Sensory Politics: Catalan Ritual and the New Immigration

by

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B.A. (New College of California) 1983

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

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Spring 2008
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Abstract

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This dissertation explores the productive linkages between ritual practice and the political status of religious and ethnic minorities in contemporary Spain. The ritual techniques studied are constitutive of a sense of local belonging in which sensory experience and thus aesthetic sensibilities are intertwined with ethical orientations, media representations, and institutional practices. The community constituted through these processes is termed a sensory public and its capacity to shape social change, sensory politics. The notion of a sensory public is used to highlight intersubjective experience in shared public space as an emergent site of host-immigrant relations that Catalans have conceptualized as convivència, or living together.

At the onset of the twenty-first century, the Catalan region of Spain became the site of one of the highest rates of immigration into Europe. These newcomers from North Africa, Latin American and Eastern Europe enter a distinct political environment. Catalonia experienced dramatic population inflows in the mid-twentieth century and was the target of cultural genocide during the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) including a ban of the Catalan language, flag and national anthem, as well as the execution, exile, and
imprisonment of political leaders. The return of democracy was accompanied by a resurgence of collective ritual practices such as those of Carnival, saints’ days and the performance of castells, or human towers, the latter now featuring widespread immigrant participation.

This dissertation challenges the long standing convention in anthropology that ritual primarily serves to circumscribe social interiors. A focus on the sensory aspects of ritual techniques demonstrates the permeability of ritual acts: showing that ritual can simultaneously secure and decenter a social body. Decentering is not dissolution but rather productive of a pluralist sense of unity that allows newcomers to gain access to a mutually acknowledged sense of local belonging. The aesthetic-ethical orientations produced through ritual carry beyond ceremonial contexts, tending to facilitate practices of solidarity and constructive engagement when conflicts occur. Sensory politics, or the interplay between aesthetic sensibilities and ethical social action, provides a nuanced account of social asymmetries in place of the binary of inclusion-exclusion that erases the intersubjectivity and specificity of lived social encounters.
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Chapter I: Sensory politics

European contexts

I arrived in the Catalan region of Spain with my family on October 27, 2005. That night, the evening news featured chaotic sounds and images of flames, smoke and gutted cars. It was the onset of rioting in Clichy-sous-Bois that was to spread throughout France for the following three weeks, precipitating a national state of emergency. The unrest was ignited by the accidental death of two youths, Zayed Benna and Bouna Traoré. Running from police, the teenagers hid in a power substation where they were electrocuted. Immigrant youth erupted in anger. The protestors declared that they could no longer accept racial profiling, poor housing, and high unemployment (Smith 2005). Although French investigators reported no evidence of the involvement of Islamic radicals in the riots (Sciolino 2005), the fact that many of the protestors were Muslim provided grist for the nativist blogosphere to contend that Islam is incompatible with democracy.

Across the Pyrenees in Catalonia, where immigration rates had soared more recently, the people I spoke to expressed their determination to create a different future for themselves. They expressed puzzled discomfort with the fact that many of the disaffected youth had been born in France, yet remained deeply alienated from French society. Fixing on French ghettos where immigrant communities remained isolated, many Catalans opined that it is better to live together to prevent the hardening of social boundaries such as those they perceived as characterizing life in France and elsewhere in Europe. I did not realize it at the time, but my research project could now be summarized
as an investigation of the practices and discourses of living together in shared public space.

As the European Union plans for the future, it anticipates increased global and regional migration. Beyond concerns with economic planning for population growth, the EU’s strategic focus for the future has come to include themes such as “social cohesion,” “social exclusion and poverty,” and “satisfaction with quality of life,” (Krieger 2004: v). Within the EU, national, regional and urban polities grapple with distinct situations of living with difference. These situations arise partly from their colonial histories, from economic exigencies, and from immigration and other social policies. Germany’s guest worker model supposed incorrectly that immigrant workers would return to their country of origin. The French model assumes a uniform cultural identity that makes no provisions to accommodate cultural practices that diverge from idealized French secular norms (Smith 2005). Rebuffing objections from some EU members, Spain unilaterally granted amnesty to over a million undocumented migrants in 2005 (BBC News 2005) and the municipal government of my field site, Vilanova i la Geltrú, relocated the threshold of migration from European or national borders to the bounds of the community with the construct of “local citizenship” (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2007b).

Often obscured beneath the geopolitical trends and policy debates is the lived experience of Europeans, native and foreign born, and the cultural resources they may draw upon to forge their own relations with one another. The theoretical arguments I make in this dissertation touch ground and derive their importance from these contexts: global migration; the management of difference by European, Spanish, and Catalan polities; and lived experience in a specific place, Vilanova i la Geltrú.
Sensory politics

This dissertation presents a sensuous anthropology of ritual practice in a Catalan town while also addressing the prospects for integration for recent immigrants to Catalonia. These two themes may not initially appear to have much to do with one another. Indeed, the relationship between them was not manifest to me until I had walked the footpaths of Vilanova i la Geltrú for nearly six months, after which the interrelations seemed to leap at me from every corner. I will make the case that ritual embodiment offers fresh insights into the phenomena pertaining to emergent multiethnic societies. If successful, I will have contributed innovations to both the anthropology of the senses and studies of globalization and migration, and opened new paths of inquiry for future research.

Although I found that many immigrants enthusiastically participated in the public rituals I studied, my argument is not that the most important aspect of these practices with regard to immigration is their capacity to provide an institutional mechanism of social incorporation. Seen in this way, it must be argued that schools, workplaces, the social networks of immigrants themselves, and language acquisition are more important vehicles of day-to-day incorporation. My argument is rather that the sensory orientations cultivated through ritual techniques are a central part of shared sensibilities directed towards a model of sociability and concomitant ethical values constructed by the community. It is this aesthetic-ethical stance that community members take towards each other that particularly interests me. This stance is constitutive of the communal practices encountered by immigrants in their new homes and contributes to the kinds of policies
and rhetorics endorsed by those whose community they seek to join. This stance then, is the ground of sensory politics.

I introduce the framework of *sensory politics* to establish a relationship between these registers of social phenomena, in dialogue with prior scholarship. The phrase “politics of the senses” was employed by David Howes (2003: xxii) to acknowledge that different societies privilege, suppress, or regulate different domains of sensory expression—for example vision, hearing, touch, smell, or the proprioceptive, or muscular sense of the body moving through space—and that the senses may carry competing claims (Classen 1999; Corbin 1986, 1998; Dundes 1980; Geurts 2002; Kanaana and Muhawi 2005). I also draw on the work of Charles Hirschkind to move the sensory in a political direction by seeing the array of the senses as a medium for ethical engagement (2006: 29). More specific to my geographic focus, Maria Jesús Buxó i Rey has written about the marked fluidity of identity in Catalonia, demonstrating that “local flavors, lights, and smells are important building blocks of cultural intimacy” that construct a sense of communal belonging to a place (Buxó i Rey 2001: 199).

My term, *sensory politics*, builds on these conceptions to articulate a patterned relationship between socially constructed sensory orientations with socially constructed ethical orientations, jointly entangled with power relationships and thus the sphere of political engagement. I further claim that the sensorium is used to articulate ethical-political orientations and serves as an experiential reservoir for the initiation and process of social change. It will be my task over the remaining pages to flesh out this framework and substantiate these claims with compelling ethnographic data, placed in an appropriate history and context and buttressed by a theoretical infrastructure. To this end I will show
how the rituals I describe work to define and maintain a specific sensorium through embodied practice and the explicit summoning of the senses. Following Richard Bauman, I will examine cultural performances as primary modes of discourse that are sensuous and performative rather than verbally explicit expressions of values or beliefs (Bauman 1992: 47). What is at stake in this distinction is that the politics of difference—race, ethnicity, citizenship—is often reduced to representation, recognition, or conscious strategy. Ritual in not only performance but a state of being in which aesthetic evaluations guide understandings of self and other. In attending to the sensuous, embodied dimensions of shared social space, I aim to resurrect subjugated knowledges of the self's sensory and affective states.

I will present the ways in which associations are forged between the sensory and the domain of the ethical through socially crafted sensibilities, echoing Howes' claim that ways of sensing are ethical (2003: 33). I will also demonstrate ways in which host-immigrant relations are constituted through sensory experience and sensibilities, and show how they are constantly reworked under the native rubric of convivência, or living together in common space, as an explicitly embodied sphere.

By deploying sensory politics as the overall rubric for diverse phenomena, I am drawing from a body of work on the anthropology of the senses to which I will make reference throughout this dissertation. I also locate my work in relation to that of two twentieth century philosophers of social life: Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault. Like them, I am addressing the processes of the social education of the embodied senses and of the fashioning and positioning of the self. I will draw on their work at various points to elucidate these processes but I have taken a different tack and arrived at different
Figure 1. "Do you hear it? Broaden your sensory life: Become a volunteer." This poster from the Catalan Federation of Social Volunteerism displayed in Vilanova's public library links sensory experience to ethical engagement.

conclusions. To begin with, Foucault's data is archival, Bourdieu's is the sociological survey (excepting his early fieldwork (Bourdieu 1966)), while mine is ethnographic, based on participant observation. As different ways of knowing, each of these methods produce distinct and possibly divergent narratives.

The focus of Foucault's work in this regard was to clarify how the education of desire could be mobilized in a complex web of social control, the capillary form of power he called governmentality (Foucault 2003a). Bourdieu's achievement was to conceptualize embodied dispositions through his notion of the habitus (Bourdieu 1977, 1990), and in a
specific case, to theorize the relation between education and taste (or discernment) in the maintenance of class structures (Bourdieu 1984). Without contesting the conclusions each drew from his data, my data—as it unfolded over the course of ten months residence in a specific place—did not neatly map onto their frameworks.

Bourdieu’s model includes a theory of change, but his examples typically emphasized durable, habitual, unreflexive processes of social reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). As Saba Mahmood has pointed out, Bourdieu’s habitus is learned, but he does not direct attention to the processes by which it is learned nor to the possible role of intention regarding its acquisition (Mahmood 2001: 838). Foucault said that “power comes from below” (Foucault 1990: 94), that it is not the exclusive province of institutions, and that multiple points of resistance are present through power networks (op. cit.: 95-6). His conception seems to open the door to an account of phenomena such as I will describe: subgroup agency and creativity, disjunctures between policy and practice, and of the bottom-up emergence of new social configurations.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s investigation of openness, dialogue and multiplicity through the embodied techniques of Carnival (Bakhtin 1984) proved to be a productive model for making sense of the specific forms of resistance, creativity, social change, and sensory play that I witnessed in Vilanova i la Geltrú. Chapter three is largely dedicated to exploring, via Bakhtin, how the ritual acts of Vilanovin Carnival serve to establish a primary medium of aesthetic and ethical orientation for its participants.

In order to provide a satisfactory context of the social elasticity I witnessed, I also looked at the broader history of the region of Catalonia in chapter two. I introduce an analysis of political positioning for which I use the term *decentering*, as a deconstruction
of majority-minority paradigms. In my deployment of the term, I encompass dynamics of 
Catalan history, self-reflection and a tendency towards egalitarian pluralism bound up 
with the Catalan notion of convivència, further developed in chapter six. I found that 
decentering as discourse, has a corollary in the embodied ritual techniques recounted in 
chapters three, four, and five, that—among other effects—work to decenter the 
individual, to produce states of individual indeterminancy that facilitate the acquisition of 
sensory aptitudes and social sensibilities. Here I am clearly drawing on Victor Turner’s 
concept of the liminal ritual state, communitas (Turner 1974). But the communitas I 
witnessed and participated in was not a generic openness to any new capacities, nor a 
Durkheimian rubber stamp mechanism (Taussig 1992: 152) but a process of alignment 
toward the sensibilities of a particular community actively negotiating agendas situated in 
local and regional history.

Perhaps the greatest divergence between my research and that of Foucault and 
Bourdieu is that, while they concentrated on the workings of everyday or institutional 
practices, I have been most concerned with the exceptional ritual practices of the Catalan 
faixa (collective ritual practices). In looking to these practices I am following not only 
Bakhtin but the work of two ethnographers of Iberian ritual, Stanley Brandes and 
Dorothy Noyes. Brandes and Noyes introduced me to the world of Catalan faixa and its 
cognates, but also taught me to look for the articulations between seemingly quaint 
traditional practices and the fields of power, social positioning and change (Brandes 
1988, 1991, 2006; Noyes 2003). While my focus on the senses is a departure from 
Brandes’ work, my difference with Noyes, who also focused on embodied experience, is 
rather one of our different conclusions. In her study of the ritual cycle known as the
Patum in the Catalan town of Berga, to which my own work is greatly indebted, Noyes found evidence of a process of the consolidation of the social body. In contrast, I found evidence that extremely similar techniques were deployed in the town of Vilanova i la Geltrú to decenter the social body and make it permeable, at least in part to facilitate the integration of newcomers.

One of the contributions of this dissertation is to unsettle conventional anthropological understandings of ritual. Within anthropology, ritual practices are generally understood to sustain and deepen social boundaries. In the case of Catalonia, ritual practices might be supposed to affirm the perceived distinctiveness of Catalans against other Spaniards and serve to exclude immigrants from participating in the production of a sense of local belonging. I found that ritual techniques do intensify a sense of social interior but at the same time, produce apertures in social boundaries, rendering them permeable. In Vilanova, the permeability produced by ritual was evident in the ways that exclusions based on class, gender, mother tongue, and regional origin had been breached, in part through the instrument of ritual practice over the preceding four decades. During my stay, I witnessed the ways in which ritual crews (colles)—social bodies characterized by intense sensory and affective attachments—were making space for new immigrants to the community.

Arnold Van Gennep’s seminal theory of the rites of passage, explicitly accounts for the incorporation of individuals into a social body to which they were previously exterior. According to his model, all rites of incorporation must have some point of aperture, which he conceptualized as the liminal or threshold state (1960). In some milieus, the aperture could be tightly controlled, re-enforcing exclusion and hierarchy. In other sites,
the aperture could be generalized and linked to an ethic of openness and inclusion, carrying a concomitant aversion to isolation and hierarchy, such as I found in Vilanova. Because rites of passage are so clearly about changes in status—and thus are processes of social mobility, however circumscribed—it is odd that anthropologists have tended to pay so much more attention to the consolidation than to the dissolution of boundaries by ritual.

This prejudice is foundational and closely aligned with the intellectual orientations of Cartesian tradition (cf. Mahmood 2001: 846). Emile Durkheim, who significantly framed the development of theories of ritual, asserted that ritual produces of a state of communion in order “to strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member” (1915: 258). Durkheim placed powerful affective and sensory experience at the center of ritual technique—introducing such terms as “collective effervescence” and “psychical exaltation.” In spite of this, and following a Cartesian model of consciousness, Durkheim cordoned off the sensory and affective as illusory forms of consciousness obscuring the real: “In a sense, our representation of the external world is undoubtedly a mere fabric of hallucinations, for the odours, tastes and colours that we put into bodies are not really there, or at least, they are not as we perceive them” (op. cit.: 259). For Durkheim, rituals produce collective representations of that social order: social solidarity is a function of the logic of the symbols produced. His model portrays social collectivities as static entities founded on dualities of interior and exterior, inclusive and exclusive: his paradigm of social structure mirrors Descartes’ paradigm of consciousness.
Following Durkheim, many anthropologists analyzed ritual as symbolic practice that reproduces social order (Brandes 1980; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Geertz 1972; Gilmore 1998; Leach 1954; Lévi-Strauss 1963; Turner 1974). Although each of them contributed sophisticated nuances to Durkheim’s project, they continued to look for meaning in representation, appearing to assume sensory and affective experience to be outside the scope of productive analysis. More recent studies, such as Noyes’ account of the Patum, have been attentive to the embodied aspects of ritual but the capacity of ritual to decenter social boundaries remains largely overlooked.

A phenomenological approach, such as I pursue, radically unsettles the study of ritual. If consciousness is, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty stated, a distributed function of mind, body and the world (1962: xi), and that, as Hubert Dreyfus shows, one can act with intention towards the world without recourse to representation (Dreyfus 1998), then the analysis of ritual becomes a very different enterprise. First, this approach leads one to look at ‘meaning’ not as signifying but as mattering. Mattering is affective rather than symbolic. For example, one does not mourn the death of a loved one because of what the defunct person symbolizes but rather one feels the lack of the sensory and affective exchanges with that person. Social solidarity is perhaps not symbolic at all, but rather an aesthetic and affective orientation towards others. To be in solidarity is primarily to sense oneself in solidarity.

To theorize perception as an active engagement with the world rather than a passive faculty, and to regard affective states not as private experience but as fundamentally social, also requires a reorientation of the study of ritual. Signification is still at play. As I will show, signifying elements of ritual serve to facilitate dialogue between the local
community and other social spheres such as government and media. But I will also show that signification is not a necessary part of ritual, either as product or technique. What ritual is producing for the local community is collective sensory-affective experience as an end in itself, and as a way of knowing and relating to one another prior to signification.

The permeability between the self and the world also points to limitations in the very vocabulary of inclusion and exclusion. Techniques of power certainly serve to privilege some and dispossess others in the continual management of positional asymmetries. Social science can acknowledge these asymmetries without totalizing them. Labeling anyone as excluded suggests that their agency is extinguished: that they are outside of power. A phenomenological approach encourages us to look at the fluidities of inequality, and at the enabling techniques of those who respond to or find ways to resist the consolidation of privilege. An anthropology of the senses can be deployed to recognize patterns of discrimination but also to identify apertures and mobilities: in short, to acknowledge change as the sine qua non of human social arrangements and to focus on its processes.

