Situated Collective Utopias

/// Stories of engaged spatial practices and shared territorial heritage ///

MIGUEL ROS MONTANER
Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention
Umeå School of Architecture
Situated Collective Utopias

/// Stories of engaged spatial practices and shared territorial heritage ///
“In response to the disturbing experience of these others, my body said to my ego *Feel pain here!* and my ego suffered and wondered how it might suffer no more. And that is why I was *made to think.*”

(Rosalyn Diprose 2002)
Challenging the widespread hopelessness in relationship to our capacity to produce real alternatives to the abstract and egoistic neoliberal utopia – with its destructive and unfair consequences around the globe in general and specifically in Mallorca – this thesis, understood as performative research, focuses on the conception and development of Situated Collective Utopias.

These would be utopias that can grow generously and unfold not as abstract and consensed projections of futures but as extrusions of very contextual and often dissensual hopes. They are apparatuses to explore our collective abilities to practically, critically and ethically engage in and sustain the making and thinking of difference. A difference that is materialized and shared as a common heritage and that belongs to who cares and takes care of it.

This thesis report contains a theoretical reflection about the concepts of utopia and heritage as well as an ecology of interventions that make and transform their own sites and aim at developing skilled spatial practices that “think through making”. The practical engagements in those particular situations afford an ongoing radical critique of their contexts and several “outside” moments of reflection.

At last, in the active pursue of finding already present Situated Collective Utopias, this thesis also tells various stories of learning from within the radical sharing community of excluded people of Can Gazà, stories which tell about a process of being given through architecting.
Situated Collective Utopias and the (LiAI)

“in order to qualitatively transform the worlds we inhabit, our only option is to understand, critique, intervene in, and devise the various apparatuses that are enmeshed in our enactments of the world as human beings, and therefore as architects.”

Given the unusualness of the LiAi’s methodologies and agendas, a preliminary contextual explanation of the conditions under the which this master’s thesis has been produced might be a helpful start.

The opening quote from the Liai’s main literature already sets the tone for the willingness to, as Roemer van Toorn would put it, “don’t excavate. Change reality!”. At the LiAi we all share a very rehearsed “readiness” to transform our immediate environments, the situations we inhabit. And that will to make a meaningful difference grows from our “here and now” close and affective relations with sites, things, people, discourse, materials, etc. so that the whole Umea School of Architecture moves towards a relational understanding of spatial practices. A meshwork of relations into which we intervene making choices and taking positions that “entangle us ethically and politically” in the world. And it is in this “disposition” to intervene, to not only criticize our given reality or project speculations about futures but to actually keep making them, that this thesis takes utopia to be a very productive concept. Utopia as an apparatus for the generation and maintenance of hope in common.

Therefore, after the decision of moving to Mallorca to undertake this research, the main agenda of this thesis has been to start, perhaps from the middle, an alternative spatial practice which is structured around interventional work, a “thinking through making” in Tim Ingolds terms. A making-thinking of other alternatives explored along practical and critical engagements with the ongoing history and the potentials of real situations not shying away from responsibility, but precisely becoming part of them and transforming them as they transform myself.

And since the LiAi program doesn’t work (at least not only) producing objective, distant and fact based knowledges to foreground our actions, this report on the actual state of affairs in Mallorca rehearses other spatial practices and methodologies of engagement (the so called “matters of concern”) which work through a different understanding of what architecture and the production of knowledge (as research documentation) can be. And it is precisely in the situatedness of the knowledge production and interventional work that this research is performing or doing something.

Immediate interventions, i believe that are understood at the Liai’s program as “heuristic devices”, and not as ends in themselves or as the only solutions to improve our living conditions. They are precisely the outcomes of that willingness to affect the world as we are affected by it, starting by “working with our often neglected body” in the situations we happen to be entangled with. And those outcomes, are not only the objects or images that those spatial interventions represent or embody but their durations and effects as well. So they are their performances. How do they transform the world in a meaningful way? How are our perception of what is possible or admissible is reconfigured through their performance?

Therefore, my interventional work, an ecology of interventions in Mallorca, is taken as a very serious even when playful engagement with the sites, people, materials, discourses and events that I discover and rework through a direct and close involvement. And in the context of what I call Situated Collective Utopias, the architectural interventions which grow from that direct engagement in those particular situations, are discovery apparatuses, they reveal and point towards new possibilities or directions to follow. Not that much as “discrete steps” to take in order to reach the no-place of Utopia, but as a “procession”, a making of utopias,
Contents

UTOPIA AND CRITIQUE

01. CONTEXT /// RADICAL CRITIQUE

02. TOWARDS AN ECOLOGY OF INTERVENTIONS /// GROWING HERITAGES

03. MARGINAL ARTS /// GROWING UTOPIAS

INTRODUCTION
RESEARCH QUESTIONS / HYPOTHESIS

TERRITORIAL INVARIANTS / ANTROPOGENETICS AND SPACE
THE BALEARIZATION / LOGICAL APPARATUSSES OF PRODUCTION

SON MULET / RESISTENCE AND INCTIMACY
EL TEMPLE / NON-DISCIPLINARY DISCOURSES
ES BALUARD / INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENTS
CAN GAZÀ / PRACTICES OF STRANGEMENT

STORIES OF ENGAGING AND LEARNING FROM WITHIN CAN GAZÀ’S COMMUNITY
From the decade of 1960 with the arrival of mass tourism and the progressive domination of neoliberal politics, Mallorca is undergoing a process that is transforming radically its environmental, social and subjective ecologies. And while the environmental effects caused by the economical activities touching ground in Mallorca are becoming more of a common concern, other injustices are less visible and underexplored. But most worrying, there is a very spread feeling that there are no rational alternatives to the logics of global market economies and its particularities in Mallorca.

Drawing upon David Graeber’s statement that “hopelessness isn’t natural, it needs to be produced”, this thesis is developed through a performative research, a stubborn contribution, to collectively keep in motion the conception and development of hopes. Hopes for experimenting new ways of coexistence that challenge the dominance of market driven relations and move towards radical sharing communities.

And while we are currently living in a huge neoliberal utopia but any dream or hope in common is immediately dismissed as an utopian fantasy and while we are destructing very valuable territorial heritages but we are also being made to behave pathologically as if we couldn’t produce any more. Situated Collective Utopias explores both theoretically and practically the issues of heritage and utopia throughout several authors and several practical engagements.

Therefore, utopias here are conceived and enacted not as idealistic and totalitarian projections of ready-made-thought futures but precisely as an impetus, directions or “methods of hope” in common. And heritages are understood and mobilized as common and shared resources which grow in practice and not as a collection of images and objects from the past to comfort our threatened identity as human beings.

The research is structured in three main parts: a radical critique to existing conditions and the production of Mallorca, an ecology of interventions aiming at growing skilled practices which make a meaningful difference and are oriented towards mobilizing and sharing a heritage of practices, and a transformative engagement with an already existing radical sharing community.

The radical critique of Mallorca today is taken here as paramount to the self-reflective attitude of raising questions in order to persistently engage in understanding the conditions under which we coexist in the island. But a preliminary understanding of the encounters and affects that makes us wonder about those often felt as natural and given conditions, is nevertheless the first raw material for such a critical inquiry. The affects caused by encounters with dying heritages and territorial violence motivates the will to research upon the history and logics of the production of Mallorca. This history is read in two very different phases: a first long phase of close relation to and slow transformation of the land by the groups that inhabit it, and a more recent and faster one, of deterritorialization and the dominance of externally imposed logics. Understanding the territory as a common heritage and drawing upon logics of invariant rules and conflictive situations, potential strategic scenarios to engage with are explored.

