legitimacy in the general assemblies echoes the historical *Tennis Court Oath of 1789*. The King of France locks The Third Estate out of the venue of the General-Estates. In response to that, The Third Estate decides to meet in a tennis court nearby and made an oath to continue meeting until a new constitution was promulgated. The tennis court, a random space in the vicinity of Versailles, suddenly acquires representative legitimacy. However, it creates a new problem: the tennis court becomes a new space of representation and the people participating in the oath, the legitimate representatives of the Third Estate. In the square movements, the occupied squares played the role the tennis court did in 1789. And parliaments were perceived as exclusionary and illegitimate. Space is key to understand the question of legitimacy in a representative democracy as it is based on the recognition that some people can speak for others and that there are some spaces to speak for others.

The square movements refused to participate in the institutional Left (Martínez and García, 2015, Romanos, 2011, Flesher Fominaya, 2015) and instead chose direct democracy in response to the perceived "illegitimacy of representative democratic institutions" (Flesher Fominaya, 2015: 154). Braun and Hutter (2014) describe how the generalized distrust of representative institutions in most European democracies and lack of openness in political systems lead to the engagement of citizens in "extra-representational participation (ERP)". Teivainen (2016) uses the term "anti-representational" to refer to these movements. He builds on Deleuze and Foucault's (1977) idea of the 'indignity of speaking for others." Deleuze and Foucault (1977) interpreted representation as inherently problematic as it always entails "trying to speak for others." Teivainen discusses political representation as well as representational processes. Representation, be it people speaking for others or things signifying others, have the same ontological root. Teivainen implicitly addresses legitimacy. He argues against "anti-representationalism" and warns that to dismiss all representation may lead to denying "people the possibility of authorizing others to speak for them" (Teivainen, 2016: 26). The idea of authorizing others to speak for you is in fact the thesis of representative democracy. Some sectors of the *Indignados* movement implicitly accepted this thesis, and they saw the *No one represent us approach 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).

However, the idea of legitimacy also entails the potential reordering of what is considered political and what is not. Rancière (1998), differentiates between *politics*, *the political* and *the police*. The *political* entails official politics in the context of the government – i.e. parliamentary debates, elections, etc. *Politics* is a more dynamic societal force that does not necessarily take place within the government. This may include protest and engaging in actions often deemed as non-political by the government. *The police* makes sure that each of the former remain in their "right" place. Building on Ranciere, some authors (Dikeç, 2004, 2005, Eklundh, 2014) have described how the discourse of loosely articulated movements (such as the square movements) is often dismissed, and they distinguish between "voices" and "noises" (the former being coherent and acceptable forms of participation and the latter being disruptive and ultimately irrelevant ones). Voices and noises are somehow ordered on the bases of legitimacy. However, legitimacy and illegitimacy are not necessarily binaries. Not everything legal is legitimate and not everything illegal is illegitimate (De la Llata, 2017). Thus, we can think of a "legitimacy in construction" (Wilson and McConnell, 2015). The *They don't represent us* group was sought to construct legitimacy through new spaces of political representation. Tormey (2012) recognizes a problem in this cycle. He questions if there is an "escape the trap of opposing representative modes of political engagement in a non-representative way?." He goes on, "How to escape the apparently futile and self-denying gesture of 'post-representative' representation?" (Tormey, 2012: 134). The *No one represent us* group was the response to the acknowledgement of a 'post-representational' representation.

2.2. Autonomy, space and everyday life

In the height of the square movements in 2011, a banner in the Barcelona encampment read: "Do not name this." This contrasted with the debates, workshops, performances and reading circles surrounded by camping tents and improvised stands. The statement sought to protect these processes from reductionism and ready-made interpretations. The *No one represent us* group put a special emphasis in creating spaces that were autonomous from representational processes. For them, democratic political representation was *only one* manifestation of representational processes. Their focus was on what representation *is* and what it *does*. And, in understanding "representational dispositifs." Therefore, they engage with other bodies of literature that intersect different veins of critical representation. They address the trap of representation from a philosophical perspective.

Representation is by definition spatial. It literally implies absence from space. To *represent* (Latin: *repraesentare* = *re-*, intensive prefix, + *praesentare* "to present") literally means "to place before." To *re-present* means to place one person or thing for another that is not physically present in the space. This implies an exercise of symbolic abstraction: one thing signifies – and physically *stands for* – something else. The power (i.e. political, economic and mediatic) over the absent, entailed in any form of representation, is as enormous as it is taken for granted. Philosophers (both in Western and Eastern[2] traditions) have historically alluded to this double dimension of representation. From Plato[3] and

[1] The idea of refusal has been explored in the light of other social movements (Camus, 1951; Marcuse, 1969, 1969; Tronti, 1980, Holloway, 2002; Hardt & Negri, 2001).