To return to the comparison between my work and that of Dorothy Noyes, Catalan provincial capitals bear many similarities, particularly in contrast to gargantuan Barcelona. Yet the trajectories of Berga and Vilanova diverge sharply. Perched high in the Pyrenees, Berga is relatively isolated. During the period of Noyes’ research, Berga had faced slow economic decline and depopulation. At the time, the tourism attracted to Berga’s Patum was the town’s only growth sector, making it the object and medium of heated maneuvering for power staked on economic survival (Noyes 2003). On the other
hand, Vilanova is in the middle of things, a node of high-tech global networks, a hub of shipping, rail and trucking transport, with a diverse growing economy and population. That few tourists are attracted to Vilanova’s festes does nothing to quell local enthusiasm for them. There is passionate maneuvering to be sure, but the stakes are almost opposite. The Berguedans struggled over the management of dwindling limited resources while the Vilanovins are grappling with ways to integrate growth and diversity, in short, to manage abundance, a task particularly suited to the carnivalesque modalities they routinely employ. If Noyes and I have both got it right, it serves to confirm that the effects of sensory techniques are not determined by biological or psychological universals but are particular to local histories, sensibilities and agendas.

Michael Taussig argues that even deeply divided communities partake of a commonality that grounds the possibility of nonexploitative solidarities, and that this commonality is an embodied, sensuous “knowledge that functions like peripheral vision, a knowledge that is imagic and sensate rather than ideational,” which is moreover a “sense with an activist, constructivist bent” (Taussig 1992: 141-2). This dissertation uses images and sensations to examine the phenomenon of immigration from an oblique angle, focusing on the ways that Vilanovins construct the conditions for emergent, unfinished solidarities with newcomers.

**Peripheral visions**

Stepping back from larger claims for now, I will describe how my approach addresses lacunae in current research. Contemporary scholarship on migration tends to follow several obvious pathways. At one end, there is a vast body of literature on the global flow
of human beings between and within, nations and continents. At its best, this literature is particularly effective in revealing how economic and political structures, as well as environmental and social conditions exert force on the global movement of people. Such studies also achieve the critical objective of highlighting the deleterious impacts of global trade regimes, warfare, inequality, national security regimes, and nativist political movements. I affirm that such dynamics structure the practice of immigration to Catalonia but these domains are not my focus of attention.

A tremendous quantity of popular, institutional and scholarly ink has been disgorged regarding migration within the framework of the nation-state. Whether this phenomenon is imagined as disciplined or out of control, the realm of data collection and statistics serves as a medium through which governmental and para-governmental institutions attempt to keep track of, and regulate the flow of people over borders and to govern those migrants present within their territory. This realm of policy is forcefully impacted by the rhetorical sphere in which anxieties, xenophobia and nativism clash with demands for human rights or economic exigencies. These national-level policies and public discourses are powerful forces in the lives of communities, as I will demonstrate in chapters two and six, but they too, are not the focus of my research.

In Catalonia, a great deal of scholarship is dedicated to various aspects of immigration. Much of the focus is sociolinguistic (Bastardas i Boada 2004; Casas i Deseures and Danés i Font 2004; Pujolar i Cos 1995; Ubach 2003), or dedicated to immigration as a Catalan regional phenomenon (Actis et al. 1994, 1995; Actis, Prada, and Pereda 1995; Delgado 2002; Manyer i Farré 1992; Rull-Montoya 2001; Sepa Bonaba 1993). Site specific research has focused on Barcelona (Aramburu Otazu 2002; Pi-Sunyer 14
1993; Woolard 1992), where immigrant communities have settled in enclaves, thus constituting a spatial relationship with the host community quite distinct from that of the pattern of spatial integration of immigrants typical to Catalan towns.

With respect to ethnographic studies of immigration concentrating on a specific local community, the preference, in Catalonia and elsewhere has been to study the members of immigrant communities (Buxó i Rey 2005; Stolcke 2005). These studies have created a body of literature about the immigrant experience especially in relation to the conditions structured by governance that immigrants face (Ong 2003). There are, however, far fewer ethnographic accounts of European host communities vis-à-vis immigration (exceptions include Aramburu Otazu 2002; Carter 1997; Gareth and Cole 1999). I am arguing for an ethnographic examination of the community ground in which immigrants land to complement those studies directly focused on immigrants as the object.

Members of communities who receive immigrants constitute on-the-ground conditions for the experience of newcomers. In addition to the humane or punitive character of a polity’s laws regarding immigrants, or the utterances of pundits, it is the acts of neighbors, schoolmates, employers, teachers, business people and service providers that will embody patterns of inclusion or exclusion, of welcome or rejection, and other material and affective qualities in their daily, nuanced interactions with immigrants. If these host community members have a meaningful agency, that is if they are not merely passive, rule-following functionaries of nation states, various orders of propaganda, or what is imagined to be their material interests, then it seems to me that the dispositions towards newcomers cultivated at the community level is of critical importance to migration studies. It is at this level that people organize themselves as anti-
immigrant vigilantes, or as centers of refuge and human rights advocacy, and all the possibilities in-between. Detailed ethnographic information about the range of orientations towards immigrants could be critically important to policy makers and community organizers. I propose to investigate the cultural resources—including historical memory, ritual practice, mass media, and political discourse—local communities draw upon when configuring their practices towards immigrants. It is this question, generally peripheral to current immigration scholarship, that I want to bring from the periphery to the center.

In theorizing a space of collective agency constituted by ritual practice, my project is not to deny the agency of the media or state institutions, nor to conceptually sever them from the local community. My work shows that ritual practice is profoundly entwined with institutions and the media. I will identify practices in the local community that make it a porous space not only between its own members but between the local community and the regional and global processes in which it participates.

Solution-oriented approaches to discrimination and exclusion be they nativist, racist, or culturalist rhetorics of incompatibility (Seguí 2002; Stolcke 1995), have often focused on legislation and education. The latter in particular have contributed to a conception of discriminatory patterns of behavior as the product of erroneous beliefs or knowledge about the other (Markell 2003). Therefore corrective messages, multicultural education programs, and the like are proposed as replacement forms of knowledge that will produce inclusive behavior. In many parts of the world, however, long-established legal guarantees of equality and decades of various versions of multicultural education are coincident with persistent, systemic patterns of inequality. I propose that part of this
persistence, part of this systematicity, resides in embodied aesthetic social practices that are not reducible to mental representation as Taussig suggests. In this regard I will explore some of the implications of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) for the study of multiethnic societies.

**Structure of the dissertation**

In the following section of this introduction I will introduce my field site, the town of Vilanova i la Geltrú, providing demographic, geographic and economic description as a context for what is to follow. Then, in chapter two, I will place that local context into a regional one, that of Catalonia, which has emerged in the twenty-first century as a region with one of the highest rates of immigration of any in Europe (Estefanía 2006; l’Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya 2006). This context will include global matters impinging on Catalonia today such as terrorism and security and the discourse about Muslims in Europe. I will also present a short critical history of Catalonia within Spain, and its unique linguistic context and historical singularity. The regional context constitutes a set of conditions in which local practices develop.

With chapter three I bring the focus to local ritual practices. Chapters three, four and five are the ethnographic heart of the dissertation, gesturing back to larger issues as appropriate but centering on the local cultivation of sensory orientation, particularly via the ritual practices of the people of Vilanova i la Geltrú. I do not aim to produce a full study of a particular ritual or festival cycle or make any attempt to be all-encompassing, a
task of encyclopedic proportions. I arrived in Catalonia toward the end of October, in time for *Tots Sants* (All Saints Day) on November 1. Over the course of the following ten months I observed or was a participant in all major acts of Vilanova’s annual ritual cycle, a cycle in its broad outline shared in much of the Mediterranean and Catholic diaspora. In calendar order, these acts included *Nadal* (Christmas); *Cap d’Any* (New Year); *els Reis Mags* (“the magician kings” or Three Kings Day); *els Tres Tombs* (The Three Turns, local form of Saint Anthony’s Day); the moveable Carnival cycle; the nominally observed Lent; Easter; *Sant Jordi* (St George’s Day); Corpus Christi; *Nit de Sant Joan* (St John’s Night); *Sant Pere* (St Peter’s Day); and *Festa Major* (the Great Festival), which ostensibly honors the city’s patron saint.

These observances included processions, dramatic enactments, public gatherings, dances, fairs, fireworks, decoration of public and private space, ritual gift exchange, concerts, consumption of ritual foods, church masses, pyrotechnic displays, and all of the commerce, time off from work, preparation, resources, and organizing these entail. I will draw primarily from just two of these festivals, Carnival and Festa Major, considered the most emblematic of Vilanova, garnering the highest levels of participation and cultivating the greatest fever pitches of excitement.

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1 A number of authors have compiled surveys of the Catalan festa or its elements providing some indication of the volume of material (Amades 1983; Artis-Gener and Moya 1980; Fàbregas and Gumi Cardona 1979; Soler i Amigó 1998). The most imposing of these is the forty-two volume *Biblioteca de tradicions populars* by the indefatigable Joan Amades (1933-36).
Figure 2. Location of research site, Vilanova i la Geltrú in the Spanish Autonomous Region of Catalonia.

Vilanova i la Geltrú

Vilanova i la Geltrú is the capital of Garraf, a county which lies half-way between the capital of Catalonia, Barcelona (40 kilometers to the Northwest), and the one-time Roman capital city of Tarragona (45 kilometers to the Southeast). The compact city may be reached by sea from the East, by road from the West and by train from North or South. My usual approach, and the one with which I will orient the reader, is to arrive from the North by train from Barcelona or its airport on the alluvial plain of the Llobregat river. The Llobregat is the second largest river in Catalonia, feeding a network of delta wetlands before pouring into the Mediterranean.

Leaving Barcelona’s sprawl, the Southbound train hugs the coastline, offering views
of turquoise water to the East and of dry scrub hills dotted with pine trees and irruptions of limestone to the West. The train stops in the towns of Gavà, Castelldefels, Garraf, and Sitges before reaching Vilanova i la Geltrú. Alighting at the platform, one glimpses the Vilanova railway museum’s collection of historic steam engines and looks out over the skyline composed of buildings rarely higher than the tallest palm trees, a legacy of Caribbean trade.

Facing the sea, Vilanova presents a lighthouse, a modern port that accommodates a fishing fleet and a marina, and three kilometers of broad sandy beach. The land to the West slopes gently upwards into the mountainous Penedès region, famous for its wine grapes, in particular the cava or Catalan sparkling wine that Spaniards prefer to French Champagne to toast New Year’s Eve. Vineyards and fields of artichokes press right up to the western edge of Vilanova and spill into sections of the town periphery. Farmers regularly enter Vilanova in horse drawn carts to purchase supplies, deliver produce and visit friends.

Leaving the train station by foot, one embarks on one of many pedestrian rambles that crisscross the city or meander through the asymmetrical medieval quarter. Lined with shops, cafes, eateries, and an inordinate number of banks and real estate offices, the rambles are thronged with Vilanovins as they go to or leave from work, run errands and for its own sake as a social activity on evenings and weekends. The rambles intersect large and small places (sing. plaça, public square), where foot traffic eddies, and townspeople pause to greet friends and children play. The infrastructure of rambles and places is critically important to the local model of socialization and residents often point to them as evidence of the high quality of life they enjoy. The embodied co-presence of
Figure 3. This network of pedestrian rambles and places in the town center structures embodied experience and patterns of contact between Vilanovins during everyday life and ritual processions.

residents in shared public space and its intensification during festivals is a primary field of inquiry for this dissertation.

Vilanova i la Geltrú was awarded the Carta Pobla (City Charter) by King Jaume I in 1274, an act which joined into a single municipality the feudal seat of la Geltrú and the new town (vila nova) that had arisen beside it (Virella i Bloda 1974). Facing the Mediterranean to the East and rich agricultural lands to the West, Vilanova i la Geltrú
developed its shipping commerce to emerge as a hub between the Catalan region of the Penedès and the world beyond. Although Catalonia was largely excluded from the Spanish project of wholesale extraction of resources from the Americas in the 16th and 17th centuries (Tremlett 2006), in the 18th and 19th centuries the region prospered by shipping its agricultural produce, wines, liquors, and textile products to the Americas. A number of Vilanovins made their fortunes in Cuba and used their wealth to build the now historic town center and endow the first public schools and hospitals, not only in Vilanova but in the Cuban city of Matanzas where many of them spent most of their lives (Puig Rovira 2003).

The town’s newspaper, *El Diari de Vilanova*, established in 1850, is read weekly by 82% of the inhabitants (Diari de Vilanova 2007c), who also have the benefit of a local television station, two public libraries, three museums, eight college level educational institutions, and several publishing houses specializing in local authors and topics. Following a pattern of assemblearisme, or voluntary democratic association typical to the Catalan region, Vilanovins have formed a dense network of hundreds of civic and cultural organizations including fifteen neighborhood associations, fifty-five athletic groups, sixty-five beneficial associations, seven political parties, twenty-five non-profit organizations, and one-hundred-and-eight cultural entities including dozens of traditional ritual crews such as those I will describe (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2007a).

This organizational density is overlaid upon a population density of 1,768 inhabitants per square kilometer (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2004: 12), jointly producing webs of physical proximity and social engagement.

Maintaining its agricultural commerce and a large fishing fleet, the city has also
grown through light industry. The Italian company Pirelli, first opened a cable production plant in Vilanova in 1902 where it has maintained a presence ever since (Cardona 2002). In 2004 Pirelli won the contract to supply an optical ground wire cable system to the East China Power Grid Corporation for a massive electricity and communication network. Much of this cable is being produced in Vilanova where Pirelli has opened a new facility for cable production (Fiber Optics Weekly Update 2004).

Vilanova is passed over by most of the region’s tourists despite its white sand beaches, spirited festivals, unique museums, and innovative gastronomy. It could be an attractive destination between Barcelona and Tarragona except for its proximity to next-door Sitges: the picturesque, whitewashed, seaside artist colony, home of pulsing nightlife and Spain’s largest gay community. However, Vilanova has established itself as a niche destination for family summer beach vacationers, the majority from within Spain, few of whom seem to venture far from the beachfront into the town center. Vilanova’s diverse, vibrant economy and easy familiarity with the world beyond its precincts has contributed to a sense of security and, perhaps, largesse. If there is a bad harvest, a bad catch, a lost contract, or a bad tourist season, Vilanova as a whole will not be plunged into crisis.

Demographic data forms an appropriate transition to the ethnographic and historical material that follows. According to the 1950 census, Vilanova then had a population of 19,487 of whom 9,908 were native born and 9,579 were born elsewhere. By 1970, with a population of 35,714, 15,615 were born in Catalonia and 20,099 born somewhere else. These newcomers who formed the majority of the town population by 1970 included Spanish Andalusians and Castilians as well as French who became collectively known as
els altres Vilanovins or “the other Vilanovins” (Virella i Bloda 1974: 224). Although many retained ties to their places of origin, and have introduced new traditions to town life, these former immigrants are now simply called Vilanovins and many will identify themselves as ‘Catalan, with Andalusian (or other) roots’ (Candel 1964; Candel and Cuenca 2001; cf. Woolard 1986). Based on this recent, lived historical experience, the capacity to integrate even overwhelming numbers of newcomers without requiring them to repudiate their origins tends to be taken for granted by Vilanovins. This is not to say that the process was free from xenophobia, that it was uncomplicated, or that it is complete, as I will relate in the next chapter.

The most recent figures from the Catalan Institute of Statistics indicate that Vilanova’s population in 2007 totaled 62,826 (l’lnstitut d’Estadística de Catalunya 2007) a figure that reveals a doubling of the population in a generation. A detailed demographic study produced by the municipal government of Vilanova in 2004 provides a level of analysis beyond the obvious general trend of growth. Among other data, this study reported details on the arrival of immigrants from beyond the borders of Spain for each year from 1997 through 2003. In the first four years, the numbers are quite modest, spanning 31 to 48 individuals per year. In 2001, this figure jumped to 796, in 2002 to 1,223 and in 2003, to 1,091 (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2004: 59). During this seven-year period, the provenance of these immigrants was: Morocco 20%, Argentina 17%, Romania 12%, and five or fewer percent, in descending proportion, Ecuador, Colombia, Uruguay, France, Venezuela, Germany, Italy, Great Britain, Moldavia, China, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Cuba, Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere (ibid). There is no particularly high concentration of recent, foreign-born immigrants in any of Vilanova’s
neighborhoods (ibid): the residences of newcomers are distributed among those of the established population, facilitating various kinds of social contact. The term ‘immigration’ is still associated by most Catalans with the earlier, defining wave from southern Spain. Recent immigration from beyond Spain’s borders is typically distinguished as the ‘new immigration’ and the unambiguous term for recent arrivals is *nouvinguts* or newcomers.

As of this writing, the trend continues. During the four years previous to my arrival in 2005, the foreign-born population of Vilanova had grown from 2% to 12% (Diari de Vilanova 2006m). Moroccan women wearing headscarves\(^2\) and long robes have given noticeable evidence of the trend by their ubiquitous presence in the rambles and public squares. Schools and community centers have become living laboratories in multicultural education. Free night classes in the Catalan language, still attended by some of the older generation of immigrants from Southern Spain, belatedly learning or improving their Catalan, have become filled with representatives of relatively unknown locations, for a time even including a citizen of that inscrutable land of contradictions, the United States.

