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Chapter 10

Tracing the City through the URBS Project

HELENA BUFFERY AND ÀNGELS MARGARIT

Àngels Margarit is one of the foremost practitioners of contemporary dance in Barcelona. Her career as a dancer and choreographer dates back to the late 1970s, when there began to be a proliferation of contemporary dance performers and companies in Barcelona (Noguero, 2008; Vendrell, 2008). Although Catalan contemporary dance has not had the same degree of international impact enjoyed by the more hybrid and spectacular performance groups such as La Fura dels Baus and Comediants, largely due to the relative absence of funding and infrastructure for dance in Catalonia and Spain, both she and the members of Mal Pelo (Maria Muñoz and Pep Ramis) were familiar names on the international dance circuit in the 1980s and 1990s. They have not, however, received the same degree of critical attention as other Catalan theatre and performance, and their work is notably absent from most publications in English on contemporary Catalan culture, including the celebrated *Contemporary Theatre Review* volume edited by Delgado, George and Orozco (2007).

While Margarit's work is not always considered along the lines of more avant-garde Catalan choreographers, in part because of the very heterogeneity of contemporary dance in Catalonia, in part because of her perceived personal focus on expressing her own changing way of thinking through the body, it has developed a very particular line of investigation and exploration of the relationship between the body and space that is central to the trajectory of contemporary dance:

> Space is the raw material of all those who dance and choreograph. The body is also space. I am space. Space moves me and I think that distances, relations and textures can be read. My body is a bit of space relating with space. And it can also be thought of the other way round: there is a territory, but the space is defined by what moves, one point relating with another.

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> Therefore, in a certain way, the body is space in space. Dance creates ephemeral architectures, memorised architectures, and sensitive architectures. You build some mobile geometries that can be read and that leave a trail in time, a trail that the viewer has to retain. Dance, therefore, is a temporal architecture that develops in space. (Margarit, in Corchero *et al.*, 2005, p. 124)

Thus, from *Mudances* (1985) onwards, through minimalist and more expressionist and theatrical phases, her work has followed a sinuous line through a series of different geographies and temporal moments, responding both to her own personal understanding of dance's revelation of the body in space, and to the material and socio-economic conditions for its production. Indeed, some of the most perceptive readings of her work link her 'desiring line' to that of visual artists such as Joan Miró, rooted in a particular geography but traced through and responsive to different contexts – ageing bodies, nature and the urban, the boundaries between public and private space – which it contributes in itself to create; at the same time indicating the impossibility of capturing its contours in writing (Adolphe, 1997; Sánchez, 2004).

Margarit's own questioning of the capacity of language to reflect human experience was carried home to us through her different interventions in the March 2008 symposium 'Contemporary Barcelona: Visual Cultures, Space and Power'. In a forum that sought to address the relationship between visual culture, space and power, by expressing in language the different forms in which this has presented itself in Barcelona, perhaps the most poignant and affecting intervention of all was her intimate gift of 'Geografies', a twenty-minute section of *Solo por placer* (Solo for pleasure, 2005), in which her body brings to life the traces made on a black dance mat with a white skein of silk string, responding to the shape of the music, but also going on to invest this with more localized meanings, emanating from the complex interactions between body and gaze. It was a reminder both of how the memory of the relationship between space and power is contained within the human body in ways that are not always fully available to language, and of the need to develop approaches to culture that are more attuned to the place of the body as a space and locus of knowledge.

This chapter draws on a number of different theoretical approaches in order to frame Margarit's work, from Michel de Certeau's (1984) advocacy of the practice of walking in the city in order to take account of the different tactics used by individuals and groups to evade, resist and contest technologies of power, to Marc Augé's (1995) idea of non-places, describing places of transience where meaning has to be constantly renegotiated, to Richard Sennett's 1994 reflections on the synergies between body and city in social history; all of them mediated through Manuel Delgado Ruiz's more recent formulations of an ethnography of public space (1999; 2007a).[1] Their