[2] The verse "the Tao that can be expressed [i.e. represented] is not the absolute Tao" arguably touches upon the trap of representation.

[3] In *Cratyle*, Plato discusses if names (i.e. a represented reality) can accurately

Nietzsche[4] to Lefebvre[5] and non-representational theory, there is a manifest interest in understanding how to refuse representation without engaging in new forms of representation.

Beyond *extra-representational participation* (Braun and Hutter, 2014) and *anti-representationalism* (Teivainen, 2016), the encampments were also spaces to *occupy*, as a prefigurative action to challenge representational processes (Vasudevan, 2015). They were spaces to enact a non-mediated and direct engagement in space. For the square movements, the notion of *occupying* did not only have a spatial connotation, in the sense of something or someone is occupying a physical space in the world. The occupiers used it almost as a synonym of *re-signifying* or *recapturing meaning*.[6]

The notion *autonomy* informs the *No one represent us* approach of *occupying* and prefigurative politics. Autonomy entails self-management, self-government and self-representation (Chatterton, 2005). It also entails performance and "practicality" (Marston, 2015) and the opening of spaces to test new ways of life (Chatterton, 2005; Pickerill and Chatterton, 2006). Vasudevan describes the OWS encampment as a "place of collective world-making [..] to quite literally build an alternative habitus where *the act of occupation* [Italics added by the author] becomes the basis for producing a common spatial field" (Vasudevan, 2015: 318). Autonomy opens the potential for new forms of interpretation. Representational autonomy, means that the processes taking place in the space are not coded and their conceptual and physical margins are let open to "proliferate" (Lotringer et al., 2008). The search for autonomy, manifested differently for each movement. For instance, OWS experimented with alternative economic logics in the encampment (e.g. barter, open libraries, volunteer work, open-source/open-access production, free lunches, etc.). The *#YoSoy132* movement in Mexico organized occupations outside the network Televisa – largely perceived as an agent of misrepresentation of everyday life and deliberately used to favor the ruling political system (De la Llata, 2017) – where it held theatre performances and screened independent films and videos directly on the walls of the network's facilities.

Some authors also draw parallels between non-representational theory and the square movements. Nail (2013) describes them as "non-representational space[s] of liberty […] and direct political representation" (Nail, 2013). The focus of *non-representational theory* (NRT) on the "geography of what happens" and on "the politics of everyday life" (Thrift, 2008) – i.e. in the sense that everyday life is the realm in which politics and the political take place – informs the approach of a total refusal of representation. Through this lense, reality (i.e. life) is entangled with human "perception, representation and practice" (Thrift, 2008) to a point that we cannot understand it outside these processes. NRT (Thrift, 2008; Anderson, 2002) challenges social theory and geographical research to think beyond representation to focus on embodied experience. There are other strands of non-representational theory that inform the refusal of representation. Lorimer (2005) proposes the term "more-than-representational" to consider the "more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds" (pp. 83). This "multisensual world" relates to the search for "uncoded" spaces and prefigurative politics which, as we will see further on, clashed with those who saw the squares only as spaces of political representation. Jones (2008) vision of "anti-representational theory (ArT)" draws linkages between pragmatism and NRT. ArT also informs the events of the square movements and their strong commitment to a "practical ideology." I propose *beyond-representational* as the closest term to explain representational autonomy. That is, not necessarily operating against representation but performing independently and in parallel to it. The "post-representational" aspect of the encampments (Tormey, 2012) also relates to *post-political politics*. The search for resignification (i.e. to occupy, to recapture meaning) is in conversation with Laclau and Mouffe's (2014) call to (re)articulate core 'signifiers' or "nodal points" to represent a whole series of demands (Kenis and Matijs, 2014). Here, the occupiers in favor of total refusal of representation eluded this possibility as they wanted to remain "unnamed" (hence the statement "Do not name this").

3. Methodology: a *hyper-ethnography* of the square movements

To better understand the nuances of the different positions within the square movements, I undertook ethnographic fieldwork primarily with the *Indignados* movement in Barcelona and OWS in New York City, which later extended to other square movements. Between 2011 and 2013, I employed direct and participant observation, video-photographic analysis and interviews with key actors. During the most intense period of my research in Barcelona and New York, I covered at least one protest a day. I attended general assemblies, neighborhood assemblies, marches, occupations, sit-ins, blockades, pickets and strikes as a participant observer. And when these movements became a global phenomenon, I also decided to explore the articulations and resonance among the different movements while continuing to study the *Indignados* and Occupy. Thus, I also did interviews with activists in Paris (in the occupation of the esplanade of the arch of La Defense in the Fall of 2011), Mexico City (with *#YoSoy132* activists in the aftermath of the attempt to blockade the presidential inauguration in 2012) and Montreal (in the months that followed the Students' Strike of 2012).