The process of negotiations between native Vilanovans and the older wave of immigrants is still being played out, particularly on the field of linguistic practice, as I will address in the next chapter. The process for the new immigrants is and will be different in fundamental ways. First, newcomers (individually and collectively) bring particular qualities to the situation: a drive to assimilate, a particular demand on public

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\(^2\) There are many different terms for and types of head covering (Mahmood 2005: 41-43; Scott 2007: 3). All of my Catalan speaking informants, including native Moroccans, used the term *mocador* (handkerchief) to refer to the head coverings of Muslim women as well as to the handkerchiefs used as a head covering by men and women during many Catalan ritual performances.
space, or social networking practices, for example, that are not merely responses to the conditions presented by the host community. Unlike the earlier wave of immigrants, the newcomers do not arrive with the baggage of Spanish history and the bitter rememberings and forgettings of a Civil War and long dictatorship (Cardús i Ros 2000; Ferrán 2000; Resina 2000; Tremlett 2006) but with their own packed luggage. Finally, the Vilanova of the 21st century is not the Vilanova of the 1960s. The community has been constituted and conditioned by the earlier wave of immigration, the restoration of democracy, and an intensification of its integration with the global economy. While the historical patterns of socialization and integration present a set of resources that are certainly being deployed with respect to 21st century newcomers, it would be absurd to predict an identical outcome so early in the game.

In a generation, the children of the current immigrants could experience life as members of a permanently marginalized and frustrated underclass, ready to erupt in anger in the face of discrimination and institutional violence, a story that can be told from experiences in the United States, France, Britain and Germany. Alternatively, in 30 years, it is possible to imagine Vilanova, perhaps with a skyline including a minaret or two, not as a site of idealized social harmony but one of working pluralism, where conflicts are negotiated rather than permitted to harden into polarized oppositions.

I make no predictions, but only venture to say that through diligent attention to conditions of justice among other factors, that Vilanovins have a fighting chance to meet the challenge. The stakes are considerable. In broad strokes, the current design of the global economy facilitates the free flow of resources while the current design of nation-states constrains the movement of people who depend on those resources, creating a
wrenching tension, often exacerbated by brutal militarized borders and punitive regulatory regimes. Nativist hysteria or rhetoric about the incompatibility of cultures routinely trump advocacy for human rights and even economic self-interest. Neither Vilanova nor all the towns in Catalonia put together can solve these global structural or dispositional trends. Yet if they can succeed in forging a working, “political culture of deep pluralism” (Connolly 2005: 64) where others have failed, they will have challenged claims about the imagined incompatibility between Islam and the West, for example. Moreover they will have provided a model that will be studied, analyzed and attempted in adapted form elsewhere. I invite the reader neither to prematurely accept nor reject Vilanova as a viable model of interethnic cooperation but rather to explore with me some heretofore peripheral conditions and practices with which such a model can be thought about and evaluated.

Of friends and fragments

I moved to Vilanova with my wife and then one-year-old daughter, a condition that guided my ethnographic work in fundamental ways (cf. Cassell 1987). The act of pushing a stroller or a playground swing tended to attract inquiries of the “how old is she? what is her name?” sort that often facilitated further discussion. By daily dropping off and picking up my daughter from preschool I also came to know a number of educators, administrators and other parents, some of them very well, and was also able to directly observe how the children were socialized, and in fact, to participate in the process. The realm of early childhood socialization is not an emphasis of my work but is rather integrated into my overall assessment of town life and practice to which I will refer from
time to time.

It is also pertinent that my family is inter-racial: my ancestry is European, such that I closely resemble native Catalans while my wife’s family immigrated to the US from the Philippines. Thus neither she nor our daughter resemble Catalans nor members of any of the prominent immigrant communities in Vilanova. The ways in which my own newcomer family was treated, jointly and as individuals, also informs this study.

Many Vilanovins, some of them presented in these pages, helped us with the practical exigencies of relocating to an unfamiliar setting and also took an active interest in helping me to carry out my investigation. Rather early in our residence we met two individuals who were to become not only key informants, in ethnographic parlance, but also fond friends. The circumstances of this meeting itself introduces not only these individuals but the themes of language politics and interethnic integration taken up in the subsequent chapter.

Most ethnographic work begins slowly and uncertainly and mine was no exception. In the initial months, as I familiarized myself with Vilanova and struggled to overcome my clumsiness with the Catalan language, I saw an announcement for a guided walk of Vilanova led by a local historian. Thinking this a good opportunity to learn some local history, I called to sign up and subsequently arrived with my family at the meeting point in the Plaça de les Cols (Plaza of the Cabbages). I introduced myself to the leader, Jordi, a slim, youthful man with round glasses and dark locks of hair who warmly greeted me.

My own understanding of the affective charges attached to linguistic practices at that stage of my research was very limited. As a practical matter, I knew that the great majority of Catalan speakers were passively, if not actively competent in the Castilian
language. I explained to Jordi that we had recently arrived and that my wife did not understand Catalan and that I was still learning. I asked if it would be possible for him to give the tour in Castilian to accommodate us. He told me that he sometimes did that and that he would consult the others. A brief conference ensued with a dozen other participants, primarily older women, whom I observed in lively discussion but could not overhear as I attended to my daughter at a little distance.

The tour began, we drew near and the guide began his commentary, in Catalan. I felt a little frustrated by this but strained to follow his explanations and translate for my wife. He described how nineteenth century Vilanovin merchants, referred to as Indianos, returned from long sojourns in Cuba, built many of the grand residences of the town center and marked them with an iconography of their trade and travels, such as ships, tropical produce, and the staff of Hermes. I then noticed a woman accompanying a child of about seven years observing us. She approached and greeted us during a break in the commentary. The woman, Núria, had fair skin, long black hair, bright eyes and a broad smile. The child, who I soon learned was her adopted daughter, had lived until age four at an orphanage in Nepal and bore strongly South Asian features. Núria had overheard me translating into English and asked, in Catalan, where we were from. I told her and I briefly explained the purpose of my research. Núria expressed enthusiasm for my project and immediately offered to help. Over the rest of my stay, Núria provided me with reflective observations about life in Vilanova and introduced me to local authorities in the realm of culture and politics, in particular, the staff of the Consorci per a la Normalització Lingüística (Consortium for Linguistic Normalization) where she herself worked as the coordinator for a program called Voluntaris per la Llengua (Volunteers for
the Language). This is a region-wide program in which Catalan speakers volunteer to pair up with Catalan learners for weekly language practice and cultural exchange. As we were to discover, it was not only the members of this program who took an interest in helping us with language acquisition, learning about our cultural practices, and orienting us to the local social world.

At the end of the tour, Jordi approached us and apologized for not giving the tour in Castilian, explaining that the group had decided on Catalan, a decision I would later understand and empathize with. He offered to give us a tour, in Castilian this time, of a historic mansion, Can Papiol. Can Papiol is a remarkable eighteenth century residence that, unlike contemporary buildings such as Mount Vernon or Monticello, has not been restored to appear as it might have been and furnished with period art and furniture. Consequent to a vow of celibacy by the original owner, Francesc Papiol, the Papiol family eventually died out and the building was never reoccupied. It remains a time capsule with all of the family’s possessions in place. These material objects illustrated how greatly the life of the body had changed in the past two hundred years. Beds were designed for sleeping while sitting up as it was believed that lying down flat provoked a risk of dying in one’s sleep. A small receptacle for holy water next to the bed provided a substance for spiritual cleansing and protection before facing the risk of going to sleep. The only bath tub, carved from a single mahogany log, was in the sick room as healthy people did not bathe except for face and hands. A tiny chapel housed the desiccated skin and blood of a saint facilitating pious practices without leaving the house where one risked infection, dirt and robbery. Such social isolation is almost unimaginable compared to the Vilanova of today in which the convivial company of others in public space has
come to be one of the most esteemed pleasures of life.

After this tour, we became friends with Jordi and his partner Maçana, who worked at one of the town’s community centers. They helped us with language practice, accompanied us to a variety of events whose nuances they explained, and taught us about local history, grounded in the political narratives of their own grandparents during the Civil War. I have yet to adequately return their generosity, having done little more than to provide English translation on a few occasions, most memorably in leading a tour of the Vilanova train museum for the English-speaking contingent of a group of “bears”—the term used in the Gay community for hairy, mature men and the men who love them—attending an international gathering in nearby Sitges.

Núria, Jordi and Maçana were key guides to the Catalan experience of Vilanovin life but I also made friends who provided a similar orientation to immigrant experiences. The free night classes for Catalan language I took brought my own position as a newcomer into dialogue with others from North Africa, Latin American and Eastern Europe. After the first class, I fell into conversation with a small group gathered outside. Practicing our Catalan, we introduced ourselves and questioned one another. Eulalia was a twenty-one year old from Mexico, studying for the language exam in order to go to nursing school. Alicia, in her fifties, surprised me by introducing herself apologetically “I’m Catalan, I was born here, my parents are Andalusian. I understand Catalan but I’ve never been confident speaking or writing it.” Ghaliyah, in her thirties had come from Morocco with her husband when she was eighteen. She worked providing home childcare and had a twelve year-old daughter of her own attending the middle school across the plaça from my daughter’s preschool. She spoke Arabic at home, as well as fluent French and
Castilian, but wanted to help her daughter—who calls herself Catalan—with her homework and to improve her language skills for her own satisfaction. Ghaliyah explained that she and her family had moved to an outlying community the previous year but that she still considered herself "very Vilanovin." These initial comments provided some important cues for making sense of the ways that people position themselves or articulate their sense of belonging. In the case of Alicia and Ghaliyah, I wondered why, after long residence in which communication was possible in Castilian, they felt motivated to learn Catalan, and if they experienced social pressure to do so. After introducing myself, I asked the others if they had ever sensed any disapproval for speaking Castilian. They all denied ever having encountered problems using Castilian. I would have to look for greater subtleties in local language politics.

Before we departed, Ghaliyah suggested that all of us meet an hour before class each week at a nearby café to practice, a proposal to which all assented with enthusiasm. I continued to meet with this group for many months, sometimes joined by others, but most often it was only Ghaliyah and myself who showed up. In supporting each other's effort to gain mastery of the Catalan language, Ghaliyah and I became friends, eventually meeting each other's families.

Ghaliyah had never met an American and was as interested in my life in the US as I was in hers in Vilanova. At our first practice session, she asked if I liked pernil (the ubiquitous dry-cured ham known as jamón in Castilian) and whether we had it in the US. I had wondered how local Muslims related to the black-hoofed cured pig legs prominently displayed in many shops, cafes and restaurants. After answering that I did like it but that it is not typical of the US, I asked Ghaliyah if she liked pernil. She
responded that, as a Muslim, she doesn’t eat pork but added that her husband, also Muslim, eats everything. “What is it like living here as a Muslim?” I asked. She explained that because she and her Muslim friends don’t wear headscarves, they don’t experience any problems but she thought that women who do cover their heads might have a different experience.

Expanding on this theme, Ghaliyah related that in Moroccan cities such as the one where she grew up, “most women don’t wear headscarves except for old women. Young women even wear miniskirts and all the risqué clothing girls wear here.” I asked if that was an urban-rural divergence and she responded that “most of the Moroccans in Spain are the poorest and least educated people. The educated and cosmopolitan Moroccans are either working in Morocco or if they are here, no one knows they are Moroccan.”

Ghaliyah’s description pointed to the need for caution in conceptualizing Vilanova’s Muslim community as homogeneous or in classifying the headscarf as a religious marker, since, for Ghaliyah and her friends, the headscarf marked class or generational status. Mindful of the way that the headscarf served as a lightning rod of xenophobic expression and discriminatory legislation elsewhere in Europe, I would continue to be attentive to what both natives and newcomers said about it, explored in more detail in chapter three.

These ethnographic fragments foreground some nuances of Vilanovin processes of integration, forms of sociality, and assessments of belonging that I will further investigate. They also underscore that Vilanova i la Geltrú, a small, provincial capital, deeply invested in its own traditions, is no sleepy backwater but vigorously engaged with the world as it has been for centuries, deliberately embracing innovations and new friends but doing so with a judicious assessment of how to integrate these changes within the
framework of its past, which is deeply felt and very often forcefully present.
Chapter II: Decentering Catalonia

Provincializing global security

Sometime before dawn on January 10, 2006, I was awoken by what sounded like furniture being knocked over and broken. This was followed by the sounds of many heavy footsteps up and down the stairs outside the door of the apartment where my family and I had resided since arriving to the town of Vilanova i la Geltrú two months before. As my groggy mind tried to imagine what was going on and discarded unlikely answers I realized it must be an arrest.

When the radio alarm re-awoke me at 7:00, the staccato voice of a Catalan news announcer reported on Operation Jackal, a nationally coordinated raid of “Islamic terrorists” in Madrid, the Basque country and in Vilanova i la Geltrú. As I helped my daughter eat breakfast I watched a television news report including local footage of the raid at multiple locations in Vilanova i la Geltrú as well as interviews with neighbors. One of the men arrested was the head of the Muslim cultural association, another was the owner of a halal butcher shop and another was the Imam of the mosque. Because the Imam held the keys to the mosque, the congregation was unable to enter it on Eid al-Adha (the Feast of Sacrifice), one of the most important holy days of the year, adding further distress to a community in shock.

By the time I dropped off my daughter at her pre-school near the central plaça, a large group of men from the Muslim community had gathered in front of city hall to protest the raid. An older bearded man was making a statement to the press, in part in response to the timing of the police action. Speaking in Castilian, he said that the raids were “an attack
against Islam.” He explained that “today is the Muslim holy day of the sacrifice of the lamb that commemorates Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son and God’s command to sacrifice a lamb instead.” He said that the Muslim community is duty bound to pray and offer thanks for the gift of God in the mosque.

The town council provided the Peixateria Vella (the old fish market), a neo-classical building used by community groups, as a temporary mosque. I later learned that not only was the mosque inaccessible but that there was no lamb for the feast because the butcher had been arrested. He would be released three days later, cleared of charges, reporting the experience to be “the three worst days of my life” (Diari de Vilanova 2006a). Three of the men detained had served as community liaisons to the city and were familiar to many people due to periodic media interviews and public involvement. Whether calculated or not, the timing maximized the anguish and isolation precipitated by the raid. The inconsideration of the Muslim community’s ethical obligations seemed insensitive to the point of cruelty. The raids effectively severed relations between the Muslim community and city government (Diari de Vilanova 2006f).

The Barcelona and national newspapers and television newscasts presented the allegations against the detained as established fact. For example, the newspaper with the largest circulation in Catalonia published a chart depicting the flow of “kamikazes” from North Africa, to Vilanova i la Geltrú and on to Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Iraq (Figueroedo and López 2006). News coverage was sensationalistic and simply reported the police version of events without interviewing local representatives or members of Muslim communities.

Speaking in Castilian, my neighbor from across the hall, a man of about 50, told me
that there had been a “round up of al Qaeda among the Moroccans in Vilanova i la Geltrú.” He said that there was an “Arab couple” living on the third floor and another on the fifth floor of our building. He didn’t know what had happened to them in the raid. In an evening news broadcast, on the local television station, the mayor of Vilanova i la Geltrú said that no one should jump to conclusions, that the people detained should be presumed innocent until proven otherwise, and that the convivència that all Vilanovins enjoyed should continue. A young man and woman representing the Muslim Neighborhood Association denounced terrorism and said that the majority of the community did not believe in it, and that Islam is about peace and convivència with one’s
neighbors, and that terrorism is very far from the true Islam. The editorial in the local paper also invoked convivência, warning against equating Islam with terrorism, against xenophobia, and for the need to quickly re-establish the severed links to the community (Diari de Vilanova 2006j), points that continued to be reiterated by local political leaders (Diari de Vilanova 2006g).

The next day I saw a demonstration led by wives, family and friends of the detained following a press conference. The women held signs in Castilian reading Queremos una convivência tranquila (We want peaceful coexistence), No Somos Terroristas, Somos Musulmanes (We’re not Terrorists, we’re Muslims), and Queremos Justicia (We Want Justice). At the press conference, the group of friends, family and a number of non-Muslim community organizations released a statement in Catalan that was printed in full in the local paper. The statement expressed indignation for the biased news coverage that violated the presumption of innocence of the detained, apprehension about the treatment of the detainees under Spain’s new, rights-abridging anti-terrorism law, and to chide local officials for communicating an image of normality and conciliation but failing to defend the dignity of all the citizens they represent or helping to ease the anxieties of the families of the detained (Diari de Vilanova 2006b). The anti-terrorism law was a reaction to the March 11, 2004 bombings in Madrid, still fresh in the public’s memory.

Later that day I ran into my barber, Xavi who invited me into a café to drink a cup of coffee. He had seen the women pass by with their placards and I asked him what he thought about it. Xavi remarked on the demonstration and the sign that said “No somos terroristas, somos Musulmanes,” saying: “That’s obvious. No one thinks all Muslims are terrorists.” Then, in reference to a previous discussion in which we had both voiced our
opposition to the invasion of Iraq by our respective governments, he nodded toward me and added wryly, "no one thinks all Americans are terrorists either."

As fourteen people languished in detention in Madrid without formal charges for months after the arrests, regular public protests followed, made up of members of the Muslim and Catalan communities, and representatives of city government (Diari de Vilanova 2006c). The placards were by now mostly in Catalan, for example a large banner declaring: *No Som Terroristes: Exigem Respecte* (We are not terrorists: we demand respect) next to children displaying photos of their damaged homes (Diari de Vilanova 2006d). With the memory of indiscriminate vigilante reprisals throughout the US following the al Qaeda attack of September 11, 2001 not far from my mind (Welch 2006), I had feared an eruption of backlash but nothing concrete materialized. The Office of Civil Rights received no reports of discrimination following the raid, and in my interviews with Catalans, Muslims and other immigrants over the following eight months, contrary to my expectations, no one reported experiencing or hearing about any local incidence of backlash although many were critical of the national government and news media.

