

Art & the Public Sphere

Volume 8 Number 1

© 2019 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/aps_00005_1

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Performing freedom: Massive protest in the Catalan sovereignty process: From smiling to resisting

ABSTRACT

Political activism, performativity and social empowerment in contemporary public space are examined with a multi-disciplinary approach to analyse the mass choreographies organized in the sovereignty process of Catalonia. Through the lenses of the performing, visual and environmental arts (dance and architecture), this research looks at the interplay between public space and performance in collective protests, and its roles in shaping the collective experience and in the construction of the commoning.

The study focuses on the largest peaceful marches ever organized in contemporary Europe, annually from 2012 to 2017 on September 11 (Catalonia National Day), by Catalan cultural and political activist associations (ANC and Òmnium Cultural) as massive collective actions in support of an independent republic state for Catalonia.

The research aims to identify the unique elements of these long-time planned choreographies, and the repeated and embodied ones that are constructing a social identity influential in current semi-improvised protests.

KEYWORDS

mass choreography
cartographies of
protests
public space
activism
commons creativity
political conflict
sovereignty
Catalonia

1. 'Catalanism' is a 'movement of national vindication for the political and cultural recognition of Catalonia within Spain along two centuries' (Colomines 2011: n.pag.).

The choreography, iconography and impact of the protests are examined at different scales, from the emotional human experience and its local dissemination in social media, to the impressive visual experience of the aerial images at the city and the geographic scale, designed to be broadcasted live by global media. The study's goal is highlighting the design-thinking involved in these massive, peaceful and artistic expressions of emancipatory will, and its role and impact in the collective empowerment, the internal cohesion and the internationalization of the conflict in search of global empathy.

INTRODUCTION

We present multidisciplinary research to analyse the protests that emerged in Catalonia from 2012 to the present during the process of sovereignty, from Catalanism to Independentism and from Autonomic region to Republic State.¹ To contextualize the sociopolitical phases of the Catalan conflict and the moments of protest that have taken place, especially in relation to the aesthetic and symbolic dimension, we apply Turner's 'Social Drama and Ritual Theory in Performance Studies' and Dilthey's 'Weltanschauung' in its collective performativity (Turner 1969: n.pag., 1974: 23–59, 1985: 177–246; Shechner 2006: 66–77). We argue for the right to the city and public space as a place of freedom of expression (Lefevbre 1968–72) for common space as a place for activism (Stavrides 2016) and build upon Tali Hatuka's socio-spatial laboratory on urban design and civil protest (2008).

PERFORMING FREEDOM:

CHOREOGRAPHIES AND CARTOGRAPHIES OF MASSIVE PROTEST IN CATALAN EMANCIPATION PROCESS.

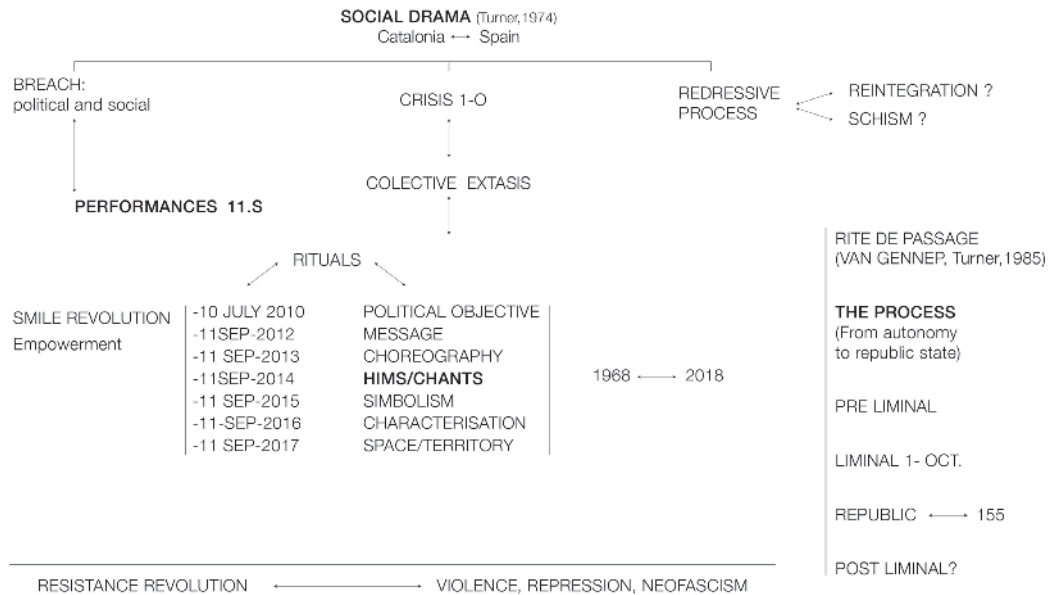


Figure 1: Conceptual map of 'Social drama evolution and rituals in Catalan "Proces"'. © Ester Vendrell.