The thesis also states that both Utopia and Heritage are life processes that have material consequences, so there is an ongoing ecology of critical and practical interventions that aim at transforming the situations one finds at the reach of his/her own hands. Interventions such as building a hut with kids while exploring the potentials of intimate rural lives, rehabilitating a city center apartment within the vortex of the sudden rush for face lifting the old town, engaging in a critical collective intervention within an art institution with obvious transparency problems, or actively supporting the relocation of the workshops of a socially excluded community all aim at rehearsing and growing responsibly skilled alternative spatial practices.

And it is precisely in the choosing of where and with whom we want to learn from and with that this work enacts its first political and ethical choices. Actively learning from and joining Can Gazà’s marginal community in their hopes for alternative futures is the third main part of this research in which interventions unfold as one becomes part of the collective site/situation and new hopes are uncovered along those transformations. Utopia and Heritage become performative.
Research Questions / Hypothesis

Given the economical, social and environmental crisis that Mallorca is immersed in, and the widely spread feeling that there are no alternatives to the dictatorship of global neoliberal market and particularly to the turistical Mallorcan lobby, can we critically explore this context in a way that facilitates the discovery of new opportunities from within and that is not strengthening the feeling of hopelessness? Or are we doomed to only resist against the dominance of actuality only by standing outside or being on the margins?

Sharing Nigel Thrift’s statement that we should “achieve a diagnosis of the present which is simultaneously a carrier wave for new ways of doing things”, this thesis proposes the development of a critical understanding of the historical and actual logics of territorial production of Mallorca which aim at discovering potential territorial situations in order to simultaneously engage practically and critically with them. But this knowledge shouldn’t be acquired in disconnection with its subject and in order to only afterwards become “ready” to do something about it, but to the contrary, it should grow along enduring affectual and corporeal relations with that territory, if we do not care for something, how are we supposed to do something about it? And I also do think that only rendering the neoliberal developments and their effects visible is not enough if we understand architecture as a transformational practice, which moves forwards along life processes.

Against the violent destruction of common territorial heritages and/or the pathological museification of the few remaining ones that are such pronounced features of our present, is it possible to retake the competence of creating and transforming meaningful territorial heritages? And to whom will they belong?

Understanding heritage as a dynamic and conflictive cultural process and not as an static and consensus based object might be a first step in order to move beyond the hegemony of market value and promote new heritage practices. Practices that develop alternative value systems and understand both the material and immaterial dimensions of diverse territorial heritages as commons. Common resources for developing alternatives and for the future generations. Commons that belong not to original or native residents but to the inhabitants that care, share and value them in practice. Understanding and performing the territory, with us included in it, as a common resource.

When we are so much told and made into behaving as if there were no alternatives and when all differential ways of doing or thinking are dismissed as irrational fantasies, Is there still any role for utopics to play in affording us alternatives? And if so, what would the conception and performance of utopias be like?

Taking utopia not as an individual projection of futures but as a very site specific process and its generated forms which grow from the hopes and dreams of groups of people, can help us engaging in different learning processes which are capable of producing situated knowledges while simultaneously producing transformations. Utopia is therefore understood as an impetus that invites us to both excavate and transform reality, not through certain steps to take but as a hopeful way to make.

What could it mean then to perform Situated Collective Utopias in Mallorca? Where? With whom? And for what?

It might mean to engage responsibly – and in common – in the transformation of territorial heritages, caring for what and how we do it and inventing new ways to avoid violent exclusions. And in order to do that we need to start by engaging with making and transforming the sites that are and we make close to us, where our interventions can be effective and have consequences. Taking the challenges of for example exploring through interventional work in a countryside house the potentials of empowering intimate rural lives, improving an old town apartment while simultaneously triggering and expanded sharing and growing of hopes from the whole building inhabitants or even the neighborhood, and other situations that might come through promoting encounters.

What can we learn from the radical sharing community of Can Gazà – an already existing situated and collective utopia – and its members? What kind of engagement do they have with their territory? What are the architectures of these and other engaged spatial practices?
“I think that the risk is worth it in order to achieve a diagnosis of the present which is simultaneously a carrier wave for new ways of doing things.”

(Nigel Thrift 2008)
SITUATING UTOPIA: HERE AND NOW /// Contrary to what we are made to believe, we are currently living the bigger utopia ever. The utopia of neoliberal global market. An utopia backed by a “vast bureaucratic apparatus for the creation and maintenance of hopelessness, a kind of giant machine that is designed, first and foremost, to destroy any sense of possible alternative futures.” (Graeber 2008)

So, any possible alternatives to the current state of affairs are immediately disavowed, even when it is of common sense that this world is far form being healthy and just. But the utopia of neoliberalism, works its way on making us believe and behave as if all unevenness were but side effects which will be over as we keep selling our future to their investors.

How can we be responsible for a world that comes to us ready-made? How can we act responsibly in a world which we experience through the mediation of so many prosthesis and so distantly? How can we change a world in which we are told and made to believe what is possible and what is impossible? How can we enjoy a world in which we (some of us) are not considered to be of it and if we can hardly take care of ourselves?

I fundamentally share Tim Ingold’s belief that “we have to make the future ourselves”, and that in order to make it we also need to think it. Immediacy, the situatedness of the here and now, comes to be an indispensable ingredient for such an endeavor since thinking (and therefore the thinking of other futures) must not be undertaken as abstract activity but as a critical practice growing in close relation with direct engagements with the “material flows and currents of sensory awareness” of the practitioner, the maker. And indeed, we are all makers.

Therefore, I understand utopics not as the actualizations of ready-made futures or the projection of ready-thought futures, but as an impetus or disposition, a kind of “method of hope” to trigger and afford us the responsible making-thinking of futures. A kind of self-discovering apparatus for the generation and growth of hope.

And as I do believe that we cannot make the future completely apart from the present conditions, coupled with the transformational engagements and thought experiments which grow with them, processes of developing critical awareness of the existing conditions must be set into motion as well and very importantly, translated and communicated in order to collectively understand the conditions under which we live and share the potentials for growing alternatives.

CONTEXTUALIZING UTOPIA: RADICAL CRITIQUE /// According to French anthropologist Françoise Choay, “Utopia competes us today more than ever, in particular because of the role it assigns space and because of the logic that motivates it” (Choay 2006). The built context is considered a spatial apparatus and the antinomy a logical one.

What Choay mainly urges us, is to retake utopian practices, understanding what its death during the last decades signals, and in order to critically develop alternatives which can counteract the pervasive effects of a unique and dominant spatial apparatus, displayed through the urbanism of global networks, and which can displace the tyranny of a neoliberal market and its bureaucratic administrations that have also caused what has somewhere else been called the end of politics. Consensus politics which are the very opposite of the conflictual antinomies that motivate any utopian enterprise.

Unlike what it is commonly thought about it, Utopia (starting with Moro’s one) is not originated in an “abstract and decontextualized imaginary but is built up step by step through a radical critique without concessions directed towards a real society”.

So an utopia for Choay is a sort of “preliminary reflection”, rooted in a radical critique of present conditions and needed to undertake any political process because of its “explorative vocation, its inclination to put in evidence and announce unsolvable or unformulatable problems which are born at the core of society”.

Although I do not completely agree on the preliminary condition that Choay assigns to critique in utopias and would rather like to conceive it as an ongoing radical critique which grows coupled with practical and corporeal engagements, understanding utopics as highly situated critical practices in the here and now to emphasize their heuristic rather than projective condition is of great relevanche for my practices.

Alberto Magnaghi’s “concrete utopias” and David Harvey’s “dialectical utopias” stand both in favor of retaking utopics as situated critical practices actively pursuing the making and thinking of difference from within the consensus politics and neoliberal utopias that we happen to be living in.