The term *convivència*, literally “living together” is a key term of popular discourse in Catalonia. It derives from Spanish historian Ramón Menéndez Pidal’s characterization of the contemporaneous presence of and competition between variant forms of early Romance languages in the Iberian peninsula. Pidal’s disciple Amérigo Castro developed the term in reference to the idealized cultural interaction between medieval Jews, Muslims and Christians and the emergence of their self-awareness as ethnic groups as a product of their collective consciousness (Glick 1992). More recent historians have
rejected Castro’s portrayal as too psychological and romanticized, presenting only the positive relations between the groups while downplaying the conflicts between them and ignoring the evidence that the three faith communities never lived together on equal terms (Kamen 1997). In contemporary Castilian, *convivencia* continues to refer to the historical coexistence between Christians, Muslims and Jews in medieval Iberia but now carries connotations of mutual interpenetration and creative influence as well as mutual rivalry and conflict (Glick 1992).

Toward the end of my stay, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews beginning with a request that my respondent tell me how he or she understood the term convivencia. I was somewhat surprised, that of fifteen respondents, none made any reference to Iberian history. Many of the responses were short and tended toward consensus: “to live with one’s neighbors in mutual respect,” “give and take,” “respect,
learning and collaboration,” “to share a common space with respect for others. It requires respect for different manners of living and the customs of the people while respecting basic human rights.”

Two city government staff members working on Vilanova’s General Plan for Convivencia had slightly longer answers. Boumediene, a native Moroccan man, explained that convivencia derived from conviure (to live together) and means “to share a place, a determinate space, with a healthy disposition and under conditions of equality.” Arantxa, a woman with Basque roots answered, “We can speak of convivencia when there is an interaction between diverse members of a community but not when indifference or hostility is demonstrated. This is not to say that it doesn’t produce conflicts but that these serve to generate change, they reveal the points of view of different positions.” These responses indicate that convivencia is not exclusively, or even primarily, conceived as a conscious attitude, as is the concept of tolerance, but is rooted in the purposeful interactions of living bodies, co-present in public space. Convivencia consists of embodied practices and sensibilities directed toward egalitarian social relationships, and thus bears investigation under the rubric of sensory politics, the focus of the chapters that follow.

Today in Catalonia, convivencia expresses a commitment to mutual cultural interchange that does seem to result in concrete practices of solidarity, the opening of various public spaces for immigrants and comparatively lower rates of xenophobic acts than reported in the US, France or Britain (EUMC 2004). But it is also often vague, idealistic and based on unchallenged assumptions, and a frequent lack of recognition of structural inequalities. It is deployed both by those who see it as a charter for radical
structural change, and those who limit convivència to notions of civility and hospitality. In this way, members of the Muslim community who invoked convivència themselves, could also criticize the mayor for using the term in order to “calm” and “normalize” the situation without recognizing the impact of the assault on their lives.

Following the incident of the raid and others less dramatic, I began to realize that although Vilanova i la Geltrú is not a place free from conflict or inequality, neither did it conform to patterns of racism and xenophobia familiar to me in the US nor those reported of many other places in Europe. Was I witnessing a politically correct façade bound to crumble or the stirrings of an emergent pluralism? At the time I arrived, Vilanova’s extra-Iberian immigrant population had increased from less than 2% to over 12% in the most recent four years (Diari de Vilanova 2006m), one of the reasons I selected it as a field site. This also meant that the town’s greatest challenges may lay ahead; but in any case, the convivència now being forged between Vilanova’s citizens, both old and new, is critically constitutive of the conditions of possibility for their future. To interrogate this emergent state, I delve into how the people of Vilanova cultivate ethical and aesthetic orientations as a community—their sensory politics—and return to larger structural issues and government policy in the final chapter. Before doing so, I will use the remaining pages of this chapter to place Vilanova in its Catalan context, a critical political and historic factor without which, neither local practices nor regional structures will be intelligible.
Decentering Catalonia

In this section, I develop the concept of decentering as an analytic frame and present Catalonia as a site of a specific configuration of decentering processes. I will discuss a range of elements constitutive of cultural politics under the rubric of decentering, not because I wish to imply that these elements neatly map onto one another but rather to highlight them as different forms of social positioning. As with other spatial metaphors such as superior, inferior, inclusion, exclusion, mainstream, or marginalized, decentering describes relative positioning in social organization but it is also literal, referring to location in public space and within territorial polities. Beyond this, decentering has a temporal dimension, denoting position in time and temporal strategies as described below.

As a term, decentering has been deployed in a variety of contexts, most of which are at best loosely related to my concerns so I will forgo a broad review. One text, however, is particularly pertinent, Alison Bailey’s “Locating Traitorous Identities: Towards a View of Privilege-Cognizant White Character,” in which Bailey locates “traitorous subjects as those who belong to dominant groups yet resist the usual assumptions and practices of those groups” (2000: 283). Bailey argues that it is inaccurate to characterize such subjects as marginalized or as outsiders, suggesting this conflates their condition with that of members of excluded racial groups. Instead she proposes describing “traitors” as “decentering, subverting, or destabilizing the center” (288), the center being the attitudinal or epistemological location of such complexes as Eurocentrism or white supremacy. “Decentering the center” she argues, clarifies that outsiders and traitors may share a common political interest but that they occupy different social locations (289).
Although Catalans were singled out for punishment as traitors to national unity by the Franco regime (Hargreaves 2000), the position of Catalans today is yet again different from that of the anti-racist whites Bailey discusses, but her formulation of decentering calls attention to the political and ethical stance of a person or group as a critical element of their social position.

I also use the term decentering in a broader way because I do not find existing spatial/relational concepts, however useful in other contexts, adequate to my task. The term *diaspora* depicts migrants as scattered seeds, forcibly resettled, nostalgic for their homelands, and carefully tending a bounded sense of community until their return. A broader account of global migration demonstrates that there are many other reasons to migrate and many different affective and interactive relations with adopted homes. *Marginal* or *peripheral* suggest static deprivation or Wallerstein’s *core-periphery* model that accounts for the global division of labor while ignoring distinctions of class, ethnicity and religion and the specificities of place (Wallerstein 1974). The language of *oppression, dominance, hegemony* implies contests in which partisans of one position achieve and maintain the upper hand. Decentering permits an additional possibility of a negotiated plural occupation of public space. My preference for the gerund is also deliberate in that I do not conceptualize decentering as telic, but as a perpetual, messy process that does not arrive at complete assimilation, multicultural stasis or any other finished state.

Positional social relationships are in no way natural, that is to say determined by material conditions or innate qualities, but are rather the product of positioning acts. On the grand scale of nation and empire, colonization is the preeminent modern paradigm of
such positioning in which the colonizer systematically concentrates power, privilege, capital, and knowledge at the imperial center by violently dispossessing the colonized of their own power, privilege, capital and knowledge, rendering them peripheral.

In the twentieth century, a great many formerly colonized people achieved some form of independence but the postcolony remains a scarred landscape of traumatic memory (Werbner 1998). Postcolonies have not been and can not be fully compensated for their losses. Moreover, they are still the bearers of relatively weaker economic and political influence, and their languages, religions, forms of governance and life ways are still peripheralized within the global community. They are not merely decentered by colonial history from which they have not yet recovered but by contemporary positioning acts that maintain old structural inequalities or engineer new ones. Being postcolonial then is a nominal state rather than a completed reversal of the colonial position.

Positional processes of centering and decentering³ occur within polities as well as between them and are not necessarily based on explicit policy. In the US, for example, the form of discrimination known as racial profiling has been reported in the sphere of law enforcement and sentencing, and as being practiced by landlords, employers, loan officers, cab drivers, security guards and immigration agents (Jones 2002; Kreck 2002; Ross 2002; U.S. General Accounting Office 2000). Whites may also bear stigmas, marks of class or sexual orientation for example, that make them subject to patterns of exclusion but, qua white people, a space of privilege has been cleared for them at the center: the social costs they might otherwise pay are borne by those excluded from the center.

³ I will use a variety of terms for processes of social alignment. Stance and position may be understood as forms of alignment to determinate objects while I use disposition and orientation in a more open sense of alignment towards an indeterminate object world.
Patchen Markell points out that such social subordination is not exclusively spatial, that the exclusion or assimilation of presumed qualities of difference does not tell the whole story but that the temporal dimension is also critical (2003: 24). Drawing on Hegel and Arendt, Markell describes one aspect of finitude, or the limits of individual agency, as “the unpredictability and contingency of social interaction” (36). The dominant who inhabit the center and who fail to acknowledge their own finitude, engage in the illusory pursuit of sovereignty as freedom from future social risk. Social subordination then can derive from one group’s insulation from social risk by transferring a greater share of it to another group, as effected in the example of racial profiling. Centering can thus be understood as temporal positioning that seeks, albeit ultimately unsuccessfully, to insulate the centered from the social risk inherent to temporal existence.

There are other forms of temporal positioning. A group making authenticity claims may draw social capital from an imagined monocultural past to devalue a multicultural present as inauthentic (cf. Fabian 1983: 11). The homogenizing drive of the Spanish dictatorship included teaching history in a way that glossed over the period of Moorish domination and the multiplicity of Christian kingdoms and generally ignored Catalan and Basque distinctiveness. Ferdinand and Isabella were central to all Franco era school textbooks and the Catholic Kings were credited with creating territorial unity, national unity, religious unity, and with founding the unified destiny of Spain as a Catholic empire. The enemies of this ‘eternal essence’ of Spain were European ideas associated with the Enlightenment and particularly liberalism, communism and separatism (Llobera

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4 In addition to being a property of states, Markell discusses sovereignty as “a condition of being an independent, self-determining agent,” (11) a notion critiqued as failing to recognize human beings as situated subjects.
Current rhetoric about the clash of civilizations constructs a modern, i.e. forward gazing, civilized and secular West against a backwards, fundamentalist Islam. This temporal scheme, little altered from Morgan’s nineteenth century formulation, is heavily marked by racial and ideological supremacist assumptions that, for example, the human rights abuses by Western powers are viewed as exceptions while similar abuses by a Muslim power are deemed emblematic. As Talal Asad points out, the unique position of Muslims as a religious minority in Europe is less due to imagined conflicts between devout Muslims and secular Europeans but to the ways Europeans conceptualize themselves vis-à-vis notions of culture, civilization, the secular state, majority, and minority (Asad 2003).

The matter of the headscarf

The 2003-4 French controversy about whether Muslim girls should be allowed to cover their hair when in public schools resulted in the engagement of a government commission in deciding how to administer French secularism (laïcité) with respect to religious signs (Fassin 2006). As reported by Asad, the commission took “certain signs to have a ‘religious’ meaning by virtue of their synecdochic relation to systems of representation” (Asad 2006: 504), thus the veil stands for Islam. The argument that served as the impetus for the commission’s ban of ostensible religious signs was that the Islamic veil was imagined to signify the low status of Muslim women. When it was learned that some

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5 That of a progression from savagery, to barbarism, to civilization (Morgan 1877)
6 In order to demonstrate an impartial application of laïcité, large crosses and the Jewish kippa were also banned in French schools (Scott 2007: 1).
Muslim girls wore the headscarf by their own choice or even against their parent’s wishes, the veil took on an additional and more alarming meaning of presumed Islamic militancy. The effect of these semiotic gymnastics was to decenter Muslim practice from shared public space.

This case highlights an important condition of pluralism as access to public space that accommodates the practices of multiple social collectivities. In Vilanova i la Geltrú, Moroccan women and girls wearing headscarves are now an everyday sight in public spaces such as pedestrian rambles, public squares, markets, playgrounds, and at sidewalk cafes. During the course of my fieldwork, I asked many Vilanovins including those of Catalan, Spanish and Moroccan provenance about headscarves, bringing up the French controversy and asking if there was any similar controversy about the practice in Vilanova. Every respondent expressed personal neutrality about headscarves and only one was aware of any instance of discrimination, opining that some employers did not like to hire women who wore the headscarf to serve customers. Two Catalan informants reflected that their own grandmothers habitually covered their hair in public, and in fact, elderly women with headscarves are still a fairly common sight throughout the Iberian peninsula. My barber, Xavi, informed me that headscarves were an issue in one way that he knew of, that some Muslim families did not allow their daughters to participate in physical education or swimming classes because the girls would be immodestly dressed for these activities. “It costs them [Muslims] a lot to integrate,” he reflected, his idiom echoing Markell’s economy of social risk.

These examples do not demonstrate that Vilanova i la Geltrú is either free of discrimination or an epitome of cultural pluralism but are indicative of some sensibilities.
within local political culture. Firstly, there was no apparent presence of the highly charged contrast between secularity and religiosity present in the French polemic, a key ideological principle of European neoconservative anti-immigrant politics. In the few conversations I had about secularity, Catalans, even those who bore animosity towards the clergy for its collaborative role in the dictatorship, refused the secular-religious distinction, and often labeled themselves as Catholic. Secondly, by hailing their own grandmothers into the situation as sharing a practice with Muslim women, those Catalans refused the positional center they could have claimed on essentialist axes of liberated/oppressed, modern/backward, or secular/fundamentalist.

This refusal, an act of self-decentering, is different from a politics of recognition in which the other is understood and validated. Declining to claim this space does not mean Catalans have learned to appreciate diverse cultural practices better than other Europeans. Tito, one of the men who invoked his grandmother, also reported a visceral negative reaction to seeing Muslim women completely covered including the face. He acknowledged that the practice made him feel uncomfortable but he did not say that it was wrong, that he could read its meaning, or that it demonstrated anything about Muslims or Europeans as a group. The adjective Tito used to describe the women, tapada, comes from the verb tapar, to cover or put a lid on, but when used of a person is defined as “to place an object that obstructs the eyes, ears, nose or mouth as to impede sight, hearing, smell or speech,” suggesting that Tito’s reaction reflects an embodied

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7 This is rarely seen in Vilanova i la Geltrú. I was told that two women who wore the burka inhabited a neighborhood near my house but I did not encounter them during my residence of 10 months.

8 “Tapar (a algú) els ulls (o les orelles, o el nas, o la boca) Posar-li un objecte que obstrueixi aquests òrgans impedint-li de veure, de sentir, d'olorar, de parlar.” Gran Diccionari de la llengua catalana, s.v. “tapar.”
sensibility about the aesthetics of coexistence and sensory exchange. Finally, Xavi’s comment implicitly recognized the uneven distribution of social costs while pointing to an instance in which one group, Muslim girls, cannot unproblematically avail themselves of a common space.

A multiculturalist ethos is not necessarily reflected in decentering practice such as enabling plural access to common space. In France it was even argued that the head scarf ban, by defending laïcité, would help create a neutral space for everyone (Coq 2004). Although there have been no attempts to exclude the practice from any context of Vilanovin life, some spaces are socially organized in a way that deprivileges Muslim sartorial practices and norms of modesty. Mixed gender education creates a problem for Muslim girls’ participation in physical education, as related by Xavi, and a related issue was raised regarding the municipal pool. A local Muslim convert had petitioned the Ajuntament (municipal government) to schedule women’s only hours at the public swimming pool but her request was denied (Diari de Vilanova 2006s). Without judging this decision I would point out that in this case, the norm that accommodates the majority, including Catalans and immigrants except some Muslim females, fails to provide space for the exercise of those women’s practices. However, on the occasion of the national police raid in which the Imam of the local mosque was arrested, as related above, the Ajuntament provided the use of a city-owned building as a temporary mosque so that the Muslim community could carry out the observances of the Feast of the Sacrifice. This action was thought to technically violate the separation of church and state but was seen as an expedient response to the Muslim community’s distressing crisis and an act of solidarity with a community in shock (Diari de Vilanova 2006f).
The swimming pool example brings up what Asad points to as the tension between the rights of abstract, universalized citizens as conceived by Enlightenment ideals and the rights of minority groups to pursue collective ways of life. Minority rights are not derived from the rights of citizenship but from membership in a group. As Asad explains, the very language of 'majority' and 'minority' is also a source of tension. As political terms for party membership and electoral results, an individual's status in one or the other category is subject to change. As cultural terms however, the individual is generally constrained to a fixed status, and of course, one can be labeled a member of a minority group, even when that group constitutes a numerical majority.

In Britain, Asad argues, ethnic, racial and religious minorities are excluded from exercising power in the political sphere as organized groups because rights are only recognized for individual citizens. While the elimination of acts of discrimination can be pursued though this model, the practicing of one's identity is placed outside of the political sphere (1993). The challenge then is how to ensure the respect of individuals and foster conditions that support collective ways of life.

**Decentering techniques**

Creating conditions for social justice and equity, for example such that no one group holds a monopolistic share of power, privilege, capital and knowledge, requires the decentering of the dominant group. A key political question then is how to displace centering processes with decentering processes. How is decentering initiated?

Decentering techniques inhabits ethical space that is not coterminous with group membership as suggested by Bailey's distinction between traitors and outsiders cited
above. Achille Mbembe points out that it is an outdated form of Marxism that assumes that economic or material conditions are automatically reflected in a subject’s consciousness (2001: 5). As a survival strategy, members of excluded groups might adopt the values of the center and collaborate in its positioning projects. As Markell argues, members of centered groups can also acknowledge the unjust basis of their privileges and refuse to collaborate in positioning acts that correspond to what could be framed as their own self-interest (2003: passim).

A range of ethical orientations could be linked to two opposing strategies of border management: centering and decentering. Those who employ centering techniques enjoy the social benefits of being considered normative, and maintain their position at the center by using tools at hand to shore up the border division of their position of privilege. These tools may include violence, justificatory rhetorics, unitarianism, counter terrorism, fundamentalism, legitimating authority, manifest destiny, electoral politics, investment, fear mongering, selective policing, disciplinary techniques, legal maneuvers, social exclusion, invented tradition, and so on. In contrast decentering consists, in Rousseau’s apt phrase, in “pulling up the stakes or filling in the ditch” (1997: 164) to thwart the enclosure of common space. Those engaged in decentering strategies also draw on a variety of tools at hand including pluralism, protest, ecumenicalism, ritual, demands for justice, derision, revolution, independence movements, parody, guerilla warfare, acts in solidarity, and strikes.