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Figure 10.1. Image from 'Geografies', part of *Solo por placer.*

influence, alongside that of other city-writers and walkers, such as Italo Calvino (1972), is explicitly recognized by Margarit in the development of her ways of thinking and remaking the place of dance in contemporary society. Nevertheless, the main focus here will be on her own use of performance as a mode of kinaesthetic research into the contemporary relationship between body and architecture in Barcelona: on the way in which she walks or dances in the city, attending to the expressivity of the

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urban body, rather than on linguistic representation. The talk she gave on her urban gesture and dance project URBS, conceived to explore aspects of everyday movement in Barcelona, furnished us with numerous images of city-dwellers using and thus transforming the space of the city, which engaged with the debates that had arisen during the conference over different frames for reading changing urban environments. The questions of ownership of space which underpinned the avant-garde and countercultural revisionings treated in earlier chapters, and which continue to inform critique of the political projections of the Barcelona model, were poignantly enacted in the interaction between groups of individuals in different spaces of transit: the markets, beaches, squares, crossroads, parks and transport links of this Mediterranean city. The degrees of mutual (in)visibility of the different users of these spaces, the ways in which different bodies and gazes interrelated, threw into focus the role of memory and forgetting in everyday negotiation of the city. Their (re)presentation in the theatre as part of the Grec Festival, recounted to us within a different frame (at the IGRS in London), focused attention on the relationship between the local and the universal, centre and periphery, language and the visual. Margarit's description of the project to her London audience thus brought to the fore the full complexity of any attempt to grasp presence or cultural difference: as simple as a body in space, as complex as how to engage with that body and account for all that it stands for.

The beauty of the movements of the old man doing his exercises on the beaches of the Barceloneta, both impervious and mutually unintelligible to the tourist gaze; the meanings inserted into the benches and chairs of the Plaça Universitat by the ways in which they are temporarily inhabited by heterogeneous city-dwellers and visitors; the movement of the skaters in the high-design Plaça dels Àngels, and their multiple everyday negotiations with the passers-by: all these contain traces of the kinds of complex histories which Margarit increasingly strives to tell in her choreographies, broken down to the simple bodily movements which construct those histories.

The URBS Project

One of the most intriguing and ephemeral interventions in Barcelona's urban space in the twenty-first century has been Àngels Margarit's URBS project, showcased for four nights on 26–29 July in the Sala Fabià Puigserver of the new Teatre Lliure on Montjuïc during the Grec Festival of 2004, with a different cast of city-dwellers on every night, thus ensuring an entirely unique and unrepeatable performance on each of those nights. Here we will attempt to produce an account of the experiment, situating it in its sociocultural context and describing and evaluating the procedures it

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involved. At the same time, however, we make no apologies for its slippery evasion of any attempt to capture the experience in narrative form, for like many of the urban interventions discussed in the course of this volume, the URBS project beckons to and traces a space beyond language, beyond the readable, which for anthropologists like Manuel Delgado, following Michel de Certeau, ultimately grants the kind of critical access to contemporary urban practice that escapes anthropological, philosophical and sociohistorical discourse. In conversation with Delgado in 2004, Margarit herself drew attention to her own lack of authority over the project, her lack of access to the keys for reading it, because of her presence on stage as it unfolded and lack of absolute control over how the piece would play out (Margarit and Delgado, 2004, p. 31). As is made clear from its status on her website as a 'projecte obert' (open project), she continues to see URBS as work-in-progress, as part of an experiment exploring the movement of bodies in the city that might ultimately contribute to choreographing contemporary urban culture. In this, it is not the different dances and traditions of the various subcultures which inhabit the city that are of primary interest, traces of their relationship with past identities and communities, but the bodily movements and experiences associated with living the city today, as observed and put into motion by walking in the city, in that mode of resistant reading formulated by de Certeau (1984, pp. 91–110). Yet the audience itself was in many ways caught up in this same double-bind, as can be observed in the reviews of the work in the Barcelona press, in particular the more negative readings which found the work boring and repetitive and suggested it lacked in aesthetic imagination. Carmen del Val's (2004) complaints that the experiment showed few signs of innovative choreography, and would have been more appropriate to the more marginal and specialized urban interventions that characterize the Dies de Dansa (Days of Dance) contrast with Joaquim Noguero's and Bàrbara Raubert Nonell's pleasure of recognition:

> Nunca el público se había visto tan variopintamente reflejado en la escena del Lliure. . . . se impone aquí la realidad misma del teatro, por medio de esta presencia metonímica, extensiva, de nosotros mismos como urbs viva. (Noguero, 2004)
>
> (Never had the audience seen itself reflected in such variety on the stage of the Lliure. . . . the very reality of the theatre imposes itself, through this extensive metonymic presence of us as a living 'urbs'.)
>
> I que diferents que som, mirats així de prop! I que bé que ens movem en massa! I com ens atrapen els seus moviments i acabem tots iguals! (Raubert Nonell, 2004)
>
> (And how different we are, seen like this, in close-up! And how well we move en masse! And how their movements entrap us, making us all the same!)

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One reason for its contested legibility is the way in which the project stages precisely what one might see on walking the city, if able or willing to stop and look, fearful of being accused of voyeurism. Manuel Delgado points to this aspect of the experiment as being the one he found particularly useful to transmit to his students of social anthropology, all of whom were required to attend the performances because of the unusually direct access offered to the day-to-day reality of urban practice (Margarit and Delgado, 2004, pp. 31–2). Where he might normally use recourse to film in class, such as the example he gives of *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), in order to explain the difference between the quantitative responses to questionnaires used by the anthropologist and the more evasive answers offered by bodies in public space, the URBS project, for him, offered an unusually accessible and candid window onto that space (pp. 24, 32). The other reason for its resistance to reading is that it depends to a great extent on recognition of the frisson of being a part of this living space, of recognizing the everyday movements, practices, routes and pathways through the urban forest that constitute a shared appropriation of the city space, alternately complicit, resistant and excessive of the modes of urban interaction and habitation envisioned by the planners of that space and by the models imposed by urbanists and politicians.[2]

In this, URBS offers a particularly powerful response to the question of the particular relationships between visual culture, space and power that characterize Barcelona, in its representation of a fragile and ephemeral trace of difference, not unlike the invisible butterfly in Xavier Canals's intervention on 'Butterflying Barcelona'. For him, that trace, that ghostly butterfly, was the language of the city, the increasingly absent Catalan that would once have been the main medium for social interaction, and which was all but invisible in the conference (because of the theme, but also because of the need to translate for an international, largely anglophone audience). In URBS, as recounted to us in Catalan by Margarit, we were reminded how far the negotiation of visual culture, space and power is located in the bodies of the city-dwellers, those who traverse that urban space; how increasingly it is imbricated with the models inherited and/or imposed from the outside, by the urbanist ideal, the tourist gaze, and the increasing physical presence of national and international tourists in Barcelona. The irony lies in the fact that while the full visual and kinaesthetic impact of some of the moments captured in the movements of the dance could only be perceived by the Barcelona city-dweller,[3] recognizing his or her own trajectories but with different faces and different histories, these movements increasingly respond to a city shaped by and for the tourist gaze; thus a mirror of its simulacra, if perhaps a resistant mirror, is contained in them too.