In Harvey’s words,

“The multiple degenerate utopias that now surround us - the shopping malls and the bourgeois commercialized utopias of the suburbs being paradigmatic
- do as much to signal the end of history as the collapse of the Berlin Wall ever did. They instantiate rather than critique the idea that there is no alternative, save those given by the conjoining of technological fantasies, commodity culture, and endless capital accumulation."

So, as an alternative to the unconsciously lived neoliberal utopia, Situated Collective Utopias proposes to retake utopics as a hopeful impetus of its critically aware practitioners but which must grow through direct engagements with real situations, make and transform sites and materials in it development, and be shared, commoned.
Drawing upon Carles Llop statement that “there is no project that does not arise from a question emerging from a feeling of like or dislike toward any situation, thing or process that needs to be transformed or formed with new or renewed approaches”, the radical critique in this thesis is a reaction against the very feeling I and Others experience that there are no alternatives to the violent deployment of global network infrastructures in Mallorca’s territory causing so many unevenesses and boosting the emergence of more and more poverties.

Criticality here is understood and practiced precisely as developing skills to reflect and raise hard questions to any given experience as a method of regaining the competence to make ourselves the experiences and consequently alternatives.

The vast bureaucratic managerial apparatus which holds dominant power in Mallorca (and paradoxically extremely corrupted and inefficient) is constantly creating the shared feeling that there are no alternatives to global neoliberal market rules, the destruction of common heritages and resources, or to the subsequent impoverishment and social exclusion generated under these conditions. And what is getting clearer and clearer is that we can’t have any proper change driven only by technocratic paradigms.

As Guattari put it, we need to invent new political and aesthetic paradigms, which correspond to our relational and ethical dimensions of our affective engagements with the Others.
Experiencing the fast driven territorial transformations that Mallorca is undergoing while as well the still remaining historical layers of several long term territorial developments makes me wonder if we have not neglected too irresponsibly a past contextualized wisdom of transforming the lands we inhabit, and embraced too easily the production of functional territories ready to accommodate the logics of global markets.

A minimum archaeology on the history of the production of the island of Mallorca, I believe is needed to overcome the understanding of the remaining heritage as isolated cultural artifacts to protect, and relate to them as many existing structural rules to help mediating our experimental engagements in retaking our competence to built contextualized territories.

Is there not a local and contextualized horizon of the territories we inhabit that constitutes a certain “genetical” rules for the production and development of our specie as humans?
For a long time I have been concerned about the “possessions”, the historical rural infrastructures that through two millennia have structured the transformation of Mallorca territory for habitability.

Those infrastructures, even when the main refrain told about them is “nothing more constant than change”, have been territorial invariants since the Romanization of the island. Redeveloped through the Arabic cultures and the next Christian feudal civilizations, they were in full use until the irruption of mass tourism during the 50’s.

Eventually, they even clustered with the early twentieth century industrial developments. But the progressive and fast abandonment of the rural activities, which today represent less than the 1% of Mallorca’s economical activity, have
rendered them almost obsolete. And of course it’s not only the buildings that are becoming ruins, but the whole landscape and cultural production associated to them.

And whether I don’t think that we should pathologically protect them and convert them into dead museums, I think that excavating their history can help us with the task of better understand how to retake that competence of creating and sustaining a local and contextualized production of the territory.

Such a concern based understanding of them, could afford a more transformational engagement with them and their territories rather than just destroying them for the sake of technological progress, conserving them rendering them further more dead only to comfort our destabilized identity or turning them into exclusive and gated enclaves for expanding the already scandalous turistical industry in Mallorca?

I believe then, that we urgently need to explore and intervene them with collective practices that grow with their mediation. Therefore, we need to understand their past role in the production of the island and discover through engaging with them the structural potentials as a network or related productive sites which coexists and shapes that coexistence with other spaces, other territories.

How could the island be rewired through a network of “possessions” where renewed productive practices were growing again?
The new territorial developments are only driven by a will to achieve very quantifiable goals. Goals, which can be the most, translated in money and votes on the political elections happening every four years. That’s the horizon of most of the decisions and discussions around which sort of environment we want to live in.

The numbers about the environmental unsustainability of our territorial model keep increasing while no alternatives, a part from attempts to put limits to urban growth, are been put on the table.

But, while continue understanding and criticizing these externally imposed logics of territorial production and consumption, I think that we need to find the potentials in the infrastructures landed in Mallorca, in order to put them at least for better uses.

What alternative territorial developments can we undertake even working as well with the huge infrastructures that the mass tourism industry has built in Mallorca? Is there any potential in having a huge and extremely busy airport connecting with the whole of Europe? And what about the vast touristic urban ghettos?
The shift from an almost self-sufficient economy and society to a dramatically dependent one, has been achieved in a very few decades.

Even when we can never talk about 100% autonomy throughout all the history of the island, there was always a certain balance between the capacity of its own natural resources and the technologies of extraction and circulation of those resources and their derived goods.

But today Mallorca is importing more than 90% of the resources we need to sustain our economical activities. Even basic goods such as water have had to be brought by ships from the peninsula!

We are even importing rubbish from Europe to make money out of burning it. And who knows where most of the
food we are consuming comes from and what external unevenness by doing that we are irresponsibly sustaining. Because what it is clear is that from the 75% of our territory, which is considered to be fertile, and indeed it has always been, we are doing nothing.

Nothing but letting it dry, cut off from the so wisely developed infrastructures (as irrigation systems for example) that made it function as a productive territory, and keep speculating with urban sprawl mainly for second home residences and vocational houses.

When the urban footprint has grown 500% in the last 50 years, almost all urbanizable seafront been built so fast that its qualities and life conditions are quite questionable, now we turn again the back to the lands that should sustain our inhabitation, the rural Mallorca.

In the sudden rush now to “embellish” our territory, some of the remaining natural - which are in fact completely cultural - landscapes are getting all the protection and economical resources to promote them as branded leisure areas leaving the rural productive landscapes with less resources if that is still possible.

But again, I think that putting facts on the table is not enough, but that we really need to collectively engage in practices that in one way or another, on top questioning and challenging the actual state of affairs trigger a redevelopment of more responsible and durable ways of producing an anthropized island, in which different ways of being can could coexist.
“There is an important sense in which any politics of ordinary moments is bound to transgress these disciplinary boundaries since it involves so many different elements of discipline and indiscipline, imagination and narrative, sense and nonsense... But each of these disciplines can be bent towards my overall goal: to produce a politics of opening the event to more, more; more action, more imagination, more light, more fun, even. This is not, I should hasten to add, meant to be a romantic or quixotic quest. It is meant to be in-your-face politics. Currently, many people are forced to live their lives in cramped worlds which offer them little or no imaginative relief because of the crushing weight of economic circumstance, the narrow margins of what they are allowed to think by what they have been taught and what lies bleeding around them and the consequently almost routine harrowing of their confidence that the world can ever be for them.

(Nigel Thrift 2008)
While acknowledging that the actual state of affairs is far from being just and healthy might be a first step to take, Situated Collective Utopias endures engaging in practical and critical transformations of present situations. If alternatives for a better future - common to all of us - are not already out there, we will have to make them ourselves. Therefore the launchpad aims of this thesis are to stubbornly contribute to the collective dynamics of hunting for new ways of coexistence.

Since utopian attitudes are immediately discredited while we live in a huge neoliberal utopia, this performative research enacts radical hopes for opening up new possibilities along practical engagements with the materials around us. Utopia here is not conceived and enacted as a point to reach but as many alternative ways to make, and utopics as an impetus for growing practiced heritages as free flowing shared materials to keep performing new ways of being in this world.