Throughout this ethnography, I learned that most of these movements shared a sense of being part of the same "struggle" – even though this manifested differently in each country. They either explicitly manifested solidarity via official videos, letters and communiqués, or simply expressed sympathy. In Barcelona, the *Indignados* called #YoSoy132, "nuestros compañeros mexicanos" and Occupy, "los *Indignados* de Nueva York." In Paris, they talked about "nos camarades en Grèce et Espagne." In New York, they introduced *Indignados* activists as "sisters" and "brothers." They constantly followed and documented sister movements and often dedicated assembly time to read international news and communiqués. 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 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. Online material (especially videos) lent broadness to my study that would have been impossible otherwise. In fact, these resources even allowed me to study simultaneous actions in solidarity happening in different places or even in different parts of the world.

If an ethnography is an in-depth systematic study of a group of people to have a broad understanding of its worldview, this methodology could well be considered a *hyper-ethnography*, as the square movements conceived themselves as a global phenomenon and saw the Internet as part of their essence. The cross-breeding, intercommunication and sharing of tactics happening online and offline was decisive in the creation of identity articulations that helped create an imagined global community.

4. Two visions of representation and space

Drawing on this material, I now turn to the debates over space and representation that were present particularly in Barcelona and New

(*footnote continued*)
represent reality.

[4] Nietzsche has been described as an anti-Cartesian, antirepresentationalist and antiessentialist ("Rorty, 1991b in Jones, 2007: 1600). Nietzsche (2007) states: "that for which we find words is already dead in our hearts." For him, representation is intrinsically insufficient, when not futile. It is always "catching up" with reality and therefore potentially insolvent.

[5] Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith (1991) makes evident that representation entails a spatial process. He distinguishes *abstract space* (i.e. bureaucratized, commodified) from concrete space (i.e. "lived" spaces and everyday life).

[6] The expression was used to suggest the resignification of almost everything, e.g. "occupy theory," "occupy democracy," "occupy art," etc.

Table 1
Dialectical tension between critical acceptance and total refusal of representation.

Dialectical position	Thesis	Antithesis	Synthesis
Ontological approach	Critical acceptance of representation	Total refusal of representation	Autonomous spaces beyond representation
Main Slogan	They Don't Represent us	No one represent us	N/A
Practical focus	General assemblies	All protest encampment activities	Performance, engagement
Motivation/ justification to occupy	Legitimacy	Autonomy	Collaborative/creative resistance
Means of expression	Direct representation, horizontal organization, representative legitimacy	Direct engagement, performance, prefigurative politics	Performance, collaboration, creativity
Main objective	Restructuring, refounding representative politics	Refusing representation	Performing beyond representation
Disciplinary framework	Political science, urban studies, geography	Philosophy, ontology	Everyday life, praxis beyond disciplinary classifications
Theoretical framework	Extra-representational (Braun and Hutter, 2014), anti-representationalism (Teivainen, 2016), critical of representative democracy (Sotirakopoulos and Sotiropoulous, 2013; Hardt & Negri, 2012; Castañeda, 2012, Della Porta, 2012; Dufour & Nez, 2016); autonomous movements (Flesher Fominaya, 2015), legitimacy in construction (Wilson and McConnell, 2015)	Post-representational (Tormey, 2012), Non-representational (Nail, 2013) and post-political politics (Laclau and Mouffe (2014); autonomous geographies (Chatterton, 2005, Pinckeril and Chatterton, 2006), anti-representational theory (ArT) (Jones, 2008), More-than-representational theory (Lorimer, 2005; the autonomous city (Vasudevan, 2015), anti-essentialism (Nietzsche, 2007), Taoism (Lao-tzû, 1974)	The *moment* (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991), Momentousness of the event (Tormey, 2012), urban laboratories (De la Llata, 2016)

York. The section is divided in three subsections: thesis, antithesis and conflict. These postures were not manifested categorically and did not form defined factions. Like most aspects of the square movements, these debates were often deliberately diffuse and developed around loose questions, that little by little evolved into more defined positions. Emulating Socrates' Maieutics, protesters debated by "posing questions that were followed by other questions, deepening into an issue every time" (De la Llata, 2016).

In what follows, analyze the thesis, the *They don't represent us* vision (mainly focused on representative legitimacy) and the antithesis, the *No one represents us* vision (mainly focused on representational autonomy) (Refer to Table 1). The former vision believes in refounding representation, while the latter refuses representation. In this debates, it was key to decide how to speak to "those who speak for others," and how to relate to "spaces to speak for others." Critiquing the representatives in turn (and the spaces used for this purpose) entails the possibility of a critical acceptance of representation. Occupying (i.e. recapturing meaning), on the other hand, entailed a prefigurative use of space that is continuously being produced and realized through action and performance (i.e. beyond-representational) but never fully formed or fixed. Here, I analyze how these two visions conflicted in the protest encampments, but nevertheless managed to coexist in the same spaces and collaborate in the same actions.