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The Urban Stage

The origins of the URBS project lie in a commission for the Universal Forum of Cultures in Barcelona, the latest and perhaps most controversial excuse for urbanist development of the city associated with the Barcelona model. Stemming from a 1996 proposal by Pasqual Maragall, the mayor at the time, to create an event that might bring the prestige – and enormous financial investment – of the 1992 Olympics to Barcelona once more, the Forum was also envisioned as a way of valorizing the model of urban living and cultural development associated with Barcelona, of sealing its relevance on the world stage (see Fòrum, 2005, pp. 16–19). In other words, it should be seen both as a symbol of the desired relationship between the local and the universal impelled by Barcelona's politicians, and as a projection of their particular vision of this ideal relationship onto a global stage. The Universal Forum of Cultures thus responded to different strands of discourse on identity, community, internationalism and globalization which have remained at the forefront of cultural debate in Catalonia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, in particular in terms of Catalan culture's feeble place in a globalized world – as a stateless nation, a minoritized and subordinated identity, that nevertheless has a degree of real or imagined global reach, most obviously in the symbolic prestige of its capital city. The question of what Barcelona stands for, whether it is the capital of Catalan culture or a more international, intercultural city that exceeds this meaning, is one that is very much a feature of cultural debate, and which was for a long time associated with the supposedly opposing ideological discourses of the Convergència i Unió government of the Generalitat and the PSOE/PSC socialist city council (Hughes, 1992; Orozco, 2007b; Crameri, 2008). The 'city of marvels' had previously been used to sanitize visions of Catalan difference in the promotion surrounding the Barcelona Olympics, as well as becoming a sign of 'hybrid', cosmopolitan, Mediterranean city-living in films such as Almodóvar's *Todo sobre mi madre* and Woody Allen's *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, among others, with its Catalan-ness all but erased. Indeed for many critics there has been much anxiety over the shifting meaning of Barcelona in recent decades. Removed from its history in a process of disremembering which has been elegantly critiqued by Joan Ramon Resina (2008a); divorced from its people, who are moved around at the whim of urban planners seeking their latest high-design coup or whose houses are demolished due to the latest development plan: for many, Barcelona has been given over to a transient population of rootless global tourists. In many ways, the Forum became the epitome of these changes. Represented as the ideal way to continue and complete Barcelona's metropolitan aspirations and to bring to fruition the utopian urban plans of the GATCPAC under the Republican government of the

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1930s, it almost immediately came to stand for all the excesses and lacunae associated with previous urbanist interventions, accompanied by a shifting and a forgetting of the urban population, moved to accommodate high design and excluded from the global celebrations, except as paying visitors to the Fòrum Recinte. One example of the ironies was the millions of euros spent on the 'Global Voices' exhibition: very few of the heterogeneous local voices now inhabiting the city were heard at all. Another was the erasure of a plaque commemorating the citizens executed during the first decade of the Franco regime at the Camp de la Bota, immediately adjacent to the Forum site. Critics have pointed to the exclusivity of the Forum model, to the mirage it represented as a mode of utopian urban intervention, and to its consignment of resistant histories of the modern city to oblivion (Horta, 2004; Abad, 2006, among others). Furthermore, the cultural programme for the event was itself enormously controversial, with many reversals of proposals and cuts in budgets, leading to the loss of some performances (Foguet, in Epps, 2004, pp. 276–86).

Cultural programming between 8 May and 26 September 2004 was to be overtly linked to the thematic content of the Fòrum, spanning three areas – cultural diversity, sustainable development and the conditions for world peace – and over three spaces, the Fòrum Diàlegs, the Fòrum Recinte and the Fòrum Ciutat. The so-called City Forum included most of the main museums and theatre spaces of Barcelona, which were either able to affiliate to the Forum project for the period in which it ran, as in the case of Sergi Belbel's *Forasters* at the Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, or whose programming was subsumed by the cultural management of the event, as in the case of the Grec Festival for that year. When Borja Sitjà approached Margarit to commission a piece for the Grec Festival and therefore Fòrum Ciutat, she was inspired by the overt social and democratic aims of the event, to undertake an interdisciplinary project that allowed her to cross the boundaries between performance and anthropology and explore the relationship between architecture and the body in contemporary urban space. She even approached Manuel Delgado to see if he would collaborate with her on the project, although his own rejection of the Forum, together with his self-avowed ignorance of dance, meant he refused to participate, even though later he expressed an interest in the results (Margarit and Delgado, 2004, p. 24). Margarit's was one of very few productions that focused on the sociocultural space of Barcelona, responding to the everyday experiences, practices and uses of its inhabitants, and thus it was closer in ethos to the 2003–4 Sala Beckett season on 'L'acció té lloc a Barcelona' in which Cunillé's *Barcelona, mapa de sombres* was first premierered (Casares *et al.*, 2005). It was also a reminder of what, for the Forum's most vocal critics, was excluded from the different spaces given over to the event: the 'ghosts' of all

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the inhabitants who had been moved on to make way for international meaning – and moneymaking.