And in recognizing that knowledge is not value neutral because of the implications of the places and ways to produce and mobilize it, this thesis holds that being bodily and affectively close to the sites we make and transform (therefore becoming part of them) is not only the only option we have to afford situated freedoms but also the only way to develop generous and caring ethical engagements with the Others.
“They will not be hurried but go at their own pace. They live in hope, not under the illusion of certainty. Their paths may go this way or that, unpredictably. They find the grain of things and follow it, and in so doing find themselves.”

(Tim Ingold 2013)
As skilled spatial practitioners that we aim to become or already are, my contend is that we need to urgently overcome the hopelessness about the lack of alternatives. Alternatives to the territorial model that we have, to the competitive economical religion in which we are immersed, or to the bureaucratization of all professions and the knowledge production systems.

We need to start developing renewed practices which fully engage in improving responsibly the most of the conditions under which we live and relate to the others.

And I think that a basic ingredient for that enterprise as spatial practitioners is to challenge the supposedly autonomy of our practice and engage in transformations that put it into question while they improve the living conditions of the ones who are affected by them.

Therefore, where should we start our task to engage carefully and meaningfully within these territories?

I have the intuition that starting from “our own backyards”, transforming the places we have closer to us and where our actions can have stronger effects is a helpful way to get started and grow an alternative practice which increases the quality of the places it intervenes and supports the generation of new heritages. A heritage of places, people, materials, discourses, events... which I understand as a kind of “meshwork” that consists of the traces left by...
“An anarchic non-acceptance of the state of the situation emerges from a caring generosity that opens up the subject’s self to the situation, making her responsible again.”

(Alberto Altés 2013)
When I am encountering so many “either/or” discourses on the appropriateness of rural lives, I wonder how I might rework my relations within rural contexts not only discursively but also as a spatial practitioner.

What can we learn from rural practices and its territories? Is there still something more than the hope to use them productively as they have traditionally served our societies? When the whole world -information, social relations, etc.- seem to be at the reach of our fingertips, is there a potential subversive practices that can occur in those apparently disconnected places?

Maybe it has to do both with the close corporeal relation with the land that sustains us and with a kind of “intimate resistance” which challenges the extreme exposure that we are faced with nowadays.

The almost anti-architectural ways of rural practices combined with children-like ways of changing creatively the rules of performing the territories they play through, offer a powerful thread to follow and transform the site I happen to inhabit through an interventional engagement.
While getting started with this intervention, a kid’s hut for my younger brother, I rediscovered why I decided very early - when I was around 10 years old as he is now - that I wanted to do architecture. I was completely passionate about making huts on the top of the trees and everywhere I happened to be playing outside with my friends.

The idea of having an intimate self-constructed space where to develop our kid’s spies-like club, where what kept myself and several of my friends busy all weekends for many years, and indeed we made a lot!

So, when moving to Mallorca and facing the difficulties of engaging in intervening directly in any huge abandoned possessió to explore their rural potentials, I very soon realized that a source of inspiration and a more accessible site for transformation might be the countryside property that my parents moved to - and me with them - when I still was a child. An in fact, it was built on top of a few remaining elements of an old possessió which was disassembled by my grand grandfather in order to bring the materials to the village and build several houses after the civil war.

So, even when now is not inhabited permanently, a huge and very carefully worked ecology of animals and plants are been taken care everyday by my parents after their working time is over. Then I decided to go back there and inhabit during the thesis period that site again.

And while having to take care of the animals and plants again, and redevelop through a close relation and learning pro-
cess with my father. I started figuring out a way to transform the place. As I was doing day by day all the ritual practices to take care of the place I was reading Tim Ingold’s making. I started reflecting as I was moving again and again doing almost the same things.

In a way, I do believe that there is a dimension in rural practices that challenges the very core of our modern profession as architects. And that is mainly about performance and a different understanding about how things come into life and grow.

The stubborn perseverance of rural practitioners on understanding and working with things not based on what they are but on way they do or better, what can they do, puts in crisis the most sensible fiber I can have as an architect.
call it aesthetics.

To let an old pan become a water deposit for the animals to drink, or turning a wheelbarrow into a barbecue are a few examples among thousands that perseverant rural activities do and without consciously wanting, dismantle any strong discourse of the typical in architecture.

The patient care for turning even a small piece of land into a highly productive space, which is even more difficult in Mallorca given the scarcity of rainfalls, is truly admirable. It makes me wonder again about a certain “ethics of craftsmanship”.

So, letting the days and my rituals through those lands pass by and grow skilled again and simultaneously to the development of the other interventions, I happened to find some waste wooden boards in a warehouse where I am storing materials for the apartment renovation. I immediately sensed the opportunity to start making a new hut for my brother, since the last one was a kind of bird’s nest at 6 meters high on a tree, and he was only 5 years old, so it’s clear that it didn’t work out very well.

I moved all those boards with my car to the lands and started playing with him trying to find out a suitable place for what it could become his new hut, the headquarters of his future kid’s club. We measured stone walls with our bodies, we tested heights jumping and climbing, we experimented the so helpful in summertime shadows under the pine trees and finally decided that it was going to be “flying” above the stone wall dividing
the “big parcel” and the “land of the pine trees”.

It would also be so that is close enough to the “safareig”, the elevated water deposit which serves as swimming pool as well as water container for irrigating by gravity, and in wintertime, as an improvised water pond for the anarchical ducks to enjoy it.

But according to Andresito, it should really be “flying”; otherwise it would not be wild enough. Actually, at the beginning he wanted it on a tree, but our trees are not tall and strong enough so to incorporate a decent hut.

We measured the site, we drew some sketches and we tested a model. And as soon as we got the basic idea about how it could work, I got cheap and small wooden profiles since I don’t have the logistics to transport and work with big elements, and we started assembling the walls. He handles me the screws and I put them in place. The walls had to be done each one in two parts.

I must admit that at the beginning our parents were quite skeptical about our enterprise and thought aloud that we were too much utopists.

Nevertheless, we endured, and when the walls were assembled they were so heavy that to put them in place was impossible only being two. Here I obviously mean my father and me. We tried it but when we had the first one almost in place it fell so that my father got a bit hurt in the shoulder and told me that or I was managing to engage some friends in helping us or he was not participating.
anymore.

So for the next weekend, my brother and me managed to convince three of our cousins to join us for a day and three of my colleagues as well. They were the same ones that came recently to have a pic-nic at the place and had seen already the first steps of our subversive plan.

That was amazing fun. As they arrived and saw the walls and the site where to put them, they were very close to run away, but as soon as we started moving them and managing to get it done, it turned to a very motivating and funny task. They all have kept in touch, asking for more and more pictures for the development and awaiting for the official inauguration. Sometimes I wonder who are the kids in this collective utopia and I think that indeed we all are and should endure being so. I think that in parallel to the making of a kid’s hut we could also be at the beginnings of a very playful team of rural devices builders.

So the next days we managed to work on that, as part form the spontaneous but very helpful collaboration of our other brother, we have had to push it ourselves. We bought a few plywood boards and extra profiles and I reused waste profiles from another intervention - the apartment renovation - to leave it almost complete, although it is never intended to be complete and always afford being reworked.

So, even when still waiting for the inauguration event to happen very soon and to follow its performance and what it will afford the kids to do with it, I think that it has been a very productive hands to work process.

It allows me to rehearse an attitude of not only sharing the process of making spatial interventions, but also of sharing the hopes and dreams that grow along with the making of and performance of the thing. It’s hard to give up your aesthetical goals and care more for the people and their relations that are reworked through such a collective engagement,
UNDISCIPLINARY DISCOURSES

Taking the opportunity to engage in another “small” architectural intervention, I try to position myself testing the tensions between the socially consensed role of the architect and the one I hope to develop even when through a lets say traditional commission, to retrofit an old town apartment for a young adult.