4.1. They don't represent us! (Thesis)

In May of 2011, Barcelona's *Indignados* encampment published a communiqué that outlined their minimal principles and their stance on representation:

> "We have come here voluntarily and by free will […] We do not represent any political party and they do not represent us […] 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 […] We have learned from Cairo, Iceland and Madrid. Now, it is time to extend the fight and spread the word"
>
> (acampadabcn.wordpress.com, 2011)

This communiqué represented a moment of rupture, as the movement here addressed the civil society – and no longer the government – in stating that they do not feel represented. This manifesto does not mention the austerity measures or make any explicit reference to the ruling political parties. Instead they go straight to the issue of representation: '*they* don't represent us, *we* don't represent them.' Even though it was yet unclear what they meant by *they* and *we*, it is clear the manifesto was a response to exclusion from the political system perceived as illegitimate and the occupation of the plaza was a practical attempt to becoming emancipated from those who "speak for others." Identifying "who [was] speaking" (Eklundh, 2014) as political subjects and who these subjects were addressing – the political party in power or the political system as a whole – was rarely explicitly said. In other square movements, protesters expressed different levels of rupture with the ruling regimes based on issues of representation. In Egypt, for example, Mubarak's regime was accused of not being representative of the people. Some of the "lessons from Cairo," which the manifesto above mentions, can be found in the action plan of the Tahrir Square's occupiers and their demands for "[t]he downfall of the Regime of Hosni Mubarak […] [and t]he formation of a new, non-military government with the interests of the Egyptian people at heart…" (Madrigal, 2011). Here, they are calling for the creation of a *new* government that, unlike Mubarak's, *truly* represents the Egyptian people. Similarly, OWS implicitly addressed the question of representation. In its *Declaration of the Occupation of New York City,* the movement wrote that a "[…] democratic government derives its just power from the people [and] that no true democracy is attainable when the process is determined by economic power. […] We come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments" (NYC General Assembly, 2011). In the first part, they point out *misrepresentation*. They make reference to a representative economy, as political processes are perceived to be ultimately determined by economic power. In the latter part, they allude to *under-representation*, as a perceived minority is privileged vis-a-vis a majority. In Mexico, the *#YoSoy132* Movement's manifesto openly challenges democracy as an outcome and advocates for democracy as a process: "We don't believe in the clarion calls, 'democracy has won,' 'History has ended.' 'Freedom has triumphed.' 'The Market is open'" (#YoSoy132, 2012). In most of manifestoes of the square movements, they responded to a perception of illegitimate representation and they explore self-(re)presentation in the occupations of the plazas. The encampments are interpreted as prefigurative actions to (re)present themselves to become 'sole drivers of the transformation.'

The challenge to representation expressed in manifestos became

clearly spatialized in the wave of parliament blockades associated with the square movements as they began to focus not only on *people who speak for others* but also on the *spaces to speak for others*. Parliaments blockades were the source of debate between those who refused the specific representatives in power and those who refused representative democracy in general. It began with the blockade of the Catalan Parliament to prevent parliamentarians from discussing and approving unpopular – and allegedly illegitimate – austerity policies. In Europe (especially in Spain and Greece) the passage of these packages was largely interpreted as a *de facto* privatization of public health and education, and, therefore, as actions that did not represent the will and interests of the people. This was a problem for the square movements: even when representation is refused and direct representation enacted, they were still being allegedly (mis)represented externally (i.e. in the parliament). These kinds of protests were later adopted in other Spanish and Latin American cities. In Mexico, the #YoSoy132 Movement also tried to block congresspeople from inaugurating the president in 2012, as he was perceived as illegitimate and not representative of the people's will (De la Llata, 2017). In Wisconsin, the occupation of the State Capitol to protest and prevent the passage of laws to limit collective bargaining was a prelude to the Occupy movement later that year. The movement tried to occupy the Stock Market as it was perceived as place in which a minority is largely over-represented.

The blockades and violence to contain them highlighted the importance of space and revealed that the square movements were targeting the essence of representative democracies and representative economies. A parliament (Old French = *parler*, *parlements*) is a space where a group of people represent and talk in the name of people who are elsewhere (i.e. literally a place for those who are 'placed before' others). As a response to that, the protesters not only organized general assemblies in the main plazas, which were open for potentially 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, governments often securitized parliament complexes – to protect their spaces of representation. This resulted in heavy clashes with the police.