The commission led Margarit to begin research and documentation for her urban intervention, with a view to staging the city on three different fronts: through the creation of a docutextual archive recording urban social movements from 2003 to 2004, the formalization of a series of choreographies based on these movements, and a series of choreographed interventions in Barcelona's public spaces. However, budget limitations meant that it would not be feasible to choreograph a fully-fledged group piece. Rather than settling for one of the solos that have characterized her way of making do with the relative lack of dance funding when compared with other theatrical forms, she decided on a hybrid audition form, entitled *URBS#1/Casting*, facilitating the improvised performances of city-dwellers on stage in order both to provide a window onto the different aspects of the project and begin to explore the process by which they interrelated. Half of the 70,000 euros received for the project was used to pay the participants' fees for the day of their performance, while much of the rest went into the process of documenting urban movement. It was, in effect, an instance of the kind of making-do witnessed in many other uses and practices of the urban space, part of the 'mobile infinity of tactics' which is popular culture for de Certeau (1984, p. 41).

Margarit had experimented with using non-professional dancers together with a trained company before, with some success, in *L'edat de la paciència* (The Age of Patience, 1999) and also had a background of very extensive research into the gestuality of contemporary social life, the movements produced in response to everyday spaces, and the way in which bodies construct space, as in her celebrated *Solo por una habitación de hotel* (Solo for a Hotel Room, 1989) and *El somriure* (The Smile). Set alongside the more ecological concerns of works like *Atzavara* (Agave, 1991), *Corol·la* (Corolla, 1992), *Arbre de te* (Tea Tree, 1996) and *Arbraçada* (Elmbrace, 2007), which trace an erotic and ethical journey through the organic relation between body and/as natural environment, the urban focus of Margarit's 2004 project might be perceived as a radical change in direction for the choreographer. Yet, just as Delgado intuits in the etiological gaze he attributes to her work on the movement of the skateboarders (Margarit and Delgado, 2004, p. 25), it is tempting to see URBS in social ecological terms, in its commitment to reflect and trace the relationship between human and environment in the here and now: a spatiotemporal context which in this case, given the frame of the Forum, was deeply imbricated with the opposing models of understanding contemporary urban space triggered by the latest excesses of the Barcelona model. In particular, it might be seen to be articulated in the opposition between the 'urbanism' of an 'arquitectura cada cop més centrada a produir efectes teatrals' (architecture ever more

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Figure 10.2. Still from the 'movies' created for the URBS project. An urban intervention by dancers from the Cia Mudances.

focused on producing theatrical effects) with 'l'ús a gran escala de l'ostentació i l'aparositat festives – les Olimpiades, el Fòrum – com a eixos de la representació del poder polític' (Delgado Ruiz, 2004, p. 45) (the large-scale use of festive ostentation and extravagance – the Olympics, the

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Forum – as axes for the representation of political power) and the 'urbanity' of the society that traverses, uses and generates the city spaces (pp. 41–2).