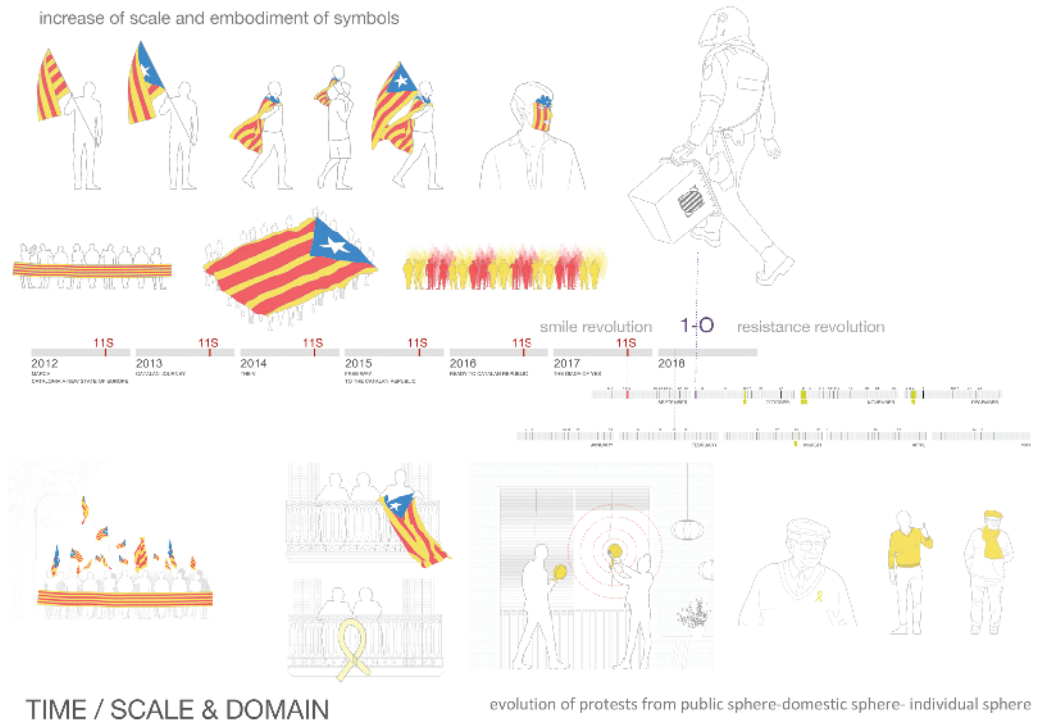


Figure 2: Timeline of protests. 2012–Spring 2018. © Sara Bartumeus with architecture students: Anna Bosch and Adrià de Luna Llopis.

The Catalan ‘performances for freedom’ have evolved hand in hand with the political situation, from (1) the ‘pre-liminal stage’ planned massive performances on the ‘Diades’ (the Catalan National Days) during the so-called *smile revolution* (2012–17),² to (2) the ‘crisis period or liminal stage’ forms of everyday and spontaneous protests during the *resistance revolution* of the October 1st Referendum (1-O) and its aftermath.³

The conceptual map of social drama periods and ritual processes and the timeline created showcase the intensity of this period and the increase in the succession of protests.

We begin by briefly describing the political conflict between Catalonia and Spain. Then we examine and map the past six Diades (Barcelona 2012–17) and the most recent spontaneous protests.⁴ We discuss how form and itinerary, choreography and dramaturgy, music and mottos, objects and symbols, colour and clothing influence the evolution of the protests.

POLITICAL CONFLICT: CAUSES OF THE BREACH BETWEEN CATALONIA AND SPAIN

The conflict between Catalonia and Spain dates back to the Spanish War of Succession (1701–14) and the invasion of Catalonia by Philip d’Anjou, in which Catalonia lost its independent political status as a Principality. This loss brought about the eradication of the Catalan language, culture, self-government and political institutions. During several periods in the nineteenth

2. The term ‘smile revolution’ was coined by the activist Muriel Casals (1945–2016), president of Òmnium Cultural.
3. The term ‘resistance revolution’ is inspired by Gene Sharp (1928–2018) and his philosophy of nonviolence.
4. The protests have been recalled and registered through social media or collected in the civic organizations’ archives while the emancipation process was literally taking place.

5. LOFCA, acronym for Organic Law for the Financial System of Spanish Autonomous Communities.
6. <http://assemblea.cat/> and <https://www.omnium.cat>.
7. 20 September 2017 is considered the turning point in the resistance revolution as the Spanish Deep State structures – National Police, Civil Guard, Media and Spanish Central Government – were aligned to stop the Referendum with the so-called *Anubis and Copernic Operations*. Police took eight Catalan government Institutions, entered private media, printing and technology companies, and tried to register the CUP's building. Twenty hours of resistance (nonviolent street demonstrations by Catalan citizens) are considered the beginning of this revolution.
8. Since then seven Catalan politicians were exiled and nine Catalan political prisoners were jailed, unjustly held in precautionary detention for many months, without any credible evidence of committing the crimes they are charged with (violent rebellion, sedition, misuse of public funds; <http://catalanprisoners.info/2018/07/>).

and twentieth centuries, Catalans have sought to regain their language and restore their political institutions.

During the period of the Second Spanish Republic – from 1931 to 1936 – the Statute of Autonomy was achieved in 1932. However, Franco's military uprising and the Republican Forces' defeat brought 40 years of dictatorship, repression, attempted cultural genocide, the suppression of all Catalan institutions and the will to distort historical record.

At the beginning of the Democratic Transition, the Generalitat de Catalunya – the Catalan government – was restored in 1977 with the return of the President Tarradellas from exile. Support for independence has arisen from political and economic factors, such as the limitations of the autonomic system (LOFCA),⁵ a fiscal deficit, a lack of investment in infrastructure and Spanish unionist nationalism's attempts to recentralize (Amat 2017). The call for independence has also been fuelled by the constant denial of dialogue on the part of the Spanish State. Catalan's desire for self-determination has grown within the context of the European Union and International rights.

In 2006, the Catalan Parliament passed the New Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia, which was struck down by the Spanish Constitutional Court in 2010. The mass demonstration that followed, organized by Òmnium Cultural under the motto: 'We are a nation, we decide', became a turning point, a breach of a stage (Turner 1974: 37–41) and the beginning of a new political project to achieve a new European State.

The latest move towards sovereignty has been stimulated by the political and economic crisis that escalated on 15 May 2011, with the 'Indignados' movement known as 15M, parallel to Occupy Wall Street. Europe's financial rescue of Spain caused the loss of the Catalan Government's economic autonomy. Angela Merkel's signature on the debt limit in 2011 was agreed upon by the Spanish National bipartisan PP-PSOE without consideration from non-state-wide parties. Catalans were faced with a choice: advocate for self-governance, or be subsumed under the Nationalist and Centralised Spanish project, where they would continue to experience setbacks to the welfare state and attacks on Catalonia culture and diversity.

In 2012, the political activist association, Catalonia's National Assembly (ANC), along with Òmnium Cultural (OC)⁶ began a political and cultural activism movement to pressure the Catalan government to propose a National Sovereignty project, Independence and Catalan Republic. Through massive, carefully orchestrated annual protests (Díades), they made internal and external political demands, promoting the cause of sovereignty in Catalonia and throughout Europe. These protests form the heart of the 'smile revolution' from 2012 to 2017.

The large-scale demonstrations were organized in part by a commission of volunteers from the National Secretariat of the ANC, among them experts in areas as diverse as politics, sociology, psychology, law, economics, communication and international relations, who responded to political vindications by studying and proposing mass demonstrations for each national day with a motto, action and a highly defined political goal.