Blocking spaces of representation was controversial among the participants in the square movement. For those on the side of *No one represent us*, the encampments and assemblies were considered prefigurative – i.e. to *enact* direct presentation rather than *demand* better representation. In other words, you represent yourself *beyond* how or where others represent you. For the *They don't represent us* group, the key was to stop external representation (in this case, in the parliaments). The discourse of the manifestoes and the blockade actions reveal a simple thesis: if the government misrepresents the interests and will of the people, it is illegitimate, and consequently, a legitimate form of representation should replace it.

4.2. No one represent us! (antithesis)

For those on the side of *No one represents us*, self-representation was crucial, even when it came to internal representation (i.e. participants, sympathizers and collectives seeking to speak for the movement). This approach contrasts with the idea of refounding representation (i.e. it is its antithesis): representation is inherently problematic and you can only be present in direct participation in political debates and actions. There were numerous debates that illustrate the tension between the two approaches. In general assemblies, communiques and online conversations, occupiers manifested suspicion of fellow activists who talked for others within the encampments (especially when speaking to the media), as their statements could be decontextualized or taken for official. This was a recurrent challenge to the movements. For example, the *#YoSoy132* asserted that there was lack of coverage by the mainstream media while the Greek *Indignados* asserted "misrepresentation by the press" (Theocharis, et al, 2015). Occupy participants were divided about the issue. Describing what the movement was about in simple words was always source of tension. Here, the Spanish case provides interesting insights.

An excerpt from a press conference given by a small group in Barcelona illustrates these tensions. Amalia, a woman in her mid fifties, explains what the movement was about for her:

> [P]eople have said 'Enough!' We are here [in the encampment], and we will go from the bottom up. There's no one behind or ahead, it's us all and our assemblies […] 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… (Amalia, press conference, May 2011)

Here, Amalia touched upon the tension between newly formed groups within the movements and non-affiliated citizens when she said "There is no one that leads, not even a [political] platform." This was implicitly a response 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 *Democracia Real Ya!*, an Internet-based political platform that raised the first call for the square occupations. This collective was often approached by the media – or they sometimes reached the media themselves – to provide explanations of the movement and its actions. The mobilizations that resulted from the encampment ended up swallowing that political platform and turning it into only one of the many collectives that converged in the plaza. As the movement grew in size and complexity, many distanced themselves from *Democracia Real Ya!* and denounced their intention to represent the whole movement. This distancing did not necessarily mean they did not agree with the collective, as many actually did, but rather that they resented their intentions to represent the movement. The second part of the press conference illustrates that conflict. A sexagenarian activist, Felipe explained:

> We are not here because of anyone's *protagonism* […] What we want is to debate […] 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. (Felipe, press conference, May 2011)

This fragment is rich in insights about representation. Felipe addresses the protagonism which results from a recurrent question in the encampments and assemblies: if representation is refused, how is the movement going to represent itself when necessary (e.g. to the media)? Here, Felipe is making clear that he does not want to have the focus placed on himself: what is important is not the messenger 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. This links to Wilson & McConnell's (2014) idea of a "legitimacy in construction." About the notion of social *protagonism* in social movements, Marina Sitrin describes how engaging in horizontal relations and autonomous organization enables a new subjectivity in 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). How the individual plays out within the collective becomes a crucial question in movements that refuse representation.

Also worth analyzing is Felipe's remark that "we will be the voice of those who don't go to the elections, those who don't vote – or do" as this comment touches upon the *trap of representation*. The contradiction entailed in trying to represent the non-represented (i.e., the autonomous, the non-affiliated, the disenfranchised or in Hardt and Negri's terms "the multitude") – and furthermore the not-willing-to-be-represented – would not go unnoticed in the assemblies and was always the source of more debates. However, this did not cause the movement

to split into different cells, but rather to embrace such differences as part of a whole that is linked precisely by debate. The last part provides clues about how to transcend the contradiction: the occupiers participate "without parties or unions [and] absolutely as citizens." Institutions (i.e. unions, political parties, etc.) are alien to the debate if they present themselves as institutions but their affiliates are welcome only if they participate as "as persons." Therefore, participants not only propound self-representation, but go a step further in suggesting direct self-presentation.

Short after the press conference, the Barcelona *Indignados* published a communiqué addressed to the media, in which the movement stated its position on self-representation:

> 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 […] 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 are suddenly paying attention, but […] [w]ill you help us convey our message accurately to the public opinion?!. (acampadabcn.wordpress, 2011)

The communiqué addressed the *trap of representation*, as it acknowledged the challenges of overcoming misrepresentation (in the media) by means of representational autonomy. Speaking *ad personam* became the response to this issue and I learned it was an unwritten rule in most of the movements I researched. 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." In other words, 'be suspicious of any represented information about the movement: instead be present in space (i.e. the plaza) and see for yourself.' In a small assembly in Barcelona, lifetime activist Alberto made this point more explicitly: "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" (Alberto, Assembly, November 2011). Similar to the communiqué, Alberto worried about the media's typical approach of "guilty by association" and stated 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.