Even when the design of the spatial qualities is one amongst the most important things I wish that I am doing, to develop a deeper understanding about the processes, materials, people and skills involved in the realization of the construction is another of my main goals. Going to test all material providers, moving things up and down, and very important, learning with and from those who are also making the construction happen, suddenly displaces my apparent position as an architect and even trigger certain worries and non-acceptances of the people around me, and I try to work that out by telling them my stories and motivations.

Is there still a chance to reconfigure, even to a minimum but meaningful degree what is thought to be an architect’s way of doing things? Am I really improving my skills as an engaged spatial practitioner or am I wasting time taking positions which others are more qualified and accepted to take?

Is there still a value and consequence of an architect’s direct engagement with the “material flows an currents of sensory awareness” that make things happen? Or, should we keep being caged in our offices designing and not taking part in the realization of the designs we make?
This architectural intervention is “commissioned” by another of my brothers. This time by Perico, who is a 22 years old young adult in the process of becoming self-sufficient.

He wanted to move to a 43 squared meters apartment in the old town of Palma, and which happened to be in quite a bad state.

We balanced two options: to do nothing and wait for a better moment to retrofit it, or to really go for it. And since the electrical and the water services had to be changed anyway as well as several other things, we decided that it was better then to check all potential improvements that could or should be done.

The apartment is located in an area that is getting now very busy with quite
a lot of young people and as it is on a third floor without a lift and with a very steep staircase, we thought that it could hardly someday suit old people. And considering the limited area it has, that it should also hardly be a good place for a family, so that we could fully work it out for a single person or a couple the most.

For that purpose, the actual arrangement of the space was really not optimal. It had 5 rooms, one quite big and completely dark because of not having any windows, and several other not very functional or qualified spaces.

So the main design challenges were to open the space the maximum to allow the most light in, considering the huge amount of windows and nice views it already had, and to try making the minimum quantity of spaces and divisions.
So, from the very first sketches, it came that in order to let the tiny space “breath”, we should go for demolishing all division walls, and only making a plywood wall-box containing the kitchen, bathroom and bedroom, so to leave the rest of the space completely free.

That decision was taken as well to integrate all installations in one place, given some existing conditions quite difficult to be changed. Some are the position of the dirty water vertical connector that happens to be outside the back façade, or the scarce thicknesses of the walls dividing the apartment with the neighbors.

Both the kitchen and the bedroom were not really going to be rooms but openable small spaces, which could be closed when one will have guests and open mainly only when about to be used.
one. They are 5 mm. “marès” walls, the main local stone that is very sandy and weak so to accommodate installations.

Said that, the most interesting part of the intervention has been the process of actually making it. I knew from the beginning that I couldn’t miss the change to explore myself several things about its making of and just handle the design and let it get realized by any company.

At the beginning, nobody was comfortable with the idea that I didn’t want it to let it go to a professional builder and I had to ask for a budget to a construction company. So that when I saw the budget I couldn’t believe it. It was so expensive, everything was budgeted around 3 times over the price you could get it in any shop or provider, so I took the risk to stress the issue and convince my brother that I was going to fully take care of its realization, even cutting wood with my own tools.

First I learnt how to go through some legislations and get the license to do it. And then I had to find the right people which has not been easy at all considering the sudden frenzy for retrofitting building in the old town given the new expectations that the crisis is about to be over.

But through a friend, who is also an architect I got in contact with Alberto and Toni, two very expert builders who could get some time to do it and who happened to like a lot the design.

Quite an event was the first day, when we arrived at 8 in the morning to start demolishing the apartment and when
I was going through the stairs I found the neighbors that live right underneath the apartment. It looked weird because being that early dozens of young people were entering the apartment. So I asked if I could talk to the owner but he was not there. I explained them that we were about to start a small construction but that the noise would probably be for only a couple of days during the demolition. They couldn’t believe it, they were about to start recording a short movie in that apartment for two days.

I told them that I was very sorry and worried, so that as we couldn’t postpone our task at least we could offer to get synchronized so that when they were recording we would stop.

That morning I had to leave, but when I came back after lunch, Alberto and Toni told me that not only there had not been any problem but that they have had lunch together. And for the next hours they came up to ask if we could lend them a small staircase, a door...

Whenever they have time, the neighbor underneath and her girlfriend are coming to check the site and they love it to. We are together starting to plan how to make something at the collective terrace at the rooftop.

We did all the demolition in one week. Even if it is a small space, the difficulties of bringing the bags filled with waste material, 600, down to the streets was quite a job. And given as well that in that street we couldn’t even park the car nor let the bags ready to come the municipal company to get them was another difficulty.
Happily I figured out a place very close to the construction site where to store them quickly. An old warehouse completely abandoned at my grandmother’s house. So there I have been storing all sort of materials that went in and out of the apartment.

And since the price for sending every small waste bag is scandalous in Mallorca, another architect told me that he would be extremely happy, since they were mainly filled with stones, if I could drop them in his forest were he is reshaping some parts.

Then he, Olivier, lent me his track to do that job and I took the chance as well to go and get some plywood and profiles for the countryside’s hut. And when I had filled the track with tons of materials, I tried to go out from the patio and got collapsed in the very narrow street. Suddenly I couldn’t go forwards nor backwards and a huge amount of touristic horse cars and people were putting pressure on my to solve the situation.

That was a really stressful moment but after one hour I managed to unlock the track from the car and push it in the patio again.

We finally made it to unload the things at their intended destinations, and by chance Olivier insisted on showing me a small construction that he was right at that moment doing at his place. And there I meet again Mahmood, a Syrian carpenter that I meet some years ago while taking part in some adventures with trying to transport and put in place a 15 m. long wooden beam at a monastery in the mountains.

Since I was really looking for a carpenter he told me that he would love to help me with my construction, so we agreed on meeting the next day at his place to talk about it.

We went to his terrace, his kids were playing around and we got a very nice Syrian brunch cooked by his wife. We talked about the designs I had done and about many other things. He is a very experienced carpenter, also a boats builder.

We made the deal that first he was going to make the windows we needed for the apartment while he would keep finishing some works he was busy with, and then we would start with our enterprise. I must get all the material and prepare all things to get started soon.

For that, I had to visit all wood providers I could find in Mallorca until I found the main one, Cisma. I also went to buy other things such as the wooden floor, the tiles for the bathroom and many others.

Before starting I broke down and got sick for two weeks, so my stress during the coming weeks grew quite a lot. I pre-ordered the plywood walls but when I went to get them, they made a mistake and didn’t have the thicknesses I ordered, so I had to improvise getting other ones, and at least I got an amazing reduced price which I am still getting now every time that I go to provide myself with more.

And since the apartment is very close to the area where many of my friends live or the bars we usually meet at, several of them have come to see its development. In particular, Rafa, a very active I.T. engineer has been talking very well about my project at some bar meetings we are having, and several start-up people are getting very interested in finding a nice place to retrofit and move together to co-work. I wish that moves on.

Then, all the work during the last weeks together with Mahmood and his assistant Ali has been an amazing experience so far. He has so much experience that I think it is great to get to know all those techniques and tips on site, even if I know that I am not intended to become a better carpenter than the professionals. But I still do believe that my designs can improve by learning first hand from experienced practitioners how they are realized. The timing, the logistics, the techniques involved, the material qualities and properties, etc.

And even when I am still waiting for the final results to come in a week, and when it is a pity not to have been able to be there for the last details, it has afforded me to get to know quite a lot how architectural designs come into being and in a specific place as Palma. It has made me grow as an architect I believe further more than my 3 years experience at an international office or lots of design studios made during my first studies in Barcelona.