20 September 2017 marked the beginning of the 'resistance revolution', with the Spanish State's censorship and repression to avoid the celebration of the 1 October self-determination referendum,⁷ followed by Spanish police violence against citizens of all ages trying to peacefully vote on this day, and by the ongoing political and judicial aggression against Catalan institutions, politicians and activists.⁸ Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution suspended Catalan's

autonomous government, and the leaders were exiled, signifying a return to the repression experienced in Franco's Dictatorship. When President Puigdemont and half of his government moved to exile in Brussels, the conflict moved to the heart of Europe.⁹ These events have inspired almost two million citizens to become resilient activists in smaller grass-roots organizations at a neighbourhood scale, the Committees for the Defense of the Referendum (CDRs), who have organized spontaneous protests throughout the territory.¹⁰ The spontaneous protests organized have been at the heart of the resistance revolution.

ART AND COMMUNITAS VALUES: COLLECTIVE MEMORY TRANSFERS AND REMAINS

Catalan creativity and cultural heritage, together with collective values of pacifism, festivity, inclusion and diversity, form the foundation of the 2012–17 Diades that we analyse. The choreographed protests are aesthetic 'communitas' builders and messages to the world. These family-friendly, cross-generational, transideological¹¹ and inclusive mobilizations are expressed through Catalan traditional and popular culture (music drummers, human towers, giants, etc.). They also arise from street theatre and *Nova cançó* ('new song')¹² of the resistance culture of the 1960s, and from the 1980s' Catalan rock movement. Supported by more than 2000 volunteers, the performances showed the world both the solidarity and the organization skills learned and displayed in the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games.

The goal of any protest is to be seen and to be heard. These massive performances have been designed by both cultural OC and political ANC activists' associations to have an impact at a double scale (the aerial and the human) for the 'double gaze' (the gaze of the outsider and the insider) and with a 'double purpose':¹³ to send a message of dissent through mass and social media to search for global empathy and to reinforce shared beliefs among the defenders of the cause. The goals include the following:



Figure 3: Human tower. © ANC. Creative commons license.

9. This international strategy has ended with the recent publication of the book: Puigdemont and Olivier (2018).
10. CDR is the acronym for Committees for the Defense of the Referendum, created by clandestine volunteers organized for the logistic of the referendum's organization. After the October 1st Referendum – a historical and collective self-management experience – they are named for Committees for the Defense of the Republic.
11. Independence of Catalonia is embraced by different political parties from anti-capitalists radical left to liberal right including socialist, social democracy and ecologist ideologies. The political parties represented are PdeCat, ERC, CUP, DC and NEC.
12. New Song means *Nova Cançó* and corresponds to the Catalan protest music that emerged during the resistance period of Franco's Regime, held initially by a group of intellectuals known as 'Setge Jutges' pioneered by a letter of Lluís Serrahima 'ens calen cançons d'ara' (*Magazine Germinabit* 1959). Principal Raimón, Joan Manuel Serrat, Lluís Llach and Maria del Mar Bonet.
13. We establish a double parallelism between the 'double-edged power of the gaze' and the 'two purposes of protest organizers' 'to enhance the impact of their political message and to intensify emotional and political solidarity among participants' (Hatuka 2011: n.pag).

14. The internationalization of the Catalan political proposal in Europe and the world through media has been and continues to be one of the key aspects against immobilism and the dirty war developed by the Spanish government and its deep State structures (e.g., Judicial System Monarchy, Civil Guard and the national media) driven by strategies and pressures of extreme right organizations (i.e., Catalan Civil Society) created to stop the sovereignty process (see Borrás 2018).

1. to empower society to demand an Agreed Referendum of Independency and to achieve an Independentist Majority at the Catalan Parliament.
2. to demonstrate to the world that the advocacy for sovereignty is a social, political, civic and peaceful movement, a unique way to break with the status quo inside Europe and negotiate the conditions of a New State.
3. to generate empathy and receive support for the cause from Europe and the rest of the world through mass media.¹⁴

DRAMATURGIES AND AESTHETICS OF THE SMILE REVOLUTION PROTESTS: THE DIADES

Through the lens of visual and performing arts, we point out how the beauty and choreographic character of the first smile revolution protests have been the seeds of the collective creativity in the current resistance revolution protests – inspired partially by Gene Sharp’s methods (2002). Below, we briefly describe each Diada and then analyse and compare the components of the Diades and the later spontaneous protests: form and itinerary, choreography and dramaturgy, objects and symbols, sounds and messages, colour and clothing.

Diada of 2012

Motto: *Catalonia New State of Europe*

Itinerary/form/choreography: A 2km march towards the Catalan Parliament, which ended with a rally of one million unexpected performers. At the end of the rally everybody raised green papers and sang the vindictive Catalan anthem, ‘The Reapers’.

Characterization and symbols: The substitution of ‘Senyera’ flags with ‘Estelades’ independentist flags.

Diada of 2013

Motto: *Catalan Journey/Towards Independence*

Itinerary: A 400km human chain along the Roman trace of the Via Augusta, crossing the entire Catalan territory from south (Vinarós) to the French border (Le Perthus).

Form/choreography: The human chain, inspired by the Baltic Chain of 1989 and also by a ‘carol.la’ (the ancient reminiscence of Sardana, the Catalán traditional dance), made a progressive ‘wave’ at 17:14 (commemorating the tricentennial of the fall of Catalan institutions in the War of the Succession in 1714). Hand in hand, people united across the Catalan territory and joined forces to claim a collective desire.

Characterization and symbols: Yellow t-shirts, ‘Estelada’ flag (on people’s backs and faces)

Diada of 2014

Motto: *Now is the time*

Itinerary: 11km of a ‘V’ formed by main city avenues



Figure 4: Human Chain, Diada 2013. © ANC. Creative commons license.

Form/choreography: Almost two million people gathered to become the message and the symbol of the protest: a V for 'vote' and 'victory' that constituted a gigantic Catalan flag to be seen from the sky. Participants raised yellow or red cardboard at 17:14. Banners with images of influential world leaders invited international support for the referendum vote.

Characterization and symbols: People dressed with official red or yellow t-shirts, depending on the assigned position, created a gigantic Catalan flag. The flag was on people's backs and faces as well.