While the *They don't represent us* approach contest external representation (i.e. parliamentarians, congress people, the media, etc.), the *No one represents us* approach extends the critique to representation from within the movements as well. Here, the challenge becomes finding collective voice and identity while maintaining personal accountability for one's own actions and words. Representational autonomy (i.e. directly engaging in one's own re-presentation) entailed problems such as *collective protagonism*, self-representation and a supposed "right to unclassifiability." These issues accompanied the movements from their very beginnings and while there was not a clear answer they were well aware that it existed.

4.3. The Square: General Assembly or Occupation (conflict)

The encampments and assemblies were the scenario of clashes between these two visions of representation. The conflict manifested itself in discussions about how to manage the encampments and it raised questions about representation and what constitutes politics. The *They don't represent us* approach often divided the encampment between "noises and voices" (Dikeç, 2004, 2005; Eklundh, 2014). While some protesters believed the general assembly was the most important part of the movements, others believed in *occupying* public space as an implicit challenge to representative democracy. That is, being present in space in real time, in an immediate, non-mediated way. Moreover, an *occupation* is not the kind of action to pose demands and remain in the space until those demands are met but rather one to experiment with alternatives directly in space. The following account of the debates that ensued show both visions coexisting in the encampments.

In the last part of the press conference in Barcelona, three activists reveal their aggregative vision of who was participating and who was invited to participate in the encampment:

> We are calling everybody [to come] […] Workers, unemployed, businesspeople, children – it doesn't matter […] – said activist Karla.
> A young man in the crowd questioned, 'businesspeople?'
> Karla replied, 'Whatever!'
> Later, Felipe followed up:
> […] 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 of all kinds: *autonomous*, precarious, unemployed, health workers, etc. People that after a long time […] exploded."
> (Karla, Amalia and Felipe, Press conference, 2011)

The discussion shows how broad and open the square movements were and also the different visions and conflicts present within them. In the first part of the discussion, there is clear disagreement about class. The young man raises an eyebrow when Karla includes business people in the call for "everybody" to come. To that, Felipe adds that the question is about participation. He also alludes to a new legitimacy, as he says they have become "The Agora of Barcelona and Catalonia." This claim is reminiscent of "The Tennis Court Oath." Amalia, complicates it by completing the picture of 'everybody' by adding social groups (including "the autonomous") that seem absent in the first description. While there is an evident conflict about who the movement represents and addresses, the debate in this press conference reveals how broad the movement is. However, there is a massive sector that remains unmentioned. In most of the encampments there were spontaneous uses of space that were rendered apolitical or simply unrelated to the movements (i.e. "noise"). In the OWS encampment this differentiation of space was highly visible. Brian, who was active in its organization, walked with me around Zuccotti Park and described to me the different visions of the occupation at its height in October of 2011:

> On the west side of the park people were playing drums and singing, non stop… Like a party. The Broadway [eastern] side was more concentrated on 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 […] 'I'll do whatever I want', You know. How are they [middle-class Americans] supposed to join? (Brian, Interview, February 2012)

Brian's testimony shows the division between "noises" and "voices." The Broadway side was perceived as a space to represent the public better in the General Assembly (i.e. to refound representation). Furthermore, Brian manifests his interest in convincing – and representing – "middle-class America" (his idea of "the public") and worries about the "bad" reputation that the "noise" gives to the movement. Contrarily, the other side does not worry about reputation, as it refuses representation. It is the epitome of what Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith (1991) calls *The Moment*. *Moments* are "points of rupture – ephemeral, euphoric, revelatory of the total, radical, sometimes revolutionary possibilities latent in everyday life" (Hays, 1993: 174 on Lefebvre's notion of *moment*). The hegemonic production of space is interrupted by the spontaneous, festive, preindustrial rhythms (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991). Indeed, festive uses of space were extensively practiced in the encampments. There were impromptu performances, puppet theatres, dances, people wearing disguises,

jugglers and the omnipresent drummers. The concept of *the moment* also echoes Marcuse's (1969) notion of "The Great Refusal" (in this case of the refusal of representation) as an opportunity for more spontaneous orders that open space for more basic, life-affirming and even erotic experiences that are suppressed on a daily basis. Even Lenin referred to the revolution as "the festival of the people" (in Harvey, 1990: 88).