And I think as well that it has allowed me to test and feel the position I want to take as an architect, even when not very well considered. So I hope that this is a humble starting of an engaged spatial practice that will try to make its own position and maybe help reconfiguring to a certain degree what is or can be to architect.
I took the challenge as well to collaborate in a collective workshop at the contemporary art museum of Palma de Mallorca, which was called “Critical interventions in contemporary art spaces”, in an attempt not only to try engaging with an art institution and test how it works in Mallorca, but also as a chance to meet other architects who might share some concerns or have some affinities with me.

And indeed, apart from all the restrictions we got from the institution, we managed to build very fast a quite nice space for their pedagogical workshops with children, and it afforded me to meet several young practitioners, which some of them are interested in further collaborating in the making of more interventions at Can Gazà’s community for example.

A tense moment when faced with all those conditions they were imposing suddenly on us made the team collectively balance several ways to take, and at the end we decided that the best for all would be to keep working the intervention the best we could even if those were not the initial conditions under the ones we had initially engaged in the workshop.

Is it possible to turn a priori restrictive conditions into new potentials? And how critical can we or our interventions keep being when we have to accept and respect so many limits?
As soon as I got to know that there was the chance of participating in this workshop led by Andrés Jaqué and Nerea Calvillo and happening at the contemporary art museum in Palma, I applied to.

It was said to be about designing and building collaboratively a new pedagogical space for that institution. And it was very clear in the title of the workshop that it was going to be critical. Two theoretical sessions and a week to intervene.

At the end, the two theoretical sessions were only a public lecture given by the coordinators and a short meeting to let the participants know, that over the coming two months we were about to receive several tasks to research about the institution and their building functioning.
I admit that I was quite furious about it considering the scarce amount of time that I already had but I managed to go through those assignments. They were mainly about mapping control dispositifs and the nomadic use of furniture and spaces. Then about finding out where to get the materials that they sent us in a list and making a budget.

So the day the workshop started I was quite skeptical about both the collaborative and the critical aspects of the workshop. 12 young architects were about to start building a design we didn’t know anything about it.

But later we saw that actually the coordinators had got into so many problems with the institution that was not allowing them to do what they had been initially hired to do, that even they didn’t have a very precise idea about what and how to build it.

As we got started, we started turning lots of elements that had been brought and creative collaboration and nice engagement from the most of the participants started turning the improvised intervention into a very productive and fun process.

Happily, my maker skills developed through the time spent at the Liai were very appreciated I hope from all the team as we managed to built a very long wooden beam from small profiles, or build a transportable container device with wood as well.

But the main thing was putting together 2 white tend and suspending them...
with a lot of cable work. During all that process we were gradually updated by the coordinators, always after working time when we were going every evening to have some drinks together, about what were all those restrictions and how they were trying nevertheless to get the work done.

It seemed that we should have had more freedom to redefine what could be a pedagogical space and even its location. It could have been more interesting to experiment with some nomadic devices that could expand the museum itself and colonize other spaces. But the institution didn’t want it since they are making a lot of money from renting the big terraces to a luxurious bar or for some other events.

Nevertheless, again the best was to work with all those young practitioners, and to share conversations and concerns.

Juana Canet, after getting very interested in my master’s thesis and the engagement had with Can Gazà’s community, invited me to attend to the weekly meeting-dinner of the G.O.A. They are an “opinion group” of experienced architects which are very critical about the territorial model of Mallorca. They meet at the same restaurant every Monday since 13 years ago, to put in common their individual concerns, translate them into articles and share them through publishing them on a local newspaper.

Even if now I am attending every Monday and very happy to be invited, I am starting to think that we also need an “action group”. Again, excavating reality is not enough. We need to change it!
What it is about to almost neglect the supposed position in relation to the collective building of things that we architects have or are supposed to? What is it about to endure letting it go through the process of its making and leave more space for others to take care about it and finish it or keep completing it as they feel like?

In trying to build a division wall from scraps, starting dreaming about making a wonderful intervention and after having build half of it, I had to face a decision regarding the non appropriateness that some of my colleagues were making me feel. Nevertheless I think sometimes is healthy to get a bit loose, and let the others take the lead in such processes.

Meanwhile, I’ll keep dreaming about that device and following any chance to get it done.
After the eviction of Can Gazà’s community (a socially excluded people’s community) from the “sa Casa LLarga” where they had their workshops and shops, we started the conditioning of their new space. It was a 1500 squared meters warehouse that had to be cleaned and given a lot of small repairs. When we had it in a decent condition, we started moving all the machines, tools and materials to organize again some workshops.

They consist mainly of furniture repairing workshop and a metal working one. But the coordinator, Emili, told me that they do not get on very well some times so that it was better to make some divisions in the space we had for the workshops. I thought that it was a pity to limit so much the possibilities of the space, but didn’t want to go to far and start being annoying. They entitled me with the responsibility to get it done and as soon as I received the materials for it, some huge pallets, I thought that I could build a moveable device. It could be just about adding some wills and making the wall very thick which could as well serve as a storage space.

In my mind, it was silently going to become a device that could move and afford other quite playful uses, as be a big screen were to project films and the like.

But when we (because I didn’t build it alone) had it close to be finished, and the idea of it being moveable had to be clearly stated, I immediately got the feeling that it didn’t like to many of my partners, so I let them fix it with screws to the existing pillars.
I am pretty sure that soon I will have some time to go back now that we won’t be in a rush to get the space ready for the opening event, and I will be able to try it or make a new one with the scraps I kept from other interventions.

The idea of turning an industrial warehouse into something more than a functional working space is rummaging through my mind all the time. And to be a bit realistic given the lack and need of resources of my friends, I think that it could be easily achieved with smaller nomadic devices. Devices which can be activated at specific moments and change temporarily the possibilities of that space.

And I am also wondering if we could not start changing the whole industrial area or even going out with those nomadic devices, working in different activities, by enrolling in different activities the people working there. How could it be if one day a week there was a moveable kitchen colonizing an outdoors space and being worked by the amazing cooks from Can Ga2?

Could that contribute reconfiguring that industrial area so needed of co-presence possibilities? Indeed, are not Can Ga2’s members already amazing experts in reshaping the environments they happen to inhabit? I think that even when they have improved in functionality, they have lost a bit the better conditions for relating to the exterior that they had at “la Casa Larga”. So, I think that going out to explore the potential relations that we can promote outside the boundaries of the warehouse might be a small but meaningful situated collective utopia.
“Given that enduring is the condition of possibility for every afterward action, it doesn’t look weird that it constitutes the most important part. Strenght is, among everything, the virtue of who endures. Occurs, furthermore, that even when the action can be seen as something punctual, the resistance of strenght is almost always something wich calls for perseverance, sustained effort.”

(J.M. Esquirol 2015)
According to what David Harvey says, “where and who we learn it from and how we learn it overrides the contemporary postmodern fascination with where we see it from as the basis for intellectual engagements”, I decided that I wanted to explore an already ongoing collective utopia, not to just draw from my dreams. And moreover, I think that caring and trying to actively support the improvement of living conditions of the weaker collectives by first of learning not about them but with and from them is an inclination that all utopias should have. Not to keep promoting and realizing visions of more exclusive segregating futures but to the contrary more inclusive and less violent ones.

And I believe that we as architects, can learn a lot from a careful engagement with those communities that have less resources and help rendering visible the problems while we keep on making efforts to make shift the situation.

But maybe in order to undertake such endeavors, we will need to go out of our social normal positions, displace ourselves putting us in not such comfortable ones, and develop other methodologies of learning in such situations and intervening more carefully.