The participants in the URBS project were drawn from different parts of Barcelona's social fabric, but the performance itself took place in the emblematic space of the Sala Fabià Puigserver in the old Palau de l'Agricultura (Palace of Agriculture), redesigned as a public theatre space by Manuel Nuñez Yanowski and opened, to some controversy, as the new Teatre Lliure in 2001. Part of the so-called Ciutat de Teatre (City of Theatre), envisioned by Lluís Pasqual and others as an antidote to the Generalitat-sponsored Teatre Nacional de Catalunya, the new Lliure provides a place of memory for the collective theatre venture that the Lliure de Gràcia once was, and flanks a square commemorating the exiled Catalan actress Margarita Xirgu, alongside the Mercat de les Flors and the Institut del Teatre. The Sala Fabià Puigserver has one of the largest multipurpose auditoria in the city, and tends to be used for large productions. Because of this, there was a feeling that Margarit's piece was out of place, particularly in comparison with the other more spectacular productions performed there during the festival. Indeed, she herself maintains that it might have been more in tune with the more ludic events at the Fòrum Recinte, including works by La Fura dels Baus and Comediants as well as multifarious samples of the multicultural world the Forum supposedly set out to celebrate and, effectively, contained. Yet in other ways it was quite appropriate, given Pasqual's own comments on the rationale for the City of Theatre: 'En algun lloc hem de veure reflectida la nostra imatge d'una manera més rica, més complexa, més contradictòria, més noble, més innoble, més apassionant, més atractiva, en definitiva menys avorrida' (We need somewhere where we can see our image reflected in a way that is richer, more complex, more contradictory, more noble, more ignoble, more exciting, more attractive and, above all, less boring), leading Sharon Feldman to meditate on the extent to which 'the theatre continues to preserve its primordial function as a place where societies partake of a complex process of *emmirallament*, or mirroring, where the members of a given community can reveal themselves to each other and to others' (Feldman, 2004a, p. 161). While Feldman hails the work presented at the Sala Beckett in 2003–4 as signs of an attempt to provide a space for collective identification and self-recognition on Barcelona's stages, the problem of Catalonia's invisibility has remained predominant in cultural debate, if only fully diagnosed by cultural critics such as Josep-Anton Fernàndez (2008), Joan Ramon Resina (2008a) and Feldman herself. It is important to see Margarit's project, and the way in which it has been read, in this context: at the crossroads of contemporary discourses about Barcelona and Catalan identity, and at the cusp of a renewed desire to perform Catalonia's lived spaces on stage.

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URBS#1/Casting

Margarit's original aim was to investigate everyday movement through the physical work of professionals, in order to produce a series of choreographies of urban movement, including urban interventions involving dance. Thus, the project began as a process of research into the uses and practices associated with contemporary Barcelona, focusing primarily on urban public space. Following Augé (1992), the main spaces explored were spaces of transit, and also non-places, such as the beach, parks, public squares, road crossings and transport sites. Urban movement was recorded using a series of methods including participant observation and video documentary, with Margarit's own production team and the video artist Núria Font. A wide range of docutextual materials were produced including diaries, notes and a video diary, and there were even filmed interventions in public space, with one dancer performing salsa on a road crossing, picking up the responses of the other passers-by, many of whom simply incorporated it into their daily routine, and another involving the dancers later used in the production of *URBS#1/ Casting* at an underground station. This diverse material was then used to choreograph particularly marked movements, such as those of construction workers on Barcelona's streets, the skaters in squares like the Plaça dels Angels and Plaça Universitat, and public transport cleaners; the moves were then incorporated into the final performance through the bodies of the five professional dancers, framed by screens with images drawn from the video documentary materials or 'movies'.

Four months before the performance, Margarit and her production team went out into the public spaces once more to recruit city-dwellers of all ages to participate in a production at the Teatre Lliure, intended to present an urban laboratory in which those selected would represent a sample of the contemporary urban fabric. Promotional pictures for the event present Margarit and her team going around the Boqueria market, another of Barcelona's more familiar spaces, thus fully locating them as part of that fabric. Furthermore, the interim auditions, held in a range of different city locations between April and June 2004, aimed to cater for different age groups, family groups and social and cultural backgrounds, spanning civic centres like Can Fabra and the Cotxeres de Sants, emblematic dance halls like the Paloma, but also the Lliure itself. In the event, the response was more positive than expected, and the auditions produced a varied cross-section of the urban population, including people of all ages, professions and cultural backgrounds, although Margarit reports that there were many more second than first-generation immigrants. People were asked to bring their favourite music on cd along with the clothes that they would wear to dance to it; however, because of the overwhelming response to the auditions, there was only time for a very brief taster, so Margarit devised the

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tactic of telling participants to put the disc and clothes on a chair and imagine they were dancing to the music. This activity worked so well that Margarit incorporated it at the end of each of the final showings, to reveal the diversity of cultural memories and gestural traditions on stage: from salsa to sardana, rock to street dance to paso doble. The initial casting workshops also incorporated a series of different exercises, some of which (three of the final five) were used in the July performances.