Figure 5(a): The 'V', Diada 2014. © ANC. Creative Commons license.



Figure 5(b): *The 'V', Diada 2014.* © ANC. Creative Commons license.

Diada of 2015

Motto: *Free way to the Catalan Republic*

Itinerary: 5.2 km towards the Catalan Parliament.

Form/choreography: A giant white pointer, moved by 50 voluntary athletes, travelled down Meridian avenue towards the Parliament. Beginning at

17:14, the athletes ran past 135 different sections (the number of seats of the Parliament of Catalonia), represented by ten colours that symbolized the main drivers of the future Catalan Republic: democracy, solidarity, world, diversity, sustainability, equality, social justice, innovation, culture and education.

As the pointer progressed, participants raised an individual colour pointer. Coordination is simultaneous and in the form of a progressive wave. Once more, the participants' bodies become symbols of the values of the new Republic, projecting the narrative of a more prosperous future that empowers citizens.

At Parc de la Ciutadella in front of the Parliament, the pointer was led to a stage where different speeches and songs were performed. Sixty groups of human towers (Castellers), drummers, giants and popular culture representatives performed.

Characterization and symbols: People dressed in a white official t-shirt (symbol of the blank sheet of the new republic) and raised pointers of different colours. The flag was once again on people's backs and faces, and people came together to become a gigantic flag.

Diada of 2016

Motto: *Ready to*. Everything was ready for the creation of a new state, the Catalan Republic (either achieved through agreement with Spain or through unilateral Referendum).

Itinerary: A collapsed 1.5km march towards the Catalan Parliament.

Form and choreography: Protests occurred simultaneously at different municipalities, each representing different social aspects in which the



Figure 6: *The pointer progression, Diada 2015*. © ANC. Creative Commons license.



Figure 7: A collective heartbeat, Diada 2016. © ANC. Creative Commons license.

Republic would be free to invest: solidarity, diversity, progress, territorial balance, culture and freedom. Beginning at 17:14, after a rocket launch, attendees in different locations simultaneously rose up and moved yellow cardboard dots to simulate a heartbeat. It culminated in a Catalan pop-rock concert in front of the Parliament.

Characterization and symbols: Estelada flag, official white t-shirt, yellow cardboard dots.

Diada of 2017

Motto: *The Diada of the Yes. Referendum is Democracy*

Form and choreography: A giant 'X – voting cross' was formed by attendees. Attendees wore fluorescent green shirts to form a large cross and performed the act to vote. At 17:14, four giant 'YES' banners (16x16m), dragged by four rows of nine volunteers advanced over people, from each four ends of the X symbol towards its intersection where a giant ballot box stated 'Democracy is Freedom'. As soon as the banner covered the protesters, they put on the fluorescent green YES t-shirts, to be seen from the sky as light, to honour volunteers from all the Diades (a reference to the vests worn by 2500 volunteers helping every Diada performance). This choreography involved a more complex coordination of people and a more complex action (overlying clothing). People chanted 'Yes!', 'Let's vote!' and 'Where are the ballots?' A minute of silence for the victims of terrorism in Las Ramblas and elsewhere was held. It ended with a concert with different performances.

Characterization and symbols: Estelada flag, official t-shirts of different colours representing different causes, depending on the section of itinerary granted in the inscription, and a fluorescent green shirt.



Figure 8: A ballot for 'YES', Diada 2017. © ANC. Creative Commons license.

FROM THE SMILE REVOLUTION DIADES TO THE RESISTANCE REVOLUTION EVERYDAY PROTEST: A CARTOGRAPHIC AND CHOREOGRAPHIC APPROACH

We analyse the evolution of Catalan protests through their main cartographic and choreographic components: *scale and domain, place and form, colour and light* and *sound* at their intersection with *time* and through time.

SCALE AND DOMAIN: EMBODIMENT OF SYMBOLS AND EMPOWERMENT

Dramaturgies increase in complexity and sophistication to reveal and narrate the development of the political drama, which parallels the expansion of participation and collective empowerment through time.

During these protests, symbols and flags have experienced a growth in dimension and scale of display. Furthermore, flags have clearly gone through a process of embodiment. Catalan Independentist flags (the 'Senyeres') have evolved from being external devices that are held and waved, to being worn as clothing (capas) as people have become more empowered. Next, symbols and flags started to become layers on the skin – makeup on the face. The people themselves even became the symbol as they performed with their bodies as a gigantic flag in the 2014 Diada.

It is important to highlight the range of 'places', 'scales' and 'domains' where protests during the smile revolution and ongoing resistance revolution are being performed. Protests range from a city scale to a territorial, landscape and geographic scale. Protesters have appropriated and marked symbolic and ordinary public spaces in the city with flags, yellow ribbons and colours. But they have also marked the domestic space of the home and the collective space of the courtyard with these symbols. They have banged pots and pans at the most exposed face of the home, the balcony to the street, and at its most private face, the gallery to its inner courtyard. Angry citizens of all ages, daily

and weekly, and always at 10 p.m., flood streets and interior city blocks with noise produced by the rhythmic clash of banging domestic pots and ladles.

Protests have travelled from the most public to the most intimate scale – the realm of the body. Citizens have embodied symbols and colours, painting flags on their face and skin, wearing yellow in their everyday attire (scarfs and hats) and pinning yellow ribbons on jacket lapels or bags.

The role of time

Irrespective of space, protests have been categorized according to the time consumed in planning and designing the protest (long-term planned Diades, short-term planned and spontaneous protests), and the time period in which the protests occur (single-event protests, recurring protests or simultaneous protests).

In terms of time and space, we find some synchronized protests, coordinated to happen at the same time in different places (e.g. simultaneous protests at the four Catalan capitals of provinces). Others are informal assemblies of people who gather weekly for as little as ten minutes to claim freedom, maintaining an impressive collective silence (e.g. simultaneous weekly gatherings of neighbours in front of their district City Halls all over Catalonia). More formal weekly assemblies, on the contrary, involve small choruses and musical performances or collective readings on freedom (e.g. weekly assembly in historic Plaça del Rei).

The role of place

This research has paid special attention to the role that public space plays as part of the protest design. We explore the symbolic meaning of public space – to build the political narrative and to construe the ‘communitas’ through the collective experience – and the role that it plays in the visual impact of the protests.