When faced with such situations where apparently not only there is no need for an architect but we feel that its own presence can be irritating, should we stop calling ourselves architects and just become citizens, neighbors, friends, etc. or are there still some skilled practices learnt through different methodologies can still be useful?
FRAGILITY / AFFINITY

Stories of engaging and learning from within Can Gazà´s community

/// PERFORMING SITUATED COLLECTIVE UTOPIAS ///

During my preliminary research about the abandoned possessions in Mallorca but aiming to find out the most close to a radical sharing community living in one of them so that I could directly engage with an already existing form of different collective way of inhabiting them, I happened to find out about Can Gazà´s community.

The challenge to engage with them and learn from their ways of living and their hopes was right from the beginning the main situation that I wanted to explore. But the “distant” respect to them that I grew while reading about them before going to Mallorca, made me a bit afraid that I might not be able to engage and “do” something together with them and I thought about other interventions and explorations keeping in mind that at least I wanted to get to know them and check the possibilities of having any change to develop some affinities with them.

At the end, even when I am in the middle of that engagement, it has turned out to be an amazing site where to learn about other ways of doing things together, and precisely from the people with less resources in Mallorca. Their humble capacity to transform meaningfully the places they inhabit is incredibly powerful, even if extremely fragile as well. What can we learn from Can Gazà? Are they not the most similar practitioners to the too often forgotten “roters” in Mallorca?

The discourses that arise from their radical sharing lives, and which are given a voice through the translation done by Jaume Santandreu, their “father”, are extremely powerful yet again humble and fragile. But indeed they put into question the whole social and economical model we live in only by their presence.
While I don’t want to get too transcendental with the stories of my careful engagements with Can Gazá’s community, I feel like admitting that it has and continue to being as long as it lasts, one of the most impressive things I have ever been involved with.

Such a time and efforts demanding engagement might be one of the most determining reasons why I haven’t been able to develop my thesis as scheduled and document it as I think it deserves. But nevertheless, I will try to at least tell the stories of my practical engagements with learning from and with them while actively supporting the improvement of their living conditions that I hope to have made even a small contribution to it.

My relation with them began with acknowledging their existence through researching on local newspaper archives in order to find out what had happened during the last years with one of the illegal settlements that is in the periphery of Palma de Mallorca. And what I came across is that in one of the various evictions happened there, some of the evicted people went to ask for help at Can Gazá, a self-financed association for supporting socially excluded people without any resources.

I started reading that they were living (around 30 people) since 13 years ago in an old possessió outside but yet close to the city. They didn’t have any public economical support and they were living from their harvesting, animals and the collaboration of a whole network of friends.

The community, or better start calling
them family, is led by the charismatic and very polemical Jaume Santandreu. A very non-typical ex-priest that also happens to be an excellent and widely awarded writer. He is the “father” of the very “numerous” family, as they define themselves and the model of living together that they perform.

When I got to know that they had been a few years ago lent another nearby possessió where they had their furniture repairing workshops amongst other activities, I thought that we might have already an affinity for reusing and reworking things.

When I arrived to Mallorca, I first probably wrong, tried to get myself more ready to go and meet them and I bought the book, written by another member of the association, which is the only descriptive essay about the story of the marginal movement in Mallorca, about Jaume Santandreu and about Can Gazà as well. Happily, the bookshop owner and writer that is next to my home and to whom I went to order him the book, happened to be a very close friend of Jaume and we engaged in several long talks about it. He was very happy that I was interested in them and when I went to take the book as soon as he received it, he gave me as a present the one he translated from Catalan to Spanish from Jaume. It was his most famous essay, which describes and reflects about his childhood. And reading that I realized that I was facing all a master in rural practices and in making possessions work, since he grew up in one, in the times when they were still in full use.

But nevertheless, through reading “Marginalia”, I started getting introduced to a quite dense history of work with and for the poor and excluded communities in Mallorca.

Having grown up in the very old town in Palma, which was until quite recent times the most dangerous and undesired place to live in, I think it has already familiarized me a bit with the disasters that mainly heroine addiction created during the 80s and 90s. Our neighborhood was full of junkies and prostitutes until the municipality decided to develop the area and turn it progressively into a luxury residential and turistical area. But where did all these people go? A part from all the fallen ones, and even when the heroine addiction is not such a spread disease today, we know that a third of the population in Mallorca is under poverty conditions. But the have again made it clear and it seems as they do not exist as we are told to be living in a paradise and we should keep being thankful to the hotel lobby because they are the reason why we are supposedly so wealthy... but who? And those who are not?

Jaume Santandreu, after his south American adventures during the 60’s came back to Mallorca and knew that he was not going to fit very well into the church structures and models, to just start with because he is gay, and if one thing he really does, is never stop saying something because somebody might get scandalized.

So indeed, he spends several decades starting all sorts of institutions and associations for improving the conditions of poor or sick people. And during that process, he was always jumping out of his initiated associations when as he says, they start becoming too much institutionalized. So that, at the end, it always comes to the point that it is everything but the excluded person. They start centering their attention and resources on the professionals associated to those institutions; the development of working plans and protocols, etc. while the excluded person becomes further more excluded.

At last, around 13 years ago, and completely frustrated with all those institutions, together with some of the excluded people he was working with, they decided to move to Can Gazà, a property which was lent to him years ago by an old woman and for these assitencial purposes. So their Utopia of autonomy started even when acknowledging that they depend on a very fragile but careful contribution of a vast network of friends.

One of their main discourses is that the worst “chains” or enemy for the poor is charity. That kind of charity that gives but then forces you to shut your mouth and pushes you to stay a certain dis-
And what they strive for is to have a certain space for dignity and for slowly recovering that people without wanting to violently reintegrate them back into the society that has destroyed them so badly.

And what they look for is to support with a family structure their affectual confidence and help them start working according to their capacities so that when they sit on the table to eat, they can feel the satisfaction that they earned the warm meal with their work as any other person likes to.

Some of them are irreversibly affected and can hardly move out of their beds, but it is the duty of all others to assist them. Others have tasks according to their condition, as can be taking care of the vegetables garden, of the various animals, cleaning the house, or working at the workshops.

Meals and hygiene are probably the only strict activities that one has to take seriously and without failing.

When I was feeling ready to go and introduce myself to them, suddenly all the local press was releasing the news that they were about to squatter the “Casa Llarga”, the possessió that they had been lent for having their workshops since the owners didn’t want to renovate the contract and were asking them to leave the place in a couple of weeks. This communication was made through their lawyer and not directly as usual and they were being constantly rejected all their attempts to talk about it, even of asking for how much were they planning to sell it since they might be interested in
asking for funds to buy it.

Jaume Santandreu had summoned the press in order to spread the word and his /their discourse about the situation and let everybody know that they would declare the place as quartered territory and the he would chain himself to the gates until somebody would come to offer them any solution or help.

His take on the issue was that although it was a legal act, it was not fair at all because they had been improving the place, that truly was a ruin before they inhabited it, always with the owners acceptance and acknowledgement, and that suddenly they were been kicked out as dogs. He was “screaming aloud” because according to him, if the poor people lose its voice to denounce the wrongs inflicted to them, they can be
truly given for being already dead.

It was a confusing moment for me. I knew I needed to go there, even in such a difficult moment. So I went the on the next day, the day that he chained himself to the gates. And for my surprise, since I was expecting a huge turbulence of people there demonstrating against their eviction, a few hours after the official moment of chaining himself and reading to the press his manifesto, there were hardly there five or six people.

Since he was talking to somebody, I approached a man close to the doors of a huge greenhouse which served as the furniture shop, and asking him about what as going on he directed me to Emili, one of the few almost fulltime cooperants of Can Gazà which happened to be around.

Emili was as well very stressed and down with the situation. He had worked for years the place they were now so happy and proud about, but they were being kicked out in not very nice way, even when he had improved so much the place. Indeed they had spend 200.000 euros of a punctual fund they receive for that purpose in rehabbing a big part of the main building which was in an advanced ruining process.