9 The use of this term in the Iberian context bears no relation to the Unitarian religion but to a Spanish nationalist doctrine of cultural homogeneity.
10 Rousseau, of course, was not referring to resistance to cultural hegemony but to the privatization of communal property. The appropriateness of my use of the phrase rests in the analogous contest over public space via the creation of boundaries.
Decentering dislodges the position of the dominant and may even be initiated from within, thus sometimes characterized by a sense of betrayal implicit in such terms as ‘race traitor’ (Segrest 1994) or in the way that Catalans are constructed as traitors to the Spanish national project. Decentering may lead to replacing one group by another at the center position but I will argue that the ethical/aesthetic orientation of its tactical array supports the construction of plural relationships among peers in place of the polarized center/margin relation. In the case of the embodied ritual practices of Catalans described in the following chapters, egalitarian decentering is in fact the dominant mode.

**Historical decentering, cultural genocide, and surveillance**

The unique position Catalonia occupies between the nation of Spain and immigrants was produced in part by its waxing and waning fortune as a Mediterranean power over the past millennium. This history helps to clarify the conditions by which Catalonia can be seen to have developed as a nation but not as a nation-state (Laitin 1989) via its language, institutions, symbols, and particularly its positional relationship to other polities.

During the tenth century, the Counts of Barcelona began to exert independence from the Carolingian empire and initiated an identifiably Catalan hegemony in the region. As a distinct and dominant polity within the Crown of Aragon, referred to by some historians as the Catalan-Aragonese Confederacy (1137-1479), Catalans exercised maritime power to expand the confederacy by trade and conquest into Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Sardinia and Sicily. When the dynasties of Castile and Aragon were united in 1479, the sovereignty of the Catalan parliament was preserved and later threats to Catalan
autonomy provoked revolts against the monarchy in 1640\textsuperscript{11} and 1701 (Llobera 2004) but the central dynasty expended little effort to impose Castilian culture on the region during this period (Sahlins 1989).

The Catalan language came under state persecution for the first time in 1714 but remained the language spoken by the majority. Until the twentieth century, Spain had very high illiteracy rates such that attempts to impose Castilian had very little impact on speakers of Basque, Catalan or Galician outside of elite, literate circles (Guibernau 2004: 49).

During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Catalans supported a spectrum of political positions, many of whose partisans took part in Republican militant resistance against the nationalists. When Franco’s troops defeated the Republicans they did so under the battle cry of \textit{España Una, Grande, Libre} (Spain: United, Great, Free), the term “united” signifying a direct attack on pluralism, specifically against the use of the Basque, Galician and Catalan languages and on the autonomy Aragonese, Navarrese, Basques and Catalans had enjoyed for centuries including their own regional governments and laws.

The dictatorship (1939-1975) annulled these agreements, and tortured and killed its political enemies including the elected president of the Catalan \textit{Generalitat}, Lluis Companys who was executed by firing squad. Approximately 100,000 Republicans were executed in Madrid during a one year period from 1939 to 1940. Transformed into public spectacle, the ferocity of the executions even shocked Nazi and Italian fascist visitors. An estimated 130,000 to 150,000, or 4.5\% of the 1936 Catalan population disappeared, either

\textsuperscript{11} The Catalan national anthem, \textit{Els Segadors} (The Reapers) commemorates the 1640 War of the Reapers in which peasants played a major part.
killed or driven into exile. An even greater number of Catalans were purged from public employment (Guibernau 2004: 46).

A number of scholars have described the homogenizing project of the Franco regime as cultural genocide. The Francoists banned the public use of the Catalan language, the display of Catalonia’s flag (la senyera), its national anthem (els Segadors), and its national dance (la sardana), and brutally suppressed any resistance to these prohibitions (Hargreaves 2000: 28; Llobera 2004: 11). Nationalist Castilian Spain not only seized the center but expanded it in an attempt to crush other regional identities out of existence. This had the effect of uniting the residents of Catalonia across class and political affiliation as never before into a clandestine counter-nationalism that learned to cultivate in private that which was proscribed in public. Montserrat Guibernau points to the disparity between these two types of nationalism, “while the regime enjoyed the power and resources necessary to impose its vision of Spain, the peripheral nationalisms were dismembered and condemned to secrecy...The regime’s aim was their complete annihilation as nations” (2004: 51).

The center is not only a trope but is territorial. Suffering many disadvantages as a physical site but situated in the very center of the Iberian peninsula, Madrid was chosen to become the capital of Spain in 1561 precisely in order to more readily wield absolute rule over the patchwork of former medieval kingdoms and separatist polities (Crow 1963: 171). Like a spider in the center of a web or the observation tower of a panoptic prison, Madrid is centrally located for purposes of surveillance and control (cf. Foucault 1995) and it became known as a document-obsessed bureaucracy from the onset (Crow 1963:
The Franco regime used this position to develop Spain as a surveillance state as never before (Guibernau 2004: 45-49).

A repressive police apparatus facilitated an intense sense of fear in Catalonia and the Basque country. The police and the Falangists controlled information on citizens and the issuance of a host of documents that regulated the movement of the population while accumulating data on ‘controlled’ persons. The regime incited accusations against ‘reds,’ required oaths of allegiance to the Falangist movement and carried out purges in the private sector as well as the public. In the early years, groups of Falangists would burst into ballrooms or cinemas and force all present to stand with right arm raised in the fascist salute and sing the Falangist anthem, Cara al sol (Guibernau 2004: 47-48).

Under the dictatorship, and in a different ways at other times, Catalonia has been colonized by Madrid in all but name and I think it helpful to think about the case of Catalonia today as an incompletely liberated postcolonial situation. Some Catalans consider their situation in this way as evidenced by a Vilanovin author of a letter to the editor who argues that because Catalonia is a nation that belongs to the Spanish state, he will “tell things like they are and declare that a colony is still a colony and that all colonization did not end with the twentieth century, the involuntary colonization of Catalans being an example” (Llagostera i Parra 2006). Franz Fanon argued for a common analysis of both fascism and colonialism that asks: “How does an oppressing people

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12 The only legal political association under the regime, the Falange, based on Italian fascism, was, in broad strokes, anti-democratic, anti-communist, pro-Catholic and sought the territorial expansion of Spain (Guibernau 2004: 36-8).

13 School children sang Cara al sol with right arm raised everyday. Thus as Dorothy Noyes has pointed out, the song is seared into the memory of older Catalans even though its performance has been anathema for thirty years (Noyes 2003: 210-11).
behave?... We witness the destruction of cultural values, of ways of life. Language, dress, techniques, are devalorized” (Fanon 1969: 33). Moreover, as an industrial region, Catalonia’s resources were extracted, and tribute paid through taxation and conscription, yet Catalans lacked political representation. Native language and culture were suppressed: Catalan children were educated in the language of the victor, public use of the Catalan language incurred fines, and Catalan public rituals were banned, censored or harnessed to serve a patriotic National Catholicism (Garcia 1972; Noyes 2003; Ortiz 1999). Catalan personal names such as Jordi, Joan or Josep were castilianized to Jorge, Juan, José, streets and plazas were renamed to honor fascist heroes and victories, and even place names were castilianized. During the Franco years, Vilanova i la Geltrú was renamed *Villanueva y Geltrú*.

Settlement by nationals of an occupying power is a common strategy for diluting claims to autonomy. Whether through deliberate orchestration or laissez-faire policies, during the Franco regime, a vast number of rural Spaniards migrated into the industrial zones of Catalonia and the Basque country. By 1970, nearly half the population of Catalonia was born outside its territory, primarily in Southern Spain (Laitin 1989: 302).

**Post-dictatorship Catalonia**

Drawing on ethical themes of democracy, pluralism, autonomy, anti-fascism/anti-racism, solidarity, socialism, and a set of communitarian values encompassed by the term *convivència*, a broad sector of the Catalan people have cultivated a collective ethos that should not be conflated with nationalisms elsewhere. As Pnina Werbner points out, “[n]ationalism is always historically conjectural: it joins with liberalism, human rights,
socialism, fascism” (1997: 263). Spain’s conservative party, the Partido Popular (PP), founded by Franco’s ex-ministers, held the Spanish presidency and a majority in parliament from 1996 until the 2004 elections. The PP represents Francoist tradition more or less openly, employing its unitarian rhetoric and opposing any exercise of Catalan autonomy or linguistic normalization, a position that many conservative non-Catalan Spaniards support (Creus 2005).

The Andalusians who migrated to Catalonia during the Franco regime were imagined to have a castilianizing effect that would contribute to national unity. They did have a castilianizing impact with respect to language, but as another victimized minority—many of them “fugitives of fascism” (Candel and Cuenca 2001: 14) who shared Catalan aspirations to greater autonomy—Andalusians not only generally supported Catalan proletarian resistance towards the Spanish state (Llobera 2004: 149-157) but may have radicalized it. Because Catalanists’ current majority in the region is based on this political alliance, they can not afford to be chauvinist and must forge a mutually acceptable compromise on cultural issues such as linguistic policy with those of Andalusian origin (Hargreaves 2000: 33-5). Making a distinction between cultural and political identity (Mamdani 2001: 264), helps clarify how Andalusians as well as new immigrants are able to become Catalan politically. Pluralism is then in one sense pragmatic political strategy but Catalans more frequently employ aesthetic terms to privilege diversity: many told me that immigrants enrich their society.

Catalonia is a relatively prosperous region that pays considerably more in taxes to the Spanish state than it receives in services (Resina 2007). Contrary to the PP’s claims and in keeping with values of equity and solidarity, Catalans maintain they want to continue
to support the poorer regions of Spain but want more control over public expenditure in their own territory (Pastor 2006). They are aggrieved, among other reasons, because the constitutional statute of autonomy paradoxically recognizes them as ‘having a nationality’ but denies that they are a ‘nation,’ and that their accommodation to the Castilian speaking members of the society to be a bilingual polity has been used to attack the normalization of Catalan.

In practice, all Catalan speakers are bilingual so that Castilian speakers don’t have to be. It is considered normal to prefer to use one’s native language if that language is Castilian but unreasonable if that language is Catalan, giving rise to the imposition of double standards. Thirty years after Franco’s death, one of the most emphasized messages of the Catalan Generalitat to Catalan speakers and learners, ubiquitously blazoned upon billboards and bus stops, is to encourage them to “speak [Catalan] without shame” (parla sense vergonya). Only a decentered people could be ashamed to speak their mother tongue.

Language politics and grassroots pluralism

The matter of the Catalan language is perhaps the most fraught social issue in Catalonia, not only at the level of governance and the discourse of the intelligentsia, but also in everyday lived experience in which opening one’s mouth to speak to an unknown person is almost never unproblematic. A great preponderance of social science scholarship in the region is dedicated to language issues and it is a near constant theme of such fora as letters to the editor. Following periods of dictatorship (1923-1930, 1939-1975) in which the Catalan language was forcefully suppressed, a key article in the Catalan Statute of
Autonomy in the 1932, 1979 and 2006 versions establishes the right to speak Catalan.\textsuperscript{14} In Catalan political discourse, it is axiomatic to state that each right implies a responsibility,\textsuperscript{15} and in this case, not only the obligation to learn Catalan but the duty of the Catalan government to provide free classes and to create the broad conditions that favor the normalization of Catalan. 

The Catalan language suffered a long period of suppression beginning in 1938 when the Franco regime prohibited any official or public use and began to wage a relentless campaign of disparagement including posters commanding “Speak the Language of the Empire” and “Don’t Bark; Speak Christian” (DiGiacomo 1985: 187). Today many native speakers of Catalan over forty can not write Catalan, or do not feel qualified to speak it in their professional capacity, including some university professors who continue to teach in Castilian even if they use Catalan in other contexts. Since the beginning of the current democratic period, the Catalan government not only had to meet the challenge of training teachers in order to provide basic Catalan education to youth and children, but also to provide adult education to the native speakers who lacked literacy skills and to the many Andalusian immigrants and their children who had never learned it at all. In fact, a number of students in the Catalan courses I attended were individuals in their 40s or 50s, born in Catalonia to Andalusian parents, generally with perfect comprehension but often


\textsuperscript{15} For the Civil War generation of the Catalan left, this formulation would have been familiarized through singing the anthemic \textit{L’Internationale}, which includes the line, “no rights without duty, no duty without rights.” In the US, particularly since the Reagan years, conservatives have employed the discourse of individual responsibility to delegitimate claims for collective rights while the US left tends to demand rights while remaining silent on individual responsibility. This stark polarization of rights and responsibilities is foreign to Catalan political rhetoric.
more hesitant to speak Catalan than a recent immigrant learner. In addition to the fear of failure or ridicule faced by any adult language learner, these older students also have to overcome the dictatorship's residual disposition to silence and denigrate the Catalan language.

Catalans are confronted by a number of dilemmas with respect to language. First, they have dedicated enormous resources to overcoming the long campaign to denigrate and eradicate their language and restore it to normative use in public space. In using the term linguistic normalization Catalans refer not only to the destigmatization of their language but principally to a process by which Catalan stands on its own rather than existing referentially as other to Castilian. Catalan speakers are also well aware of the inexorable decline of most languages without a state and to languages pushed from public usage and are therefore attentive to fostering conditions that enable collective, public use of the Catalan language in as many social ambits as possible.

Catalans commonly speak of their territory as a land of welcome (*terra d'acollida*) and seek to accommodate immigrants, foreign students and other visitors staying in Catalonia for a limited time. Although the occasional linguistic militant may disagree, the majority of Catalans recognize that it is more practical for temporary residents to speak or learn Castilian, and, in the words of sociolinguist Noemi Ubach, "in solidarity with them, the learning of Catalan has to be a secondary question" (2003: 275).

This very tendency to accommodate is seen to directly undermine the use of Catalan. The Catalan Information Center for Foreign Workers reported that half of new

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16 The opening line to the preamble of the Statute of Autonomy of 2006 reads: “Catalonia has been shaped over the course of time through the contribution of the energy of many generations, traditions and cultures, which found in Catalonia a land of welcome” (Generalitat de Catalunya 2006a: 7)
immigrants do not understand Catalan while only 5% do not understand Castilian, characterizing this as a "grave deficit" (Playà Masset 2006). One of the best known examples current in anecdotal comments and popular culture is that of Catalan universities where the presence of one or two students from elsewhere in Spain or from Latin America will often result in shifting lectures, discussions, and course materials to Castilian. As Ubach explains, in the presence of people supposed not to understand Catalan there is an implicit, sometimes explicit, consent that in the case of newcomers, immigrants already have enough problems of adaptation without having to grapple with an unfamiliar language. Although this dilemma is opaque or trivial to those outsiders for whom the Catalan language is merely a quaint inconvenience, the stakes are high for Catalans. If Catalan is not normatively employed at the region's top universities, there is nowhere else in the world that Catalan can be fully realized as an academic language. The same dilemma is present in many other communicative contexts. Every retreat of a threatened language from public to private space constitutes a nail in its coffin (Branchadell 1996; Crystal 2002; Vallverdu 1986). As anyone who has ever struggled to explain a term that 'doesn't translate' from one language to another should be able to understand, every language constitutes a unique way of making sense of the world and a vast body of knowledge. When a language becomes extinct, it is as if a library filled with rare volumes has been burned to the ground.

Despite the tendency towards linguistic accommodation (Woolard 1989), there are instances in which a professor or group of students will refuse to relinquish the linguistic space of the classroom. The 2002 French film, L'auberge espagnole, about an international group of students sharing an apartment in Barcelona, contains a scene of
frustration for one of the students after a Catalan professor declined her request that he lecture in Castilian. The Catalan professor is portrayed as unreasonable, not the foreign student. Had the film been set in Paris it would be hard to imagine a sympathetic portrayal of an exchange student asking for regular university lectures in a language other than French. While Catalans attempt to balance normalization with accommodation, usually erring in favor of the latter, many are stung by being ‘badly seen’ (*malvist*) as in the negative portrayal in *L'auberge espagnole*.

The same dilemma infuses interactions of town life. During my first few months in Catalonia, I found that in many social interchanges in which I spoke Catalan, if I failed to understand a reply immediately or stumbled over grammar, the person I was speaking to would shift to Castilian, assuming that this would facilitate our communication and relieve me of a socially awkward moment. In the adult education Catalan classes I attended, other learners reported the same phenomenon, and complained that it undermined their efforts to practice. Our instructor, Meritxell, took up the theme, affirming that this practice is a very common “bad habit that we have (*mal costum que tenim*) but that it is not for bad intent (*mala llet*, lit. bad milk) but from a wish to make others comfortable.” Moreover, she remarked that many Catalan speakers will automatically speak Castilian to any person who appears through visual or verbal cues to be an immigrant, which also has the effect of impeding Catalan language acquisition by removing the incentive to learn (cf. DiGiacomo 1985: 182). Despite a prevalent stereotype of the hostile Catalan nationalist berating Castilian speakers, none of the Catalan learners in my classes nor those I interviewed in other contexts reported ever having experienced any unfriendly treatment for speaking Castilian.
Caught between a sensibility of sociability, an aspiration to the unproblematic use of their mother tongue in their home territory, and anxiety for the very survival of their native tongue, Catalans also chafe under linguistic double standards. Catalonia has two official languages, Catalan and Castilian, but in practice their application is uneven. Catalan is now in many ways the nominal prestige language of the region, being the standard for official business and public ritual, and most public employees must pass a Catalan language proficiency exam as a condition of employment. However, the majority of product labels, news media, books published, user menus and instructions for electronic devices, television programming and movies, for example, are Castilian, not Catalan. Moreover, there is no corresponding language examination for Castilian because proficiency is assumed. These factors prompted one Vilanovin elected official to remark to me that “it is possible to live here without speaking Catalan, but it is not possible to survive here without competence in Castilian.”