Protesters appropriate public space as a stage to broadcast their message in different ways. Some protests use place for its symbolic meaning (historic, collective memory or institutional plaza or building), while others use the form of the protest, its spatial gathering (the shape of people’s assembly) to construct a symbol, utilizing place as a frame or a canvas. Maps of the protests showcase the extension, geometry and symbolic meaning of place in the different types of protests at different stages.

During the smile revolution

Some of the Diades (2012, 2015, 2016) are linear directional protests, with focal points at a symbolic place: the Catalan Parliament. The institution, representing democracy and people’s voice in the right to self-determination, is central to the narratives of the performances that lead along the collective path towards the final destination of sovereignty. The emphasis on the symbolic place is illustrated in these Diades mottos: ‘Catalonia a new State of Europe’, ‘Free way to the Catalan Republic a new state’, ‘Ready to [vote]’.

On the other hand, for the 2014 and 2017 Diades, the selected avenues and streets are symbolically irrelevant to the message, but instead are chosen to become the frame of the symbol achieved by the spatial form of gathering – a V and a +. These patterns, reinforced by the colour worn by the protesters, also help emphasize the message: ‘Now is the time’ and ‘Yes. Referendum is democracy’.

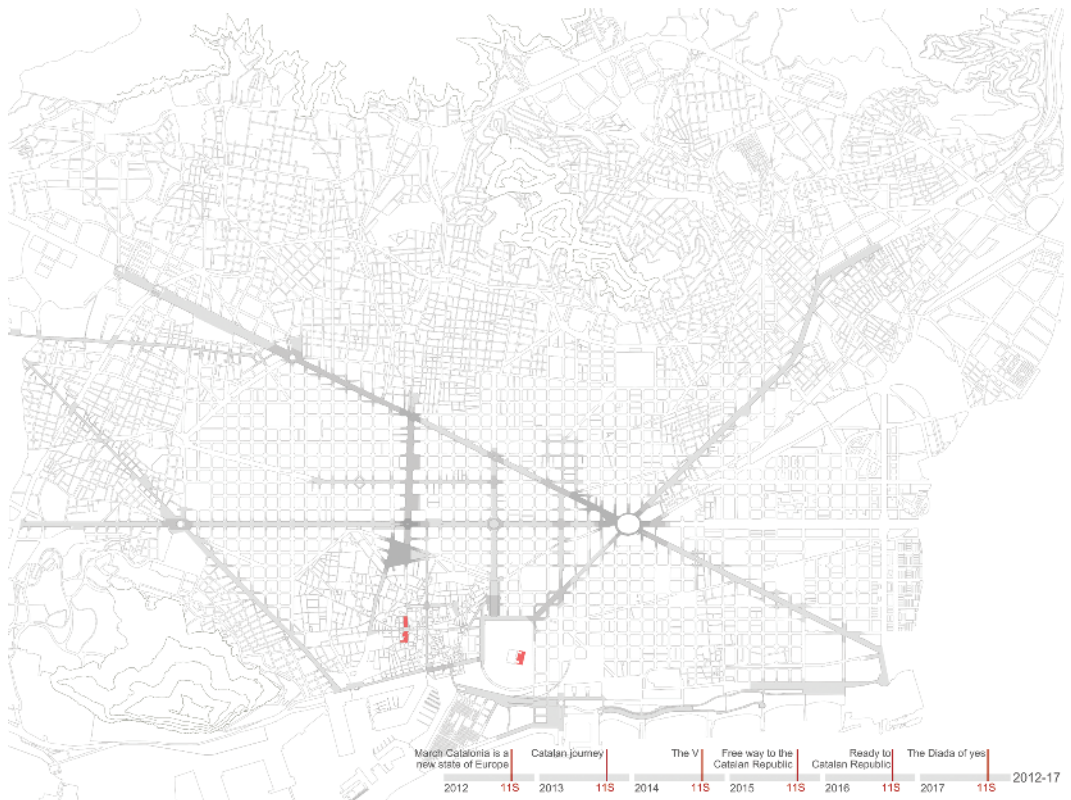


Figure 9: Cartographies of the Smile Revolution Diades (2012–2017), Barcelona. © Sara Bartumeus with architecture student: Anna Bosch.

In the ‘Catalan journey towards Independence’ 2013 Diada, the role of space can be considered a hybrid of the two previously described cases. The spatial gathering in the form of a human chain stretched along the Catalan shoreline and included a loop in Barcelona to engage institutional symbolic buildings and public spaces (e.g. the City Hall and the Generalitat in St. Jaume Plaza and, once more, the Catalan Parliament in Ciutadella Park). The rest of the protest involved space in a dimensional way, underlining the whole Catalan coast to show the scale of the movement and the unity of people, literally holding hands across the territory.

The Diades, the long-term planned *annual rituals* with the goal to empower people and ‘to construe the political message’, have set performative patterns and aesthetics, particularly involving space, which have been adopted in later protests.

During the crisis period

The most paradigmatic spontaneous protest in the crisis period was the massive defence of the Catalan Economic Ministry taken by the Spanish police on 20 September 2017, which would have turned into a riot if activists (who are ironically now imprisoned) had not pacified the crowd. This protest,

15. Citizens occupied high schools and civic centres for 75 hours before and during the October 1st Referendum, organizing cultural activities and festivities during this occupation.
16. One month later, on 8 November, a second General Strike was held, calling for the release of the Catalan officials, and also the imprisoned heads of the ANC and OC (Jordi Sanchez and Jordi Cuixart) and the withdrawal of Article 155 imposing direct rule on Catalonia from Madrid.

together with the collective efforts to defend and avoid police closure of polling places,¹⁵ marked a shift in the line of events and the type and scale of the protests that followed.