As he was updating me, when Jaume finished talking and was free, Emili introduced me to him. I don’t remember telling him at any point that, but when he introduced me, with a quite spontaneous sense of humor he told Jaume that I was his fan wanting to get to know him. Jaume stared at me and scanned me up and down for quite a moment to then very
gently ask with amusement where from I was suddenly appearing. I explained him that I read those books about them and that I was feeling that I had a lot of affinity with them, and as just landed in Mallorca and gotten to know about the problem they were facing, that I wanted to go and get to know more about it and show a bit of support.

We talked for a while and he asked Emili to show me the whole place... the house, the workshops, the gardens, etc. saying that I would love how they had worked out.

And so we did, and so I started to go day after day to talk to them, to spend a bit of time there, getting to know form first hand what was actually going on since the press and the public opinion were, according to what I believed, only scratching the surface of such a delicate issue.

Basically the main opinion was that he should be thankful to such a generous family that lent for a couple of years that place, and leave without making any scandal or blaming anybody, so that other people could do the same generous act again.

But he was getting further more furious with those opinions because that exactly the point he was trying to make. That kind of charity was one of their bigger problems, because was rendering them completely defenseless. It was something like I give you this, but is mine, and whenever and with the manners I want I take it out form you again. And furthermore, you have to shut up and leave saying thanks and praying publical-
ly about my generosity.

So after more than a week he was chained until a politician came and offered them to help covering up part of the expenses they would need to rent another space next to Can Gazà and Sa Casa Llarga, since their logistics for moving to work do not afford a new location which wouldn't be at a walkable distance.

They found a cheap while huge (1,500 sqm) industrial warehouse in the nearby industrial area of Can Valero, and as soon as they arranged the renting of it, they started having a very cheerful attitude.

On one of those calmer days after the struggles, since I was visiting them everyday, he invited me to have lunch with them at Can Gazà for the next day. He told me that they would be glad to have me there with them and that I would enjoy meeting the place and the other members of the community.

Up to that date, I had only get to know Jaume, Emili and Ramon. Ramon is one of the two members that were more in charge of Sa Casa Llarga and that were indeed living there since a couple of years ago. He was having very hard times. He said had been feeling so well and caring so much for that place, and that now he was feeling that they had completely fooled them.

When I got to for the first time to Can Gazà, I brought some tomatoes from my own land. I got to know lots of people immediately but there was one that came to me very fast. Jacinto is very old grandfather, called “el maño” since he is from Zaragoza, and which started asking me lots of questions right from
the beginning before even start to have lunch. He suggested me that we should play chess together after lunch, and other mates started joking about that, saying that I wouldn’t beat him even if in the best of my dreams. And indeed, he has been several times champion of the islands so that is certainly impossible to get any chance. But through the many times that I have gone there to have lunch with them after working things out with them, or even during days that I couldn’t attend to have lunch, but nevertheless I was trying to join them/him for a couple of games at the coffee’s time.

And during those first days of getting to know them and establishing some bonds I kept making myself clear that I would love to give a hand in the several tasks that might be coming very soon with the moving all the workshops to the warehouse. I think I really never had the dream, or I buried very soon almost not to be aware of it, about becoming their architect, for organizing and designing the conditioning of the warehouse. And indeed it would have been such a failure because they all do love so much discussing and sketching how are they going to arrange the spaces that it would have been completely useless and pedant form my part. But burying that will to immediately become the architect of a community that I was starting to get to know and relate to helped me to keep focusing in learning from them, learning form within.

So after a one-day task of moving the archive not to the warehouse, but to a downstairs room in can Gazà’s house, we finally got the warehouse.

The cost was going to be around 3,500 euros per month and they would be receiving from the government hardly a bit more than a thousand, so a lot of constant help from the friends was and it still is going to be needed. At the end they do make a bit of money by fixing and selling second hand furniture or clothes, but surely not that much as to cover those expenses.

But of course, at he end, the important according to them is not if they make more or less money, but that the ones that are in better physical and emotional conditions can freely start recuperating their lost working habits.

Even if I had already been told about the dimensions of the warehouse when I first entered it was impressive. A huge warehouse of 20 by 50 meters and half of it with a second level. But the worst, for that money and that quantity of squared meters which they truly needed to host all their workshops and things, which they could only get one in really bad conditions. It had been closed for several years and just to start with the layer of dust was o several centimeters.

Without any panic, we started cleaning with two “karchers” and several brooms. We spend a whole week cleaning up the space, and that even if we were six or seven all the time. We had to make some wholes in strategic places to easily push the water outside.

And right afterwards, everybody there started doing its specialty. It happens that at the end, there are two quite experienced construction side workers, a metal worker, a welder, a carpenter, an upholsterer, etc., etc. and two amazingly engaged organizers, Emili and Miquel Àngel so that the amount of things have managed to do in very compressed time schedules and with very few resources are nevertheless amazing to me and to all of us.
Furthermore, in that process of sharing time, tasks and talks amongst other things with them I also do believe that I have learnt a lot. Starting with practical construction activities such as building a small concrete blocks wall, welding and working on a metal fences built up all from reused materials, giving a hand in painting the walls, building a wooden wall to divide some workshop spaces and contain storage spaces, and so on so forth.

For the inauguration, Jaume was planning for a certain period of time to do host a huge event, with music, food and more things, but at the end, it was a quite “calm” opening, and whether he is talking lately about them being very proud about moving to a proletarian set up where he says they actually belong, he got irritated again with the general comments made about them opening up a “shop”. He rather wants to conceive it and make it perform as a place for solidarity exchanges, or a space for “second hand utopias”, a pace where you might give second opportunities two artifacts, people or even reuse concepts such as “freedom, dignity or independence”.

At the entrance, “MARGINÀLIA, TALLER DE CAN GAZÀ, ON LLIBRES, VESTITS, MOBLES, VIDES, UTOPIES, CERQUEN L’OPORTUNITAT D’UNA SEGONA Mà”

“Marginlàlia. Can Gazà’s workshops, where books, clothes, furniture, lives, utopias, are looking forward for an opportunity for a second hand”
“only the service to the weaker people leads to peace and because it highlights what contemporary culture—without having digested yet very well the illustrated discourse about autonomy—has underestimated to soon: the mutual dependence. ”

(J.M. Esquirol 2015)
Bibliography


Choay, F. 2006. La Utopía y el estatuto antropológico del espacio edificado. Trad. por R. Hin capié from Pour une anthropologie de l’ espace Éditions du Seuil.


Van Toorn, R 2006. Aesthetics as a form of politics. Open n10.
Challenging the wide-spread hopelessness in relationship to our capacity to produce real alternatives to the abstract and egoistic neoliberal utopia – with its destructive and unfair consequences around the globe in general and specifically in Mallorca – this thesis, understood as performative research, focuses on the conception and development of Situated Collective Utopias.

These would be utopias that can grow generously and unfold not as abstract and consensed projections of futures but as extrusions of very contextual and often dissensual hopes. They are apparatuses to explore our collective abilities to practically, critically and ethically engage in and sustain the making and thinking of difference. A difference that is materialized and shared as a common heritage and that belongs to who cares and takes care of it.

This thesis report contains a theoretical reflection about the concepts of utopia and heritage as well as an ecology of interventions that make and transform their own sites and aim at developing skilled spatial practices that "think through making". The practical engagements in those particular situations afford an ongoing radical critique of their contexts and several "outside" moments of reflection.

At last, in the active pursuit of finding already present Situated Collective Utopias, this thesis also tells various stories of learning from within the radical sharing community of excluded people of Can Gazà, stories which tell about a process of being given through architecting.