This division in OWS was less marked in other encampments but was still present. In Barcelona and Madrid, there were often big cloth billboards in the encampments that said: "Menos botellón y más revolución" (Less drinking and more revolution). The regulation of practices and access to the encampments, assemblies and actions was always at the center of the discussion of mobilizations. This sign also coexisted with the previously cited "Do not name this" banner, which was a call to remain autonomous and free of "signifiers." In the context of a *cacelorazo* (pots and pans protest) in Plaza Catalunya in Barcelona, Alberto, an activist who valued festive expressions, explained his vision while pointing at a small group of people drinking and dancing in a circle: "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" (Alberto, Interview, November 2011).

For those who critiqued representation, the occupations were a means to an end: denouncing illegitimate representation in the government and enacting more direct forms of representation (including within the movement). For them, *unclassifiability* seemed chaotic, senseless and apolitical. Conversely, for those who completely refused representation, the encampments were the means *and* the end. *How* they did things informed *what* they did. For them, representative democracy was only one manifestation of a "representational regime," constructed on a kind of quotidian, omnipresent and taken-for-granted ideology – like "a colourless odourless gas" (De Botton, 2008 on Marx). They can be considered political in the sense that they challenged representational processes prefiguratively. *Unclassifiability* reflects commitment to a processual character and the refusal to become a consolidated political force.

5. Beyond representation: theoretical conflict, practical synthesis

Letting others speak for you in crucial matters (e.g. health, education, safety, the environment, equality, etc.) potentially leads to problematic scenarios. The most obvious one is *illegitimate representation,* i.e. a problem about *who* speaks for others. It entails that the government is not representative because it was imposed, because there was a fraudulent election or because it serves alien interests. This was recognized in most of the square movements. There is also *under-representation*, in other words, a problem about *how much* proportionally some speak for others. OWS claims regarding the interests of a 1% being overrepresented via lobbies, elected officials and corporation-friendly politicians is the clearest example of this scenario. Finally, there is *misrepresentation,* i.e. a problem about *how* some speak for others. This occurs when someone claims to speak for others without accurately conveying what the others intended in the first place. The movements accused politicians of this, but even moreso the media.

Two questions remain: was there a synthesis to the conflict between the two main visions in the square movement (i.e. between the thesis and antithesis)? and, is it possible to escape the trap of engaging in representational practices while refusing representation? On the one hand, the *they don't represent us* approach frontally challenged those speaking for others in their manifestoes and their spaces of representation in their actions. Their discourse implied the possibility of refounding representation. They sought an alternative form of politics through direct democracy and horizontal engagement as means to create a collective counterpower. Therefore, their main focus was the general assemblies. With political parties like *Syriza* in Greece and *Podemos* in Spain acknowledging inspiration from the *Indignados*, and some splinters of Occupy Wall Street supporting Bernie Sanders in the United States, it is clear this kind of approach tilted more towards the strategic side. On the other hand, the *no one represents us* approach valued the tactical advantage of remaining unclassifiable – i.e. autonomous – to politicians, the media and even people within the movement. They advocated for self-accountability and speaking *ad personam* as the ultimate refusal of representation. Speaking for others in general and in particular was considered inherently illegitimate (e.g. saying they will become "the voice of the voiceless" or the "new agora"). They focused more on the politics of *occupying* and direct action. Therefore, their main focus was on the protest encampments activities (beyond the general assemblies) as emancipatory *moments* in themselves. To overcome the trap of post-representational politics the movements needed to acknowledge the "momentousness" of the event (Tormey, 2012).

Nevertheless, the *trap of representation* was a Gordian Knot *only* in the theoretical sense. This stems from the fact that most of the occupiers went beyond the reactive stage of waiting to act until they resolved ideological differences. Their coexistence entailed a practical synthesis even when differences were acknowledged. This was achieved because both sides embraced prefigurative politics and performed *beyond representation* and enacted three main practical philosophies throughout most of the development of the square movements. First, being quite aware of the ideological differences, they developed a tendency to *embrace conflict*. This means that the two sides found solidarity in acknowledging a common problem even when their interpretations of the problem were different. Ideological differences did not stop them from collaborating. They both acknowledged two main problems with representation: (1) to be represented entails being absent from crucial conversations about ourselves – it means being silent and it means not being there; and (2) there is always a potential insolvency in representational processes. In the same way that a currency devalues when is not representative of the value it is supposed to represent, the square movements acknowledged how life devaluates when its complexity is misrepresented by the media and underrepresented by politicians or even when fellow activists try to summarize the experience of the whole. Noting these taken-for-granted truths about representative democracy is arguably the movements' most important contribution of the debate of the *trap of representation*. Second, they developed a sense of *creative resistance* (De la Llata, 2017). *Embracing conflict* made them go beyond the stage of theoretical and ideological discussions. Therefore, they believed that they could collaborate in projects even when they did not agree on apparently crucial theoretical issues (as was the case with the *trap of representation*). Finally, they developed a sense of *proactiveness.* This means that after being aware and thinking creatively about common problems, they were willing to take action together. They engaged in collective action beyond the clashes about representation. They were proactive in testing the politics of direct presentation and occupation in parallel to the discussions. In that sense, the participants of the square movements were true "organic intellectuals." They worked prefiguratively as they sought to enact alternatives rather than demand them. They believed in "making the road by walking" (Chatterton, 2005) and "a new world in the shell of the old" (Ince, 2012). They also operated as a *multitude* (Hardt and Negri, 2011; Arenas, 2014), as conflict did not prevent individuals with different visions from collaborating. And, as similar autonomous movements, the protesters were not required "to agree on everything, [as] [c]ontradictions, even irreductible antagonisms, [were] allowed to coexist (Felix Guattari in Lotringer et al., 2008: 110).