During the resistance revolution

At the current resistance stage, protests have been *short-term planned and spontaneous* reactions to specific political events and grievances. Most rebellious protests happened at the beginning of this period, at the climax of the political crisis, such as the call to a General Strike on 3 October to protest police aggressions during the referendum. The selected protest places were major infrastructures across Catalonia, with the goal to close the harbour and the border with France, preventing any connection between the rest of Spain and Europe. Citizens then cut off traffic with barricades on highways, railways and bridges, and occupied principal train stations where spontaneous performances of traditional folklore were played.¹⁶

An example of a singular protest that crossed physical borders and had a trans-national impact is the Caravan and March to and into Brussels. Motorbikes, cars and buses filled with 45,000 people performed a caravan of 1348km to Belgium. Brussels was selected both because it is the place where President Puigdemont and five of his ministers were exiled, and also because it is the home of the EU Parliament. Place in the massive March to Brussels is linked to the symbolic meaning of its message and motto, 'Wake Up Europe'. The spatial dimension of the March, the length of the itinerary and the protest (including the length of time spent during the displacements) and its geographic scale (learnt from the human chain of the Diada 2013) influence its global impact.

Besides this massive transnational march, most protests in the liminal stage have become smaller in dimension but more plentiful, scattered throughout the territory and synchronized in time.

Some have been *reiterative rituals* (weekly or monthly, such as the collective assemblies to mark the anniversaries of political imprisonments in front of district Town Halls), while others have been *everyday rituals* (banging pots and pans or wearing yellow ribbons or yellow attire).

In these protests, place, together with time, history and collective memory, play important roles as people assemble at traditional plazas in front of symbolic or institutional places, sending a direct message to institutions: city halls, governmental buildings and prisons. In this sense, place is still part of the message and becomes even more important as the protest places multiply throughout the territory and actions become smaller and more persistent.

The role of light and colour

In some other emergent types of protest, colour and light play a principal role in reinforcing the spatial form of gathering, learned through the 'V' and '+' patterns of the Diades. Place here plays a secondary role, acting as the canvas where people, as actors and space markers, write and draw messages and symbols with their own bodies to become the message themselves.

The message in these cases is within the spatial form of the protest, construed not by any spatial frame, but by the form of the gathering (people standing still, seating or in movement) filling in (or outlining) drawn letters on the ground in large outdoor spaces.



2017-18

Figure 10: Cartographies of the Resistance Revolution Protest (2017–18), Barcelona. © Sara Bartumeus with architecture student: Anna Bosch.

People, by gathering into groups or crowds, have drawn colourful symbols (ribbons, crosses and hearts) and have shaped letters, words and statements ('SOS', 'help', 'help Cat', 'help us', 'help us Europe', 'wake up Europe', 'freedom', 'republic', etc.) to send the message of dissent out.

In a few of them, fresh or salt water has been selected as the place (background and medium) by the protestors to gather and perform (in movement) the configuration of a symbol (e.g. rowers in yellow canoes aligning to form ribbons).

In others, public space is appropriated by marking ordinary urban spaces and landscapes with objects and symbols (colonizing beaches, fields and mountain summits), resulting in beautiful land art expressions of resistance and protest. Emotional pilgrimages are performed to dye and wrap symbolic architectural and natural landmarks.

In most cases, colour has helped visualize the message, such as when the crowd turns red, the colour of the uniform of a collective, as 'firemen for freedom' or when they 'uniform themselves' with yellow t-shirts (as learned in the Diades performances), or when they perform with light.

Light has also enhanced the visual impact of the resulting images from the protests by contrasting with the background and by making people's bodies almost disappear at dusk. This has been the case in the late fall and winter

17. <http://musicperallibertat.cat>.



Figure 11: Freedom for Political Prisoners March, 11 November 2017, Barcelona.
© ANC. Creative Commons license.

crisis period when people had to gather during evening hours. Light from candles, torches, lanterns and smartphones has flowed through the streets, claiming freedom for the imprisoned (e.g., 17 October, 11 November).

The role of music

‘Let’s make freedom our hymn, let’s make music our voice!’ (Musicians for Freedom Platform).¹⁷

The Catalan and independentist communities share songs and mantras built between the nineteenth and the twenty-first centuries. These songs and mantras have generally been of protest and resistance against Spanish repression. According to ethnomusicologist Ayats ‘Singing together is to collectively live the metaphor of the symbols’ (2011: 7), creating strength and cohesion.

The collective embodied experiences through coordinated movement, symbolic gestures and musical emotions, have been the key instruments of empowerment and preparation for the reaction and resistance when Police and repression arrived.

Either in organized or in spontaneous events, thousands of people have gathered to sing together: *The Concert for Freedom* on 29 June 2013, at the F.C. Barcelona Stadium with 90,000 attendees to boost the Diada 2013; *the Concert for Freedom for Political Prisoners* in Lluís Company’s Stadium on 2 December 2017 – with 50,000 participants – to collect funds for the exiled and political prisoners and to support their families followed the performance of 10,000 musicians occupying Plaza de Espanya (Spain’s plaza) with melodies charged with symbolism. On 24 December 2017 a transterritorial *carol singing* to cheer up political prisoners was also organized by the platform *Musicians for Freedom*: ‘From our point of view, art, culture and sensibility are key elements in building a society based on dialogue, empathy, peace and democracy. As musicians, we believe in the transformative power of our art’ (Fundational Manifest, 6 November 2017).

As the smile revolution has unfolded, an existing repertoire of collective songs, most of them positive and festive, claim freedom and show the values of Catalan society. Songs with special significance include the national anthem, 'The Reapers', an identity song that shows the diversity of the Catalan people: 'We come from north, we come from south' (Llach 1978), and *Catalonia has power*, a translation of the original Peret rumba 'Barcelona has power', created for the Barcelona Olympic Games. The violence and repression of the Spanish State after 20 September is linked to the anti-Franco protests of 1968 through song: Lluís Llach's 'L'Estaca' (1968) and Maria del Mar Bonet's 'What does this people want?' (1968) – paradigmatic songs rescued from collective memory 50 years later.

The word 'mantra' – translated from the original Sanskrit – means 'instruments of thought or mind'. Repeated words or phrases, performances of the mind, express strong beliefs and are reinforced with rhythms, melodies and accents. The mantras for each Diades have evolved over the years, according to the political and emotional intensity of the events. The first and most repeated mantra is 'In, Inde, Independència'. In response to the referendum and the violence, new mantras have appeared, changing to a percussive 4/4, accentuating the first, second and third syllables and accelerating speed: 'Votarem!!' ('we will vote'), 'No tinc por' ('I'm not afraid'), '¿Dónde están las papeletas, las papeletas donde están?' ('Where are the ballots, the ballots where are they?'), 'Els carrers seran sempre nostres!!' ('Streets will always be ours'), 'Llibertat Presos Polítics' ('Freedom political prisoners'), 'El Vostre conseller és a la presó' ('Your minister is imprisoned'), 'Puigdemont el nostre President' ('Puigdemont, our President!') and 'Som República' ('We are Republic').