17 Point one and two of article 6 of the new Statute articulate the official position:
“1. Catalonia’s own language is Catalan. As such, Catalan is the language of normal and preferential use in Public Administration bodies and in the public media of Catalonia, and is also the language of normal use for teaching and learning in the education system.
2. Catalan is the official language of Catalonia, together with Castilian, the official language of the Spanish State. All persons have the right to use the two official languages and citizens of Catalonia have the right and duty to know them. The public authorities of Catalonia shall establish the necessary measures to enable the exercise of these rights and the fulfillment of this duty. In keeping with the provisions of Article 32, there shall be no discrimination on the basis of use of either of the two languages.” (Generalitat de Catalunya 2006b)

18 After a period of lobbying by the Generalitat, in November 2006, the mobile phone manufacturer Nokia added Catalan to its language menu options. There is no law requiring manufacturers to provide the option but Catalan government entities had argued that of the 32 language options of Nokia’s phones, 12 of those languages had fewer speakers than the number who speak Catalan. The Generalitat only purchases phones that include the Catalan option and 5 million mobile phones were purchased in the Catalan countries last year (Vilaweb 2006).
If virtually all Catalan speakers are bilingual from necessity, Castilian is also widely esteemed by many Catalans for its poetry and literature. In Catalonia, April 23 is the holiday of Sant Jordi, Catalonia's patron saint and also the patron of lovers. Since 1926 this date, which also commemorates the death of Cervantes and Shakespeare, is celebrated as book day, originating in Barcelona, and then adopted as Spanish national Book Day. In 1995, UNESCO declared April 23 International Book Day. In Catalonia, couples give each other books and roses on this day in which more books and roses are sold than during the rest of the year combined. A traditional gift choice is a Castilian text, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, and I observed that *Don Quixote*’s 2005 quatercentenary was observed with great enthusiasm throughout Catalonia with exhibitions, lectures, news and television features and special edition printings. I present this as evidence of a Catalan orientation toward linguistic pluralism in that the normalization of Catalan does not appear to assume the exclusion or denigration of Castilian.

While perhaps not uniform, the Catalan tendency of respect for the Castilian language and pluralist orientation that I witnessed is not always reciprocated by Castilian speakers. Besides the (generally indirect) disparagement of Catalan I heard spoken by some Castilian speakers that Catalan sounds ugly, that it is uncultured, or by referring to it as *Polaco* (Polish), the fact that many long term Castilian-speaking residents do not choose to learn Catalan is a sore point for many Catalans. One friend exclaimed in frustration, “even after they live here for many years they think that learning Catalan is something frivolous!” Over the ten month period of my stay it was the rare day that I did not experience one or more Catalans exclaiming at what they perceived as my rapid acquisition of Catalan. If I demurred that I was still just learning I was inordinately
praised and informed that "there are people who have been here twenty or forty years and still haven’t learned as much" (cf. Noyes 2003). Some acknowledged that many immigrants did learn Catalan but that most of them did not speak with proficiency for several years. Some Catalans, particularly members of the older generation, gave me the impression that by making the effort to learn their language I was providing balm to their souls. I tried to moderate this praise by explaining that I had studied Catalan in California and that as an academic it was part of my job to devote more time to language studies than the majority of newcomers could afford to do, but this had little effect. I found myself somewhat of a curiosity on the occasions that such people would call over one of their friends saying words to the effect of, "oh look, here’s this American lad who’s only been here five months and already he speaks Catalan!"

One Friday evening during rehearsal at the locale of els Bordegassos, the ritual crew described in chapter five, Alba, whose husband and two young children were also members, pulled me over to meet some relatives of hers who had moved to Catalonia from southern Spain, where Alba herself had come fifteen years before. She urged me to speak to them in Catalan so I introduced myself and told them where I was from. She smiled approvingly at me and then prodded them, "you see, you can learn Catalan too." Alba had not only become Catalan but had taken on the role of an enthusiastic linguistic ambassador, a phenomenon I found to be fairly common among established immigrants. I found myself similarly deployed on other occasions as a sort of good example to encourage or perhaps shame monoglot Castilian speakers by their Catalan speaking friends.

In everyday practice, the communicative interchanges between many of these long
term "passively bilingual" Castilian speaking residents and their Catalan speaking friends and acquaintances do not pose a problem: each one speaks his or her own native language which both parties understand. I didn’t realize that this was considered a normal communicative mode until I learned about it from Neus, the receptionist at my daughter’s pre-school. Neus, a woman in her twenties was someone I saw everyday and often chatted with, explained this diglossic practice and also offered her candid opinion about language politics more generally:

I can get along fine with Castilian speakers who haven’t learned to speak Catalan but understand it fine, both of us speaking our own language in mutual respect. What I can’t stand is people who come here, who don’t learn our language and then [raising her voice] criticize me in my own house. They complain that store signs have to include Catalan and demand that we should provide monolingual Castilian education to their children. This is just my private sentiment but this is what angers me. They’re always talking about this being “Spain” but I don’t feel Spanish at all. Spain is a recent invention that has only existed for a short time. There’s no such thing as a “Spanish language.” Castilian

Susan DiGiacomo had reported the prevalence of “passively bilingual” Castilian speakers in Barcelona in 1985 citing three contributing factors: 1) all Catalan speakers speak Castilian such that Castilian speakers do not need to know Catalan, 2) Castilian speakers may avoid speaking Catalan either to avoid making embarrassing mistakes or to affirm their own Castilian identity, and 3) being born in Catalonia or living there many years have provided them with passive knowledge such that they understand Catalan easily (1985: 180-1).

Kathryn Woolard reported of her fieldwork in Barcelona in the 1980s that this mode of bilingual communicative practice was not in practice nor considered acceptable (Woolard 1989).
is native to Castile, not to Spain, Catalan to Catalonia, Galician to Galicia, and Euskara (Basque) to the Basque country.

Neus spoke about the intense discrimination and covert cultural existence suffered by her parents under Franco and the enduring sense of hurt this produced. I asked her about the argument I had seen in anti-Catalan letters to the editor comparing Catalan language normalization policies with Franco’s imposition of Castilian in Catalonia. “That’s the PP [Partido Popular],” she exclaimed, “they’re the grandsons of the fascists: they stand behind the same slogan, ‘España Una, Grande y Libre.’” She concluded, “The last Catalan who imposed the Catalan language on other territories was Jaume I.”21

A few weeks before, Neus had told me that she had informed Lluis, the city’s director of economic development about my research and that he wanted to meet with me to discuss publishing my dissertation in Catalan. I had met with him in the interim and Neus asked if the Ajuntament was going to translate my thesis. I replied that Lluis had said that he would like to translate and publish it but that because of upcoming elections, he couldn’t guarantee it, but had said that any government would likely want to do so since it would help promote Vilanova. Neus agreed, then added, “unless the PP wins! Then you can forget it. They want to kill our language and our culture.”

As a native speaker of neither language, I found the mode of communication Neus had described difficult to maneuver, my stumbles involved mixing the languages or awkwardly shifting to Castilian when addressed in that language. One evening I was

21 James I of Aragon (1208-1276) surnamed the Conqueror, was king of Aragon, count of Barcelona and Lord of Montpellier from 1213 to 1276. Today’s Catalan speaking lands within Spain, France, Andorra and Italy roughly correspond to the territories under his reign by inheritance or conquest (Llobera 2004: 63).
waiting for Jaume, my partner from the Linguistic Pairs program in the bar near his home when another man struck up a conversation with me. He was from Valencia and somehow got on the topic of railways and was singing the praises of the beauty of the train station in Valencia. I had been there recently and we began discussing the ceramic tiles in the station when I realized we were using different words for tile: I had used *rajola* (Catalan) and he, *azulejo* (Castilian). It then dawned on me that it was not merely these two words, but that we were speaking two different languages, so seamlessly that I had not even been conscious of it. In my remaining months in the field I often noticed exchanges of this type in contexts such as between shop keeper and client, between the members of ritual crews, and satirically depicted in popular drama.

A number of Vilanovin traditional dances include a *ball parlat* (lit. talking dance, or dance drama) within its performance repertoire. It is the primary modality of Carnival’s *Ball de Malcasats* (*Dance of the Ill-Matched Spouses*) in which the squabbles between couples mitigated by the interventions of the archbishop, the mayor and the sea captain serve to lampoon political foibles of the past year spanning missteps of local government to the problem of Catalonia’s uneasy position within the Spanish state.

Dancing behind an ensemble of bagpipe, fife and drum, the Malcasats, wearing half-masks and clad in eighteenth century dress, stopped in each plaça they came to and performed their drama. One of the ill-matched couples was a Catalan man and a Spanish

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22 Valencia is not part of the Autonomous Region of Catalonia but lies in the southern end of the Catalan speaking territories. The language receives considerably less government support (the Partido Popular is in power) and is spoken by a considerably smaller percentage of the population (Melchor and Branchadell 2002).

23 Both Catalan and Castilian speakers in Catalonia have adopted words from the other language into their speech. Bilingual people who code switch between two languages often do so without conscious attention (Woolard 1989).
woman: the husband, hunched, cringing, his red *barretina* (a traditional Catalan cap) limply dangling off his head and his wife, straight-backed, dour, with every stitch of lace in place. The first stanzas they exchanged were:

**Català:**

_Aquí us porto aquesta dona,_  
_Per si la podeu esmenar_  
_Jo ja no tinc més esma_  
_Jo ja no la puc aguantar._  
_Sembla que fa tres-cents anys_  
_De que ens varem casar_  
_No para de treure 'm els quartos_  
_I no faig més que pagar!_

**Catalan man:**  
Here you have this lady  
Perhaps you can correct her ways  
I can’t take it  
I can’t stand her any longer,  
It seems like it’s been three hundred years  
Since we got married  
She never stops emptying my purse  
I can’t do anything but pay!

**Española:**

_Este solo se queja_  
_Y se hace el pobrecito_  
_Siempre piensa en lo mismo_  
_Y no se le levanta el pito._  
_El otro día señores, miren su condición_  
_Que puso “Volem l’estatut”_  
_Todo escrito en un condón_  
_Y como la tiene chica_

**Spanish woman:**  
He only complains  
And plays the victim  
He always thinks of the same thing  
And his wienie won’t rise  
The other day, sirs, just look at his condition  
He put “we want the statute [of autonomy]”  
Completely written on a condom  
And because he has a small one
When he had put it on
All one could read was “TUT”
If the condom had been fully extended
Ay, what a fright it would have given me!

Their dialogue continued with the husband speaking Catalan and the wife, Castilian, presenting a ritual affirmation of the intelligibility of this form of communication but also illuminating tensions in the relationship between Catalans and Spaniards. The Catalan is accused of being miserly, a common stereotypic attribution, and moreover as impotent. Catalan political impotence is embodied in the carnivalesque imagery of a human phallus. The text of the proposed statute of autonomy which declared Catalonia a nation among other concrete constitutional amendments had been approved overwhelmingly by the Catalan electorate but eviscerated under the withering attack of Spanish nationalist politics and the failure of Catalan leadership to defend its substantive gains. In this portrayal, the difference in power is highlighted but the fact that such a bilingual mode of dialogue was presented with the assumption that its auditors would recognize and understand it without difficulty is again illustrative of the existence of a speech community in which such a mode is normative.

The contrast between the way in which Catalan and Castilian are often posited as opposing nationalisms manifest as *language communities* and the case I have described in which speakers of each language become one *speech community* (Silverstein 1998) demonstrates a way in which membership in a Catalan community such as Vilanova i la Geltrú is permeable. In this context of diglossia, that is of two languages of unequal
status inhabiting one territory (Ferguson 1959), membership in the speech community is not fixed but rather emergent and embedded (Hanks 2006). What is embedded is that the members know that both Catalan and Castilian are present and that in the case of acquaintances as described, both languages will be understood and met with respectful affect. These embedded qualities allow community members to anticipate either monolingual or bilingual interactions, the point at which membership in a common speech community emerges. The speech community, unlike the language community, is not linked to the state and its projects of bilingual policy measures, linguistic normalization, scholarly texts adjudicating standard use, or the world of text in general (Silverstein 1998). Without making claims beyond the local context, in the practice I have described, the two languages coexist within the center, neither marginalized, both valorized. In other words, the historic jostling for position between the two languages is in these contexts collapsed by members of a local speech community.

I am not arguing that institutions that manage culture necessarily, or in this case, undermine pluralism, rather that there are disjunctures between institutional policy, scholarly discourse, and community practices. What the state codifies as accommodation or the capitulation of Catalan space to Castilian is at the grassroots level rather a negotiable practice wrapped in ethical sensibilities of equality and the cultivation of an affect of sociability. The bilingual practice I have described is an act of decentering that transgresses the boundaries staked out as a conflict between normalization and accommodation. This dissolution of the center position does not imply that Catalan and Castilian are met with identical affect. Catalan speakers described an affect of respect between themselves and Castilian speakers while they demonstrated an affect of warm
enthusiasm for those who learn to speak Catalan. Despite the disjunctures, the Catalan government approximates the aspirations of most Catalans. The vast majority of the electorate, native born and immigrant, vote for Catalanist parties, that is, those that seek greater autonomy for Catalonia, the protection of the Catalan language and culture from Castilian hegemony, and act as a center-to-left united front against the rightist parties historically dominant in central Spain (Castro 2006) that portray pluralism as a threat and that are aggressively anti-Catalanist.

Catalanist aspirations are endorsed by immigrants for a number of reasons. Many immigrants are linguistic or ethnic minorities in their home countries such that their experience may provide a basis for sympathy with the Catalan position. In fact I heard several North African immigrants articulate this similarity with respect to Morocco’s Berber populations. Acquiring the Catalan language tends to facilitate economic objectives made possible by better jobs and greater integration into many aspects of community life as I will describe later. The left flank of the Catalanist political spectrum with its agenda of human rights and solidarity with oppressed peoples explicitly recognizes the plight of immigrants and may contribute to the reciprocal recognition of Catalanist aspirations by newcomers.

The ethic of solidarity is put into practice in a number of ways. Public demonstrations in solidarity with Palestine or the victims of Darfur are a common sight. Catalan volunteer medical professionals were among the first to arrive in Baghdad during the US bomb attacks in 2003. Catalan families hosted 750 Sudanese refugee children for the duration of the summer of 2006 (Cartró Boada 2006). Three brigades of volunteers from Vilanova’s county, the Garraf, have traveled to Palestine to provide medical aid (Diari de
Vilanova 2005). Catalans also adopt foreign orphans at a high rate, primarily from China, Africa and South Asia (Playà Maset 2008).

Ignacio, the only person I knew in Vilanova before moving there, told me that Catalans began adopting children in great numbers following the broadcast of a television series about the plight of orphans about a decade previously and that in Vilanova it had become a chain phenomenon. He explained that because everyone knows families with adopted children, adoption has become considered as a normal way of having a family. A local publisher has issued a series of children’s books of real adoption narratives that relate information about the child’s country of origin and his or her adoption and integration process (e.g. Vinyals i Florenciano 2006).

Figure 6. “For the extension of the social use of the Catalan language: think, live, struggle, sing, remember, celebrate, love, write, study, read, hate, work, speak IN CATALAN!” This poster catalogs examples from the spheres of affect, embodiment, ritual and ethical action to articulate a vision of language politics. Note photo of Malcolm X at bottom right.
These books model becoming Catalan while maintaining a relationship to one's place of origin. Adoption in Vilanova could be seen as a form of solidarity practice and perhaps as a way in which Catalans recompose their society at the intimate level of family.

Although the modern notion of race may be said to originate in Spanish history, membership in the Catalan collectivity lacks a salient racial criterion. At the legal level, Catalan citizenship is strictly civic. Long-term former president, Jordi Pujol's famous formulation avers that "anyone who lives and works in Catalonia and wants to be Catalan, is Catalan" (Pujol 1976: 20). At the same time, much Catalanist discourse affirms the importance of the Catalan language and traditional practices and these comprise criteria for the performance and recognition of Catalan identity (Candel and Cuenca 2001; Woolard 1986). While this second sense of belonging to the Catalan collectivity requires assimilation to the degree of learning the language and some form of participation in community life, both native born Catalans and newcomers whom I interviewed denied that successful integration requires 'giving up who you are.' Boumediene, who has lived in Vilanova twenty years and works for the Ajuntament, told me he considers himself equally Moroccan and Catalan: "I go back to Morocco every summer to visit family," he said, "While I'm here, I miss Morocco and while I'm there, I miss Catalonia." These claims do not counterindicate the existence of disproportionate demands placed on newcomers seeking inclusion in Catalan society nor that there may be

24 The term raza (race) and official exclusions based on proof of blood purity date from the 15th century when they were deployed to preserve the privileges of the "old Christians" as Spain's Jews and Muslims were increasing forced to convert or emigrate (Kamen 1997).
subtle forms of exclusion that act as barriers to these aspirations. This discourse does demonstrate that Catalan identity is commonly understood as permeable rather than essential, and that homogeneity is not a requirement of belonging.

The underdogma of bulls and burros: being badly seen

The anti-Catalan political agenda is justified not only via rhetoric of national unity under Castilian linguistic and cultural norms but through a series of popular negative stereotypes. Catalans are said to be tight-fisted, closed, stubborn and stupid (Buezas 2000). The salience of the latter two attributes are evident in the term burro that Spaniards have applied to Catalans in contrast to the animal Spaniards deploy to symbolize themselves: the noble, courageous and hyper-masculine bull or toro. The use of the ass or donkey to symbolize obstinacy and stupidity is ancient and widely distributed\(^\text{25}\) and this use may be found in Catalan as well as in the Castilian language.