6. Concluding reflections. Prefigurative politics beyond representation

Considering representation always potentially illegitimate led to the trap of representation. This very article – any article, theory in general – is technically also subject to this trap, as it is trying to classify, understand, curate, contrast, summarize and – inevitably, reluctantly – represent what happened in the square movements. That will always be

the limitation of theory and it was explicitly acknowledged in the square movements. Being *aware* of this, is no little first step. While recognizing this inherent limitation, this article has contended that the square movements addressed the historical question of the *trap of representation* by enabling a shared space for deliberation rather than claiming any kind of convergent ideology. As noted above, the trap of representation is one that has long been present, as in the premise “The Tao that can be said is not the absolute Tao” and in Nietzsche’s “there is always contempt in the act of speaking.” In that spirit, the protesters acknowledged the “Tao” of the phenomenon of the square movements could only be experienced (and not said). The issue of representation divided the square movements, but their focus on practice allowed them to operate beyond conflict. The juxtapositions of representation and everyday life stressed in pragmatism, non-representational theory, theory of practice and so on are not necessarily mutually exclusive. That is, there is not an embodied, lived, concrete experience separated from representations of it, but rather life unfolds beyond (i.e. in parallel to) representation.

The three practical philosophies enacted by the protesters are linked by the notion of art, understood here as a creative, poetic process that transcends representation. The encampments were, in that sense, *concrete* 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 protestors’ contempt for representation. The demand for the reductive “about” summary (i.e the pivotal signifier) 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 was about the practices displayed in the encampments and the assembly. The encampment could be seen as a laboratory to enact the politics and praxis of *direct presentation*. The occupiers protested the current political-economic system while enacting the reality they wanted to see. The encampments were not only political in the sense that they demanded a more legitimate kind of representation but also in the sense that they sought to experience life as a process that exist, *not against*, but *beyond* representational processes.

The idea of prefiguration and the importance of the encampment as a concrete space – that incorporates the abstract – was highlighted in the testimony of a participant in the community garden in Plaza Catalunya:

> […] the garden cristalizes the beautiful assembly abstractions of the plaza […] The solar panels, the medical post, the dance workshops, the playgrounds, the bioconstruction house, the copyleft photographs, the vegetarian kitchen […] [and] people trying to live the square on the basis of organization, creativity, self-stewardship and minimal comfort […] seems consistent with a movement that refuses political representation with such emphasis and opts for self-representation. That is, for self-managing that for which we are fighting for. […] [The encampment is] a coherent space in which we try to reduce the distance between our ideas and our actions […] [It is] more inspirational than a thousand texts or manifestoes about any ideology” (Alvaro, 2011)

Here, if there is any kind of synthesis, between the more abstract intentions of refounding representation and the more concrete experiments to refuse external and internal representation, is that they are not antagonic but parallel processes: there is an assembly in the plaza that is abstract, while there are creative and collaborative projects that ‘cristalize’ these abstractions. It turns the abstract into concrete. There are thus simultaneous processes that, even as they may, clash theoretically, synthesize practically.

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Silvano De la Llata is an architect, an urbanist and an educator. He received his PhD in City and Regional Planning from Cornell University (2014). He has taught design/planning studios and seminars on urban sociology, public space and history at Cornell University, and universities of Tamaulipas and Anahuac (Mexico). For the last 15 years, his research has focused on public space and the study of alternative uses, such as street vending, graffiti, public assembly and protest, as design/planning agents. His dissertation explores alternative planning processes in the context of protest encampments in horizontal social movements. He did research and participated in the *Indignados* mobilizations in Barcelona, Occupy Wall Street and other social movements in 2011 and 2012.

Building on this experience, he directs the project Cities X Citizens, which focuses on the democratization of planning and urban design through participatory design methodologies and open-source systems. Bridging research, pedagogy and design practice, he developed urban design methodologies, *open planning* and *planning-in-situ*, to redesign interstitial spaces in Montreal through collaborative community engagement. Additionally, he coordinates brainstorming/reading circles on critical theory and philosophy to develop strategies to democratize everyday life in the city.