The role of music in these intense events is beautifully expressed by Llach: 'A community is a living being [...] and when it's in danger, it answers to the needs of the people. The Living Being creates sociocultural and political defenses. The poem is a trench and the trench is music' (2018: 44).



Figure 12: Singing carols in front of Barcelona's former prison on 24 December 2017. © Omnium Cultural. Creative Commons license.

18. The yellow ribbon is a centuries-old custom/tradition that symbolizes the desire to reunite with loved ones who are absent. The use of the yellow ribbon in Catalonia began to request the release, the return home of political prisoners.

19. Yellow symbolizes the campaign for universal suffrage and was previously used in the women's vote campaign in the United States in the nineteenth century. In Fall 2014, during the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests known as the 'Umbrella Revolution', yellow ribbons were worn and tied to fences and trees around the city by protesters using Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Old Oak Tree as a protest song.

THE YELLOW INVASION, A COLLECTIVE CREATIVE RESISTANCE: ACTIONS OF DEFACEMENT AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

During the smile revolution phase, *space* is used in different protests either as a blank slate or frame where protesters – often with their own bodies – write and display the claim, or as a stage that becomes the message itself – when protesters have chosen a place already charged with a symbolism that is meaningful to the cause. Sometimes places have been chosen to defend Catalan institutions that were threatened and needed defending. The selection of places such as the Catalan Parliament, the Catalan Economy Ministry, city halls and prisons has acted as an imperative of the cause, showing how the Catalan claims have evolved from a right to self-determination to more basic rights, such as democracy, freedom of speech and of assembly, and finally to basic freedom.

At the current liminal stage of the process, the main *message* of the protests is against oblivion. People shout and banners state, 'Neither oblivion nor forgiveness'. They do not forgive or forget the Spanish State's repression during and after the October 1st Referendum, nor the unjust fact that peaceful activists and democratically elected politicians are still in prison and exile one year later.

In the current resistance revolution's protests, *space* plays a similar role as depositary of this message against oblivion. Rather than occupying or defending symbolic spaces and institutions, the protesters today have extended the protests through time and space and have taken over the everyday cityscape with a stubborn resilience. 'Collective memory uses space as a kind of repository of meaning [...] marked by socially recognizable indicators' (Stavrvides 2016: 183).

Protesters today not only periodically occupy the streets, shouting messages, sending messages out with their voices and accelerated mantras or gathering in specific spatial forms, they have taken over the everyday public space, the collective space. By marking the ordinary space of cities and landscapes with colour and symbols – yellow and yellow ribbons – they have appropriated it, giving the protest a more silent but also a more persistent and everyday visible face.¹⁸

Yellow has literally dyed our urban, agricultural and natural landscapes. Large-scale yellow ribbons have temporarily marked our symbolic and ordinary landscape, adding colour and texture to landmarks, summits, monuments and bell towers. Yellow markers such as straw bales were intentionally packed in yellow punctuate agricultural fields. Dozens of yellow crosses, symbols of loss of a republic state, justice, democracy and freedom, appeared at dawn one Easter morning on beaches along the coastline, unique pieces of collective land art.

Furthermore, thousands of small yellow ribbons are worn in lapels and have colonized all kinds of ordinary urban landscape elements, tied to railings at public stairs and bridges, to bench legs, to street lamps and traffic sign poles, and to tree trunks and branches (with photos and messages of support to the imprisoned and exiled).

The virtual space has also been dyed yellow, with social media the medium for the 'call to action' and the place where people share images of the 'yellow invasion'. These actions have made the ordinary not only the depositary of the message, but the repository of the collective memory.¹⁹



Figure 13: *Collective creativity. Yellow Catalonia map with exit door in Girona's Cathedral. CDR action. © ANC. Creative commons license.*

Actions of defacement and collective creativity

This yellow invasion, transforming the skin and texture of our collective spaces, can be considered, using Stavros Stavrides' terminology, an act of defacement. These acts and gestures 'interfere with the meaning of public space by manipulating images that shape its perception' (Stavrides 2016: 185).

The 'space' transformed by an act of defacement varies in scale, context and ownership, influencing the gaze that it attracts and its range of impact. Some large-scale 'actions of defacement', in the landscape or in monuments and landmarks, are meant to be seen from long distances and to have a single broadcast. Others, smaller in scale, displayed in ordinary cityscape elements and surfaces, search for a longer-term impact at a human scale. They are more permanent markers in the day-to-day urban landscape. By 'creating singular objects' out of habitual ones, they monumentalize the ordinary (Stavrides 2016: 191).

Whether the space is in a public or a private ground, the object of defacement is always the skin, the exposed face of the collective space. These collective gestures, which mark the skin of our hardscapes and softscapes, appropriate public space and reconfigure it into collective space. 'Defacement may temporarily convert public space to common space if it triggers forms of collective reinterpretation' (Stavrides 2016: 189). Painted messages and claims act as tattoos on horizontal and vertical surfaces, walls and pavements. Yellow ribbons, weaved into bridges over rivers and highways and tied onto trees, change the texture of the skin, adding wrinkles to urban and rural landscapes, which, by recalling memories, prevent us from falling into oblivion.

The act of defacement also varies in form. Some of these acts have been delivered in a performative mode during daylight when the spotlight is on the ritual itself. A human chain (lesson learnt from the 2013 Diada) hoisted pictures – with yellow frames – of each one of the imprisoned and exiled to

20. The concept of the *right to the city* has been explored from different perspectives (Purcell 2002; Mitchell 2003; Harvey 2008; Blomley 2009; Kafui 2011) since Lefebvre's influential essay was published in the context of 1968, 'The right to the city is not only the right to change the city, but also the right to transform and alter social relations (when they are oppressive) through the democratic re-appropriation of urban space' (De la Lata 2017: 176).