Of the more than 200 people who attended the different auditions, almost all were selected, breaking down at around forty-eight for each of the four nights of the performance. Only people who clearly had some professional dance experience were rejected, and the figure of forty-eight was set in order to allow for any non-attendance on the night. Afterwards, the successful participants were invited to come to the Teatre Lliure two hours before their performance, where they had their name and photograph taken for projection during the introductory part of the show, given a tour of the performance space and had the running order explained to them. This was followed by a buffet, which gave them a chance to meet and mix with the other participants, producing a relaxed, festive atmosphere. Around forty-six, ranging in age from two to eighty and drawn from across the different original audition locations, attended on each of the nights. Families appeared together and were provided with their own space on stage, divided into three groups and consigned to constructing, using and inhabiting houses on stage using the large play blocks formerly used for *El somriure*.

The final shows were structured as an audition or 'casting', involving layers of different sequences in which space, movement and the interactions between people sprang from the tasks, actions and games proposed to them. Margarit was present on stage and used a microphone to give instructions to the city-dwellers, and their movements were framed with large-screen projections of aspects of Barcelona's urban text. Each performance began with an introductory sequence in which images of the participants were projected to the audience alongside selected footage from the video-documentary material, which was followed and juxtaposed with formal choreographed elements performed by the professional dancers. The non-professional dancers then entered the stage with Margarit herself for the first group activity, which was to walk on, sit down and trace the space of their room with their hands, first with their eyes open, then closed. This was followed by a whole-group passage involving both professional and non-professional dancers, with the participants split up into pairs and leading their blindfolded partners around the room, negotiating the improvised and choreographed architectural spaces constructed by the group of dancers and their peers. The third task required the non-professional dancers to improvise four everyday movements, before freezing each one.

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Beginning at the front they were then encouraged by Margarit to use the whole space of the stage, stopping and repeating the improvisation when they wished, and observing and imitating others if they wanted, even dancing if they chose to. The fourth had the participants walk on stage, choose an object and wait until either they were allowed to leave or were instructed to ask others to leave, thus creating a space of transit on stage; while the final one employed the tactic of presenting their favourite music through dance. These group activities alternated with sections involving the different family groups – who were given more intimate spaces on stage, using screens – and with choreographed pieces abstracting the on-screen movements, mirroring the metro cleaners, skateboarders and even instances of the dancers' own interventions in the urban scene. Thus, urban space was explicitly being simulated and represented on stage via the theatrical frame, the use of mixed media recordings and the staging of a reality show. Yet the ephemeral presence and improvisation of otherwise anonymous bodies meant that a scenario was created in which the different elements, practices and tactics in the social construction of space could be experienced and observed.[4] The use of mixed media performance contributed to underline the 'nowness' of the event, making the 'spectator . . . hyperaware of the presence of the performers' bodies, the configuration of stage space, the actual moment of (re)presentation' (Lavender, 2002, p. 189), so that even the prerecorded material was drawn into the here and now. Yet how far this in fact contributed to commodify the 'urbs', to make it part of the Barcelona brand as demanded by late capitalist culture, is far more problematic, and demands reconsideration of the different frames for seeing the event.



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Figure 10.3. Stills from the performances of *URBS#1/Casting*.

What has been clear throughout conversations with Margarit about the *URBS#1/Casting* part of the project is that the most important aspect for her was the duty to facilitate the presentation of the non-professional participants on stage, to provide a frame, an 'embolcall' (protective wrapping) for them with her practice and that of the other dancers and production team.