Knowing that Spaniards use the representation of the donkey in derogatory reference to Catalans, the visitor to Catalonia may be puzzled by the ubiquity of this figure on bumper stickers, caps, and t-shirts, with the animal’s body frequently displayed against the ground of a Catalan flag.

The donkey is known in Catalan by three terms, ruc, ase and burro and is a figure strongly associated with the Catalan countryside. A species unique to Catalonia, el ruc català, is currently being brought back from the brink of extinction with the acclaim that “the Catalan burro is best in the world” (Miralda 2005). Dos en un burro, a popular 2006 book recounted the odyssey of two young men in a burro drawn cart to explore their

\(^{25}\) Motif A2537.2 Why ass is stupid.
Catalan heritage after choosing the burro as the most appropriate mode of transportation to the task (Guinart and Sabadi 2006). Catalans have re-appropriated the insult in order to assert pride in their identity, adding the burro to their array of national symbols. An explanation I heard a number of times is that the burro can handle a lot of abuse and still persevere, thus becoming a symbol of the determined underdog. Positive traits Catalans sometimes attribute to themselves are hard work and commitment (Vicens i Vives 1962), traits they may perceive the donkey as sharing. I asked Jordi, a young historian who coordinates programs for Vilanova’s museums, about the burro and he developed the theme: “the burro is a loser animal. It’s humble and it’s sterile, it’s the end of the line.”

“Catalans celebrate losing. Catalonia’s national holiday commemorates the day we lost our sovereignty,” he continued, “and Barça is a loser team that people support avidly.”

To the extent that animals are still good to think with, the contrast between bull and burro is another indicator of the way that Castilian Spaniards conceptualize themselves at the center, in this case, inside the bullring, while Catalans construct themselves as long-suffering but indomitable underdogs. To decenter Castilians’ taurine iconographic hegemony Catalans use their burro to ridicule the bull: a popular t-shirt depicts a bewildered bull, sent flying by a kick from the burro’s hind hooves.

26 Jordi, a native of urban Barcelona, is mistaken. The mule, which is the offspring of a horse and a donkey, is sterile.

27 On September 11, 1714 Barcelona was defeated in the War of the Spanish Succession. In punishment for having supported Hapsburg claims to the throne of Spain, the victorious Bourbon monarchy dissolved Catalonia’s parliament (Generalitat) and abolished its laws.

28 Barça is the familiar name of the Futbol Club Barcelona.
In keeping with the way their aspirations are framed in central Spain, many international visitors interpret the Catalanist agenda as reactionary nationalism. Josep Llobera argues that framing Catalanism as nationalism is to arbitrarily categorize it as negative, remarking, “[m]any people only see the nationalism of others, while they of course bask in legitimate patriotism. To them I have only this to say: nationalism is the patriotism of others” (2004: 144). Perhaps because Catalans are largely middle class and educated they are not deemed subject to discrimination. Perhaps because they have not taken up armed struggle or demanded secession from Spain, they are not reckoned to merit solidarity. Catalans “cannot be called subaltern from any global perspective” (Noyes 2003: 9) yet neither can they be considered a hegemonic majority. Recognizing Catalonia as decentered helps disarticulate an often assumed coincidence of economic and political power. Catalonia is, as Susan DiGiacomo pointed out, “politically peripheral and at the same time economically central” (DiGiacomo 1985: 186). Allowing for such
polyvalent positioning, the decentering concept helps unravel the specificity of social suffering and to elucidate the position of Catalans at the double-crossing, simultaneously centered with respect to newcomers and decentered within the Spanish state.

Montserrat Guibernau has pointed to historical conditions that have made pluralism a strategic advantage in Catalonia: “In a stateless nation subordinated to a state engaged in a firm homogenizing process which disregards national minorities, a certain degree of cooperation and of solidarity among opposition forces generally emerges” (2004: 65). I would argue that the Catalan project of autonomy has engaged pluralist strategies since the 1930s when anarchist and communist workers from Andalusia, anarchist Catalan workers, and liberal Catalan bourgeoisie began forming a(n uneasy) united front against Franco’s nationalists (Llobera 2004: 149-157). Under the dictatorship, a sector of the Catalan left actively mobilized the immigrant population in the cause of freedom for Catalonia in order to advance social justice broadly (Guibernau 2004: 68). These disparate elements came to form a somewhat unified Catalanist assemblage spanning left to center right, encompassing the vast majority of the electorate (Llobera 2004: 24). This project incorporated many southern workers who are now considered and consider themselves Catalan with Andalusian roots, or els altres Catalans (the other Catalans) (Candel 1964), Catalan identity being grounded in political values and community participation rather than in biological descent (Llobera 2004). Although some of the immigrants were and continue to be hostile to Catalanism (Guibernau 2004), a large number were sympathetic and their contribution is reckoned an asset. It may be at least in part due to this experience that many Catalans today are sanguine about the current immigration from parts beyond Spain to their territories, tending to see immigrants as
potential allies in a common project and as positive contributors to Catalan society (Candel and Cuenca 2001). A 2006 opinion poll revealed that at the national level, forty percent of immigrant voters support the Socialists while only fifteen percent support the conservative Partido Popular (La Vanguardia 2006), thus aligning immigrants with many Catalans from a party perspective. It remains to be seen whether Catalans will join in broader common projects with the new immigrants as they have with the old, an outcome yet to be constituted by the dispositions of both hosting and arriving communities. In any case, immigration is a familiar phenomenon in Catalonia, perceived with little threat: as Guifré, a local musician and instrument maker from an old Vilanovin family told me with a shrug, “we’re used to it.”

In the spectrum of political cultures described by Connolly, ranging from an “authoritative center” to pluralism, he identifies those cultures as constituted by ethos, sensibility, and ritual as well as by ideology, philosophy or faith. I see decentering practices in the array of moves in all these registers involved in the “task of forging a positive ethos of engagement between multiple constituencies coexisting on the same strip of territory” (Connolly 2005: 34), a phrase I believe many Catalans would accept as a good definition of their own term convivència. This engagement does not guarantee social justice but constitutes a condition under which equality and justice can be pursued. As Connolly points out, the dynamics of social equality are not determined by conditions of pluralism but the two registers bear a mutual influence upon each other.

I do not consider the political, historical, linguistic and discursive decentering of Catalonia as determinative of the ritual technologies used to cultivate selfhood in Vilanova i la Geltrú that I describe in the following chapters. They rather contribute to
the conditions in which this cultivation takes place and serve as resources for Catalans and immigrants to draw upon in the local construction of community ethics and aesthetics.

Following this chapter’s focus on the broader historical, linguistic and political context of Catalonia as a region, the chapters to come will retain connections to this context while focusing on a specific place, the town of Vilanova i la Geltrú, where I conducted ten months of ethnographic field research. It is through presentation of this intimate local data that I will elucidate how the seemingly disjunctive domains of the sensory and the political are closely interwoven.

The next chapter, as well as the two that follow it, center on selected ritual practices, primarily drawn from the celebration of Carnival, the festival of the town’s patron saint (Festa Major), and the construction of human towers (castells). It is not my purpose to describe the entire ritual calendar nor present a full description of Vilanova’s Carnival, Festa Major, or ritual crew of castellers, each of which has been the subject of one or more full-length studies (Capdevila, Brotons, and Mañé 1997; Ferrer i Soler and Anguera i Llauradó 1964; Garcia 1972; Guinovart i Callejón and Orriols i Caba 2002; Puig Almirall 2002; Sagra 2006). The focus of my investigation is to observe how an array of ritual techniques is employed to produce shared embodied experiences and link them to a range of social and ethical orientations, together constituting conditions for the social reception of immigrants. Having accomplished this, I will return to the realm of immigration policy and discourse in chapter six, while retaining a local standpoint in the emergent relations between the old and new residents of Vilanova i la Geltrú.
Chapter III: Ritual embodiment

This chapter and the two that follow it focus on ritual practices in the host community that produce local characteristics of the sensorium. The sensorium emerged as an object of knowledge in the mid-seventeenth century, envisaged as the part of the brain that receives sensory impressions. Anthropologists have considered the sensorium as a set of perceptual orientations specific to a social milieu that might, for example, privilege the visual or suppress the olfactory. These preferences jointly constitute a perceptual stance toward the world. A number of scholars have provided accounts of the relative valuation of the senses, and the resultant variation of epistemological claims and practices (Classen 1999; Dundes 1980; Geurts 2002; Goody 2002; Howes 2003; Kanaana and Muhawi 2005). My project is to explore the sensorium as an object of technique, a medium of learned competencies, and a locus of emergent publics.

Sensory techniques are practices that facilitate patterns of experience for persons within the community. In Vilanova i la Geltrú, the social production of the sensorium also constitutes conditions of reception for immigrants to the community. A sphere of physically proximate sensory and perceptual transfers, the sensorium is a register of experience no less salient to understanding social integration than that of state policy, educational curricula, or economic structure. While immigration is essential to the entirety of this dissertation as part of a broad account of social encounters, there is a limit to the extent that newcomers will appear in the following pages. I will suggest ways in which their absences are as eloquent as their presences.

\[29\] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “sensorium.”

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The ritual techniques described in these chapters can be seen as productive of what Friedrich Schiller termed *aesthetic education*, a tuning of receptivity to the world in both sensory/affective and intellectual domains (Schiller 1967). In contemporary anthropology, Schiller’s notion has been configured in terms of the role of the sensory in ethical development such as in Charles Hirschkind’s study of moral listening to Islamic sermon cassettes. Hirschkind moves the anthropology of the senses in a political direction by investigating the “sensorium as condition for and object of emergent ethical-political reasoning” (2006: 29). In a similar vein, the purpose of the following chapters is to broadly explore the entanglements between the sensory and the ethical encountered in the ritual life of Vilanova i la Geltrú.

The primary idiom of these entanglements is the body itself. Through everyday practices the Vilanovin body is oriented towards a physically proximate sociality: kisses in greeting, elbows rubbed together convivially while standing at the café, flowing with the tide of foot traffic down the pedestrian pathways (*rambles*) and eddying in public squares to co-inhabit public space. In speaking to me, Vilanovins, both North African and Iberian in origin, sometimes pointed to these embodied patterns of daily public life as characteristics of a pan-Mediterranean society to which they consider they jointly belong. I will explore ways that these and other embodied practices are constitutive of local and regional publics. Cleavages based on religion, language, national origin, or political affiliation are certainly at play in Vilanova but the salience of these categories is often tempered by the embodied solidarity of learning to collectively inhabit local space.

During the intensity of annual ritual cycles, attention is drawn to the body as medium and object through a range of performative techniques perceived as rooted in continuities
with a Catalan past. These techniques do not constitute unchanging traditions but serve as
templates for improvisation and social commentary. Focusing mainly on language and
gesture, José Limón demonstrated how counterhegemonic discourses may be performed
through bodies as natural symbols and via carnivalesque play idioms of sexuality, mock
aggression, and laughter (Limon 1989). Taking Limón’s model as a point of departure, I
will direct attention to sensory and affective aspects of embodied Carnival techniques,
and describe how anxiety-producing themes—terrorism, national police, infectious
disease, interculturalism, and death—can be driven into the body and reworked into
tastes, smells, sounds, movements, images.

Many, but by no means all, Vilanovins are devoted practitioners of public rituals that
give form to a series of annual celebrations known collectively as festes. Although all
Catalan towns celebrate at least a few festes, and may dedicate intense energy to one,
most often in honor of their patron saint, Vilanova i la Geltrú is known for the
enthusiastic observance of many different festes. Townspeople describe this proclivity
with an embodied metaphor when they say that “Vilanova always has a leg in the air.”30
The most important festes occupy multiple days and nights but by far the longest festa
and the one with the highest degree and hottest fever of participation is Carnival, known
in Catalan as Carnestoltes or Carnaval.31

30 A no longer current saying, “Vilanova is festa” also defined the town by this characteristic (Martorell
2006: 71).
31 Carnestoltes and Carnaval are both used to refer to the ritual cycle of Carnival. The personage of King
Carnival is referred to as Carnestoltes or by various sobriquets and honorifics but not as Carnaval. Except
for quotes in Catalan, I will use the English word Carnival to refer to Catalan Carnaval as well as to
Carnival phenomena in their broader distribution throughout Europe and the Americas.
This chapter and half of the next, recount my observations of Carnival from the position of a newcomer to whom many things were unfamiliar. I did not know what to expect, how to competently participate, and had only a few acquaintances to orient me. This will contrast with my accounts in chapter five of the Festa Major that occurred six months later, as a performing member of a ritual crew, considerably more integrated into the social life of the community. My own process of integration forms part of a narrative of migration, both in the ways my position as a male North American scholar made my experience different from that of other newcomers, and in the ways that it was similar. I will begin with an account of a moment of my own ritual becoming.

Procession of Moixó Foguer

The week before Carnival, I saw a news item in the local paper titled “Feathers with sanitary control for el Moixó,” explaining that during Carnival, someone called Moixó Foguer (lit. little bird bonfire) would sally forth to scandalize everyone with his nudity and that the feathers pertaining to this personage had passed sanitary control for avian flu (Diari de Vilanova 2006n). On the Saturday following the tumultuous arrival of King Carnival (el Rei Convivència), I hurried from one ritual event to another in a futile attempt to witness all of the elements of the day. In the evening, I made my way to the Plaça de les Cols where I hoped to intercept the enigmatic Moixó Foguer on his progress. The streets and public squares were littered with festa detritus such as paper confetti and thronged with celebrants, many in costumed groups, either forming miniature processions, or pausing to refresh themselves outside one of the bars or cafes in the plaça or the pedestrian rambles that fed into it. Similar scenes were taking place all over town.
At the corner of the plaça I saw a group dressed as chickens, wearing boxes of vaccine with drip leads to needles inserted in their wings. The topical reference to avian flu caused me to wonder if these figures had something to do with Moixó Foguer. Then, from beyond the farther end of the plaça, I heard the strident sound of the *gralla*, a reed instrument paramount in Vilanovin street music, announcing the approach of a ritual crew. A group of birdlike hominids covered in white feathers emerged from the darkness into the illuminated plaça, pulling a small carriage which bore a painted cabinet. The *grallers* went silent, the group halted mid-plaça and I drew near in order to photograph them.

Just as I was composing a shot, I was grabbed from behind by someone who sharply scolded me, "*no fotos*" and then shouted to the crowd "*Mireu! un musol!*" (Look! an owl!). Chagrined but powerless, I limply acquiesced as my captor derisively described my owlish characteristics to the crowd while he lasciviously groped my chest. Disoriented and less adept in Catalan than I would later become, I did not understand all of my subjugator’s witty banter. But I knew that when applied to a person, the word ‘owl’ communicates perceptual ineptitude and roughly translates to ‘dim-wit.’ The tirade came to an end and I was released. I turned and saw my erstwhile captor, a tall, long-nosed, masked figure dressed in black who I later learned is called the *Xerraire* (jabberer), derived from a verb that may be applied to the vocalizations of birds or human beings. The next moment, a person covered head-to-toe in feathers jumped forth from the painted box before me, launching clouds of yet more feathers into the air to the delight of those assembled.
Mikhail Bakhtin developed a theory of the role of humor and popular ritual in Carnival to produce a festive perception of the world, constituting a second life of the people, exterior to the seriousness of officialdom. He argued that the feast is a primary human cultural form, rejecting as superficial its reduction to the need for rest from work (Bakhtin 1984: passim). Bakhtin’s claim poses a challenge to both capitalist and orthodox Marxist categories of experience in which play as a human activity is ontologically secondary to the “real” instrumental world of political and economic systems (Limon 1989: 478). In their broad strokes, the popular ritual forms Bakhtin described as characteristic to medieval and renaissance life continue to be strongly present in the festes of Vilanova i la Geltrú. There is a risk that translating festa as party, festival, or holiday will call up misleading associations so I will use the Catalan term and provide some background about how that term is understood.

Valencian sociologist Antonio Ariño acknowledges that festa in a general sense may refer to any gathering of people for purposes of diversion but elucidates the concept of festa as a collective ritual practice and social institution. Ariño defines festa in dialectical relation to quotidian life, that it is exclusive of work time and that it submerges its participants in an atmosphere that propitiates and intensifies emotional interaction. Festa cultivates a state of paradox that synthesizes but maintains the tensions between rite and site, ceremony and diversion, tradition and spontaneity, the spiritual and the corporal, and the intimate and the public. Moreover, Ariño asserts that it is through the medium of festa that a key dimension of community existence is expressed and reaffirmed that puts diverse social registers into play (Ariño 1998: 9). I would amend this assertion to maintain that the medium of festa is not necessarily used to express conscious ideas about

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community but to embody, contest, imagine, and negotiate dimensions of community life.

I affirm Ariño in his conceptual move towards collapsing the convention in an earlier anthropology to portray ritual as creating and maintaining social order in opposition to festival as a safety valve to release antisocial drives that threaten order (Cohen 1993). Comparing Carnival to Christmas on Saint Vincent, Roger Abrahams demonstrated that neither is a device of social control but rather jointly provide opportunities to celebrate the plural orientations of different social sectors. The aggressive, transgressive behaviors of Carnival bring social tensions into the open and enact them in performance, not as a revelation of a unified social order but as a way to focus attention on conflicts and incongruities, embodying them in “senseless” acts (Abrahams 1972). Such a formulation is consistent with Bakhtin’s assertion that Carnival constitutes a second, parallel form of life. However, in the case of Abraham’s data, some people “do not play Carnival,” considering it anti-Christian and improper, so there is a sense in which the divergent characters of different ritual cycles are the province of distinct publics.