Figure 14: *Collective creativity: yellow land art in Catalan beaches, Cadaqués. CDR action. © ANC. Creative commons license.*

San Bernat peak in the symbolic mountain of Montserrat. Professional mountain climbers completed the human chain at the summit.

Others are the sum of individual or collective actions done with 'nocturnality and treachery' – during the night and in secret – to achieve a surprise effect in the morning. In this case, the focus is not on the performance itself, but on the shock achieved by the reconfigured space. Dozens of yellow crosses were simultaneously planted in different beaches along the Catalan coast one Easter night. Stavrides refers to these gestures and acts as not simply producing changes but also 'generating memory shocks by providing the ground for revealing comparisons between what was formerly visible and what became visible as a result of these acts' (2016: 185).

Other collective rituals and performances may not 'deface' space, but rather temporarily occupy it with colour and sound. On the morning of 24 December hundreds of people, wearing yellow scarves and yellow Santa hats, gathered to sing carols with families of the imprisoned in front of the former prison in Barcelona to tell the world that the missing ones were wanted back home. Numerous 'yellow dinners' and festivals have been organized by ordinary people in outdoor spaces. Significantly, once the imprisoned were brought from Madrid to institutions in Catalonia, these events have moved to spaces around the prisons so that the prisoners can hear and feel their warmest support.

*Contested public space and the 'right to the city'*²⁰

In the everyday 'yellow ribbon' battle, common space is being challenged as public space and collective memory is being fiercely contested by actions and counter-reactions of defacement. While some knot yellow ribbons, others untie them and replace them again. This illustrates the dynamic ('always-in-the-making'), contested nature of collective memory and public space – a crucial arena for social antagonism (Stavrides 2016: 183).

These actions of collective defacement create beauty for most people, while for others, they are seen as provocations that disfigure and ruin the cityscape. 'The very act of official erasure (in the name of the law or protection from 'aesthetic pollution') exposes itself as a violent act of war against dissident images' (Stavrides 2016: 183).

As Cotarelo (2018) explains, the neo-fascist political party has started a campaign to support the ongoing actions by violent anti-democratic people to clear the yellow ribbons from the streets, attacking the freedom of expression of three quarters of the population. Not only has this campaign of hatred, arrogance, authoritarianism and intolerance been met with pacifist tactics (citizens ignoring the provocation and replacing the illegally torn ribbons in greater quantity), but it has also awakened a broader movement of solidarity with Catalonia throughout Spain and abroad. 'The humble yellow ribbon that we began to wear demanding the liberation of unjustly incarcerated people, has become the symbol of the fight against Spanish State fascism' (Cotarelo 2018: n.pag.).

In the Catalan struggles over the appropriation of public space, we find the usual tensions between 'the right to the city' and the 'rule of law', shown in other movements illustrative of the tensions between legitimacy and legality'. Silvano De la Llata reflects on these clashes when he points to 'the potential of public space as catalytic of extreme and controversial manifestations of the right to the city: the right of resistance to oppression' (De la Llata 2017: 175). In the sequential narration of the 1DMX movement, he describes three forms of legitimacy–legality tension – the right to the city (beyond the rule of law); the rule of law (beyond human rights); and the use of law (against human rights) (De la Llata 2017: 175). These three tensions seem to perfectly illustrate the decline of democratic rights against the Catalan movement and its translation into the public space debate.



Figure 15: Collective creativity: citizens knotting yellow ribbons in ordinary cityscapes. Spontaneous action. © Social media.

The 'right to the city' and activism

Indeed, national social movements (Òmnium, ANC) and their organized and designed large-scale demonstrations (Diades) have been crucial in *shaping discourse and emotions* (in the pre-liminal stage of the process), as demonstrated by the proliferation of more spontaneous actions organized by micro-scale associations of citizens in defense of the Republic (CDRs).

One could argue that the multiplication of activism in space, through networks of grassroots community organizations, is the spatial consequence of urbanism with a social focus, one that harvests the civic ground.

If it is possible someday to map the physical spaces where the CDRs meet (without putting their clandestine nature in danger), we may realize that these spaces overlap existing networks of civic and public structures. Has the vibrancy and equitable spatial distribution of public space bred this network of collective actions?

In the case of Barcelona, one would see a clear spatial relationship between the equitable distribution of public spaces and facilities throughout the city and the multi-faceted, grassroots social activist network. Barcelona's urbanistic transformation, during the first democratic city halls, made an effort to equitably invest in public space recovery and public facilities (schools and civic centres). The aim was social justice, using a polycentric model to evenly distribute public spaces and centrality throughout the city. Public spaces are where people meet, share culture, problems and beliefs and build community. These places reinforce the rich associative fabric already in place, becoming new threads of civic action that have been woven into political activism.

Beyond the main urban settlements, and avoiding a hyper-centralization in the capital city of Barcelona, this expansive effect of grass-roots activism mirrors the decentralization and territorial inclusion that the Catalan emancipatory movement stands for.

In Catalonia, cities, towns and landscapes have been taken over by the people. The case of the Catalan massive emancipatory protests and their evolution illustrates the strong relationship between democracy and public space, public space being the place for freedom of expression, where city, politics and community meets. Through shared rituals, performances and re-presentation, the community develops a sense of belonging, a collective identity, purpose and memory. Against fear and towards trust (Bauman 2001), public spaces are the fertile ground for activism and social change (Lefebvre 1968–72; Stravrides 2016).

CONCLUSION

Cultural and political activism has always gone hand in hand along the three centuries of Catalan Sovereignty vindication. This cultural legacy and shared emotional history is what makes strong and unique the collective expression of this *communitas'* will.

Democracy and human rights have definitively undergone an immense retreat, an unimaginable reversal in Spain, travelling 50 years backwards. Catalan emancipation might have to wait longer than expected, but the growth of people's empowerment through peaceful – designed and spontaneous – performance protests is unstoppable today. It is the scaffolding of a future of hope with a citizen-centred politics and an evolved, more empathetic society.



Figure 16: Bruxelles march. December 2017. © ANC. Creative Commons license.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Bartumeus, S. and Vendrell, E. (2019), 'Performing freedom: Massive protest in the Catalan sovereignty process: From smiling to resisting', *Art & the Public Sphere*, 8:1, pp. 39–62, doi: 10.1386/aps_00005_1

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