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In this she displayed strong consciousness of what Cornago (2008) has more recently formulated as an ethics of the body, sensitive to the presence of the other and oriented towards the production of intersubjective spaces. Such an ethos influenced the structure of the event, the way in which the stage was laid out and used, and also the interaction between professional and non-professional dancers. Indeed, it was even a consideration in choosing the music for the piece, described as a mix of the 'cuarenta principales' (top forty), drawing on all musical styles, but transformed into versions, so that the music was close to the social imaginary but not so close that it produced facile recognition. She talked constantly of creating complicity, both between the onstage participants and with the different audience members, and this is perhaps nowhere better reflected than in the third exercise described above, in which the participants' observation of each other led them to mimic each other's actions, sometimes leading to whole groups trying out and mirroring one person's gestures. More than the '*voyeurisme* respectuós' put forward by Raubert Nonell (2004) as a description of the gaze facilitated by Margarit through her choreography and multimedia (re)presentation of the urban scene, the experiment involved reflection through the kinaesthetic impact of dance on how bodies create social existence (Foster, 2008, p. 57). However, not all those who saw the event at the time were as appreciative, and in particular there was a division in the audience between the more habitual contemporary dance and theatre clientele, many of whom criticized the lack of integration of the performance, its unfinished feel, and the more complicit who came to see their families and friends. In some ways, as suggested below, this mimicked exactly the opposition between city and urbs that Margarit's project had been devised to explore.[5]

Work-in-Progress

While the response of her peers clearly disappointed Margarit, in many ways her experiment has since been vindicated, both by renewed interest in the materials she gathered for URBS and in her invitation to the Mercat de les Flors–Eix Temàtic in 2011, for which she had hoped to record new material in order to trace changes in the organization and use of urban space in the intervening years. She has repeated the experiment in Granollers, but felt this was less successful than the Barcelona version because the people knew each other too well, making it more difficult to reproduce a sense of the urban non-places of transit onstage. Although some interest has been expressed in repeating the experiment in other cities, such as Edinburgh, San José, and even Alcalá de Henares, so far the long-awaited commission has not been forthcoming; instead, she has watched Mathilde Monnier's

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relative success in France with a similar, but more formally choreographed project, *City Maquette*, in recent years.

The URBS project has inspired other creative materials, productions and interventions, such as *Souvenir*, and can be traced in the more abstract and imagined city-choreography of *Larandland* (2007); however, above all it has fed Margarit's commitment to the need and value of social performance. Its status as an ongoing project reflects a vision of urban space as a living process generated by anonymous bodies, and it is in this mirroring that it resists the superficial shine of the architectural spaces of the Forum, as represented rather tellingly in Manuel Huerga's documentary (2004). For while the Forum sought to contain the multicultural manifestations of different global popular cultures within the utopian space it projected, these were only ephemerally reflected in the shining screens of its buildings and the proliferation of technological machinery it promoted, and were generally received passively by the often bored or uncomprehending paying visitors to the venue. In contrast, *URBS#1/Casting* used the simulacrum of performance within a theatre, within the City of Theatre, within the theatricalized city, to create a space for the urbs within that city. Unsurprisingly, this multilayered metatheatricality led to automatic questioning of what can legitimately be staged as theatre, through many audience members' bafflement about the aesthetic meaning and value of the piece. In its presentation of a mirror that the audience did not necessarily want to see or recognize, URBS demanded both visual and physical engagement with the social body and, ultimately, re-evaluation of the urban space which not just contains it but that it contributes to create.

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Notes

1 Margarit's own identification with Delgado can be observed in an interview with Pérez Royo, in her emphasis on his more positive engagement with the dissemination of meaning in the postmodern city: 'es un vitalista, habla del lugar para ser usado' (2008, p. 123).

2 Once again, we might cite de Certeau: 'If it is true that *forests of gestures* are manifest in the streets, their movement cannot be captured in a picture, nor can the meaning of their movements be circumscribed in a text. Their rhetorical transplantation carries away and displaces the analytical, coherent proper meanings of urbanism; it constitutes a "wandering of the semiotic" produced by masses that make some parts of the city disappear and exaggerate others, distorting it, fragmenting it, and diverting it from its immobile order' (1984, p. 102).

3 Susan Leigh Foster cites Berthoz's research into *The Brain's Sense of Movement* (2000) as evidence that '[o]ne's history of engagement with the environment profoundly affects how one sees, and consequently what one sees' (2008, p. 54).

4 This was above all the case with the third activity which both Margarit and Delgado felt best approximated the changing rhythms of urban space, producing a sense of flow.

5 Here we are drawing on Simon Glendinning's recognition of the need to break down the opposition between the cives-civitas and the 'urbs' to allow 'the possibility of an existence which is "democratically urban"' (2000, p. 124).

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