In the case of Vilanova, while there are undoubtedly individuals who do not participate out of personal preference or subgroup sensibility, the divergent character of rituals do not map onto social distinctions. The heterogeneous people of Vilanova—young, old, Catholic, Muslim, atheist, native-born, and foreign-born—who participate in Carnival to any degree, may not share a common interpretation of its rituals. Yet these participants do share common space and participate in sensory and perceptual transfers.

As a space of possibility, Carnival presents the opportunity to cultivate a circumscribed recklessness and mayhem (*rauxa i avalot*) including grotesque embodied
practices and an affective mode of liminality. The period of Lent that follows is, at least ostensibly, a time for the same people to cultivate the modes of abstinence, reflection and repentance. Although easily contrasted, both Carnival and Lenten modes are positively valued but neither deemed appropriate to everyday life during the rest of the year when people throughout the Catalan lands are imputed to cultivate seny, or rational centeredness\textsuperscript{32} as the normative mode of life. In these ways Vilanovins foster a kind of plural personhood, ready to adapt to different configurations of community life. Seny might be understood as a normative mode but it is not exclusive, and by being summarily banished during Carnival's reign of senselessness, seny is explicitly decentered.

The term Vilanovins frequently employ to characterize Carnival acts and persons that I have translated as senseless, is poca-solta. Solta is the quality of being well-adapted to circumstances and the capacity to act in line with the requirements of a situation. To be without (sense-solta) or to have little (poca-solta), are expressions that mean to do things badly, to act without common sense, without clear motives, or incongruently to the circumstances. The aesthetics of Carnival are oriented by a common sense of what is appropriate to Carnival, thus senseless does not literally mean without any judgment, but rather the subjunctive positing of an alternative order to selected norms and expectations.

The grotesque provides an idiom through which to playfully deconstruct normative sensibilities and process conflicts or anxieties. As performance, Carnival lifts taken-for-granted norms out of their context, or decontextualizes them such that these norms can be

\textsuperscript{32} Arguably the most Catalan of folk concepts, seny may be understood as a collective sense of justice, consensus and probity, which does not neatly translate into English. A seminal author of the concept, Vicens i Vives, initially defined seny as that which "situates us right in the middle of our life" (...situant-nos el bell mig de la nostra vida) (Vicens i Vives 1962: 214) thus I will use centeredness as a place holder for the concept. A further exegesis of Vicens i Vives' development of the term appears later in this chapter.
reflexively examined, critiqued, and adjusted (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Were this reflexive process carried out exclusively in the intellectual sphere, the people without the linguistic capacity or inclination to participate would be left out of the process. By driving reflexivity into sensory experience, children, people with cognitive or perceptual disabilities, and recent immigrants, for example, can participate and develop important social competencies. I do not mean this in the didactic sense that Carnival reversals of norms demonstrate what those norms are, even if that is also the case. I mean that learning to laugh together, to find pleasure and aesthetic appreciation in the same objects, and producing collective, affectively charged memories, are forms of social solidarity constitutive of a sense of belonging to a community.

In Michael Warner's terms, one kind of public is that of a crowd witnessing itself in visible space, knowing itself in common visibility and common action. Another kind of public he describes is that which comes into being through the circulation of texts, inseparable from the rhetoric through which it is imagined, a public that “exists by virtue of being addressed” (Warner 2002: 50). His model suggests the following terms. 

Contextual public in the first instance, is appropriate to the assembled crowd attending Carnival. The second, applicable to the Catalan citizenship, is textual public. I will add a third term, the textural or sensory public that fashions itself through embodied performance. In the case of festa, this is also a contextual public but it is not merely visually, nor passively constituted. The textual public is also fashioned through a circulation of textures and embodied experience, as implied by the term rhetoric, among
other meanings carrying the sense of the *expressive action of the body in speaking*.

I will return to Warner’s analysis of publics later in the chapter.

The incident of Moixo Foguer related above is but one of dozens of events that comprise Carnival in Vilanova and a minor sideshow at that, but one that serves to illustrate a few of Bakhtin’s claims about Carnival. “Carnival does not know footlights” avers Bakhtin, in that it does not acknowledge a clear distinction between actor and spectator (1984: 7). I made myself an unwitting target of the Xerraire by separating myself from the ritual by performing spectatorness, interposing a camera between myself and the plumed practicants. For this transgression of Carnival order I was bodily extracted from the sidelines where I had placed myself and then thrust into the center of the drama. The comic verbal abuse I suffered exemplified the ambivalent Carnival laughter central to Bakhtin’s conception. Carnival laughter is simultaneously gleeful and derisive and it is the convivial laughter of all the people towards everything: no one is exempt (op. cit.: 11-12). The act of subjecting me to mild abuse had an effect opposite of what might be expected of public humiliation in that it served to incorporate rather than exclude me. In fact it counteracted my self-exclusion. Like the practice of ‘permitted disrespect’ used to intensify the intimacy of friendships, ostensibly offensive behavior, framed as comic, may serve to cultivate an amicable connection (Basso 1979; Limón 1989). In Limón’s terms, skillfully applied “playful nips,” including groping, mock aggression, and degrading *double entendre* such as I experienced, “produce a paradoxical effect, namely the interactional production of solidarity” (1989: 478).

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33 *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “rhetoric.”
Bakhtin articulates a grotesque concept of the body, describing the specific sensual qualities of Carnival acts. Exaggerated bodily features such as noses, bellies, ears and phalluses signal sensual appetites, and an affirmation of the lower bodily stratum (Bakhtin 1984: 368-436). The Xerraire, masked with a long pointed nose, subjected me to “ritualistic debasing gestures” (op. cit.: 385), verbally describing me as an animal while his lascivious groping of my chest portrayed my body as an object of gratification. Every personage in the ritual of Moixo Foguer, including the bearers, the Xerraire and myself, were visual or semantic avian-human hybrids; an embodiment of the grotesque specific to this ritual. Catalan has a rich vocabulary of abusive insults, any of which could have called attention to my dimwitted behavior. By marking me as a owl, a taxonomic member of the practicants’ own genus avis, the insult constructed me as a temporary member of the ritual crew.

The actions and images of the ritual performance of Moixo Foguer directed attention to the body, and produced multi-sensory and affective experience, in this case a nighttime play of darkness and light, of din and quiet, of confinement and release (both Moixo’s and my own), of the tactile and visual onslaught of feathers, of surprise, aggressive sexuality, laughter, chagrin, and relief. As performance, the ritual act was framed as pertaining to the alternate logics of the world of Carnival, of crystallizing an intimate sense of community, and as an aesthetic experience to catch and release, rather than flatten to a photographic representation. The sensory experience was yoked to a community sensibility that I learned about by violating. I received a message: this is an invitation to communion. The person who stands apart to interpret it is missing the point: don’t think, experience!
For those beyond the remedial stage of ritual literacy, embodied experience is invested with additional community sensibilities. A brochure produced for visitors and townsfolk, including Castilian and Catalan language editions, highlighted twelve Carnival events including Moixó Foguer. The description includes the seeming non sequitur, “His infectious illness may be intuited without being seen” and the photo is labeled “the diseased one” (Federació d'associacions pel carnaval 2006). The news story I cited linked Moixó Foguer’s morbidity to then current alarm about avian flu, thus these two textual references draw attention to the body as diseased and dangerous. Like the bird-like figure of the Plague Doctor (Herlihy 1997) who the Xerraire resembles, the ritual of Moixó Foguer and the vaccine-bearing chicken-people, engage anxieties about infectious diseases, mocking them on the one hand, and on the other, articulating contemporary medical-technical knowledge about their transmission and prevention (cf. Goldstein 2004). The parodic treatment of dangerous illness is suggestive of what Bakhtin identified as Carnival’s model of a gleeful death that recognizes destruction as generative (1984: 197-8), a feature to be made explicit in the rituals of the dead king’s body. The playful treatment of the theme of death in no way indicates that Vilanovins are indifferent to their own mortality (cf. Brandes 2006) but is perhaps rather a show of agency, a choice to engage rather than deny the inevitable.

A DVD available as a memento from the kiosk of the Federation of Carnival Associations (FAC) at the end of Carnival included footage of the preparation of the figure of Moixó Foguer illustrating other aspects of the grotesque body. It showed a naked man, from whose body all hair save his eyebrows appeared to have been removed, covered in a thick coat of honey to which an abundance of feathers was then applied,
transforming him into a human-animal hybrid. One could speculate as to possible mimetic allusions to embalming the dead, preparing the body for surgery, tarring-and-feathering, delousing, or the soul in flight. Concretely, the acts of removing the body hair and applying honey and feathers are actions that transform the boundary of the body. By these actions, the epidermal zone is first reduced then augmented to produce what Bakhtin referred to as a strange anatomical fantasy that transgresses the boundary between the body and the world (op. cit.: 347). Moixo Foguer emphasizes what Nadia Seremetakis calls the passage between sensory interiors and exteriors (1994: 6) and dramatizes “the transfers, exchanges, and attachments that hinge the body to its environment” (Hirschkind 2006: 29). The ritual of Moixo Foguer is just one of many instances of a kind of sensory play upon and between the bodies of Carnival participants demonstrating sensory perception as a purposeful act rather than as passive reception or mere entertainment.

Repression and resistance

The ritual of Moixo Foguer derives from a medieval practice of the same name indigenous to the Penedès region in which a plumed figure chased a personage with figs sewn to his clothes and ridiculed people in the market during Carnival (Soler i Amigo 1998: 451). But the ritual in which I played an unintended part is a recently recuperated practice. The ritual is just one example of how Carnival in Vilanova has been subject to

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34 Festa organizers and local press used the term ‘recuperated’ to describe reintroduced lapsed traditional practices. Meaning to recover something that was lost, the verb recuperar characterizes the ritual performance as a static object, dusted off and returned to circulation. Vilanova’s Director of Culture suggested to me that this is an unwarranted, romantic claim of continuity and prefers ‘reinvented,’ thus characterizing these practices as contemporary artifices of human making.

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constant innovation (Federació d'associacions pel carnaval 2006). Its vitality does not lie in preserving antique aesthetic forms as museum pieces but in smashing them against contemporary social realities, allowing many different people to pick up the pieces and incorporate them in their own self-fashioning.

Although Carnival has been celebrated in Vilanova i la Geltrú for hundreds of years, with detailed journalistic descriptions beginning in the early nineteenth century (Garcia 1972), the most radical disjunctive in Carnival observance throughout modern Spain came in 1939 when Carnival was banned by the victorious Falange (Federació d'associacions pel carnaval N.d.). The rationale provided by the Nationalists was that the wearing of masks would provide cover for people wishing to carry out reprisals to settle political scores (Mintz 1997). If the dictatorship’s objections ran no deeper than this it would have been straightforward enough to suspend Carnival for a year or two or merely to ban wearing masks, a practice that had been historically regulated for similar reasons elsewhere (Cohen 1993; Foster 1960: 177). Bakhtin characterized Carnival as constituting a second life of the people opposed to orthodoxy and hierarchy, typified by ridicule of authority, sensory-moral license and rejection of official truth. To the extent that Iberian Carnival bears these traits, there is good reason to propose that the pious, reactionary Catholic and anti-democratic dictator would have been vehemently opposed to Carnival as a whole mode of being and not merely due to imputed security risks.

The Iberian historical example appears to corroborate Bakhtin’s generalization but this is in part due to the exclusiveness between a certain instance of dictator with a specific pattern of Carnival, not because these constructs are universal or mutually exclusive. Achille Mbembe has given examples of lecherous dictators whose domination
is essentially constituted through obscene and grotesque spectacles and has argued that
the carnivalesque laughter and play of the people does not constitute a purely
oppositional resistance or counter-hegemony but that “ribaldry and derision are actually
taking the official world seriously” (2001: 107). A tendency to romanticize resistance
could arguably be found in Bakhtin and in Vilanova, but the substantive issues mocked or
driven into the body during Carnival are also the subject of conventionally serious
treatment by the same people at other times. As a second life of the people, Carnival in
Vilanova provides a space in which status quo knowledges and positionings are
creatively reimagined, re-sensed, and re-embodied: a temporary conjugation of
community practices into the subjunctive, a time not merely to wonder about, but to play
out, what if?

In Warner’s terms, the circulation of Carnival performances constitutes a
counterpublic, distinct from and resistant to the vast asymmetries of the production and
reception of mass culture, and in this case, of national politics (Warner 2002: 73). In
chapter two I demonstrated ways in which Catalonia may be productively analyzed as a
postcolony. Mbembe also notes that the postcolony is made up of several public spaces,
each with its own logic but liable to be entangled with the logics of others, producing
subjects with flexible identities who can successfully negotiate changing contexts
(Mbembe 2001: 104). I think this is fair to say of many Vilanovins both with respect to
their navigation between ritual and ordinary time and as uncomfortable but pragmatic
subjects of the Spanish state. The navigational tactics and the texture of discomfort will
differ, for example, between Catalans who lived through the dictatorship, tenuously
situated undocumented South American laborers, and North Africans whose community
had been recently targeted by a national roundup of al-Qaeda suspects. The asymmetry of their positions, however, does not deprive them of encounters that facilitate overlapping imaginings of a different social order. The attempts to suppress the Catalan cultural practices discussed in chapter two give rise to a series of imaginings of resistance addressed to all town residents.

With comic license, Vilanova’s Federation of Carnival Associations (FAC) reported that Franco’s order to stop celebrating Carnival was not in every case obeyed.\(^{35}\)

As did the Gauls of Asterix in their little village, certain cities resisted the stupid order dictated by the fascists, opposed to everything that could represent the goal of tolerance between people and good humor, and enemies of every kind of liberty. The population of Vilanova i la Geltrú did not obey this order and continued to celebrate Carnival, discretely, but openly. (Federació d'associacions pel carnaval N.d.).

While a romantic depiction of a heroically imagined past, this statement makes the ethical value of community formation across boundaries explicit. I asked, Ximo, Vilanova’s Director of Culture and a local author on Catalan folklore and popular performance who lived through the Franco years, about Carnival under the dictatorship. With a gravelly voice that issued from under a bushy white mustache he responded, “Well, there was some kind of Carnival during those years,” but cautioned against confusing continuous

\(^{35}\) The ban was circumvented in a number of other locations within Spain, but these were scaled down observances that were not permitted to be called by the name Carnival and were submitted to strict censorship and the prohibition against masks (Mintz 1997).
with unchanging, citing many elements of Vilanova’s Carnival as introduced from as far as Italy, Cuba and the Philippines, or of lapsed practices that had been reinvented such as the ritual of Moixó Foguer.

One day as I was having my hair cut, my barber Xavi related his understanding of Carnival during the dictatorship:

During the Franco years, Carnival was banned. But in Vilanova, on the night of the arrival [of King Carnival], a group of people just found themselves going for a walk along the rambles and then happened to gather together in the plaça, and then found themselves making the motions of some of the things they did at Carnival. That first year there were no costumes or anything but every year it became more overt. After a few years the mayor applied for and got a special exemption from Madrid for Vilanova to celebrate Carnival. The only thing that wasn’t allowed was wearing masks. Everything had to be open.

Xavi’s apocryphal account loosely corresponds to the documented history of Carnival in Vilanova but cleaves to Bakhtin’s claim that Carnival rituals are driven into the body. As related by Xavi, the celebrants express no conscious determination, no affect of nostalgia, no ideological commitment to resistance: it is their bodies that lead them to

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36 As a Mediterranean port Vilanova has long been a gateway of trade and the processes of exchange this entails. According to Ximo, the term l’Arrivo is Italian not Catalan (l’arribada), the mantons de Manila, embroidered shawls worn by women for several Carnival dances as well as the flowers worn in their hair are Filipino customs, and the extensive use of sugar in Vilanova’s Carnival derives from the 18th and 19th century period of intensive commerce with Cuba. A detailed history of Vilanova’s Carnival discussing these developments was published by Xavier García (1972).
ritual acts, as if possessed by the invisible sovereign presence of His Majesty King Carnival. In Xavi’s account, the essence of the ritual is embodied practice.

Postmodern grotesque: Redundant body of the king, Part I

Notwithstanding the existence of other exuberant, and carnivalesque festes in the local ritual calendar, Carnival garners by far the largest numbers of participants. Carnival in Vilanova i la Geltrú includes a spirited parade like Carnival in many better known locations, but that is not the defining event in a ritual sequence spanning fifteen days and consisting of forty publicly advertised events as well as countless other events held in schools, workplaces, markets and community centers. Rather than exhaustively catalog these manifold events, I will focus on a few of the most highly attended events of Carnival in Vilanova, beginning with the ritual cycle of His Majesty King Carnival (Sa Majestat el Rei Carnestoltes).

In Catalonia, the King, Carnestoltes—also known by a host of honorifics and metonyms—is a magical personage on the order of Santa Claus in the United States although significantly different in his moral attributes. Like Santa Claus, his arrival is feverishly anticipated as a highpoint of the year, he is subject and actor of various performance genres, he is represented by multiple actors and artificial bodies, and he is associated with a kind of potlatch, or profligate consumption of resources.

The week before Carnival, Vilanova’s newspaper reported an announcement from La Medusa (the jellyfish), the organization responsible for organizing l’Arrivo, or the arrival of the king, which marks the beginning of Carnival proper. The article claimed that because no entity had come forward to accept this responsibility, La Medusa did so at the
eleventh hour. Their spokesperson regretfully admitted that, not only had nothing been done to prepare, but that the king, indignant that no one had stepped forward earlier to receive him, had forbidden any preparation on his behalf, and thrown into question whether he would attend at all. La Medusa’s spokesperson reported that the 6,000 euros ($8,500) provided by the FAC (Federation of Carnival Association) for l’Arrivo had been responsibly invested for the coming year during which the entity would reach an agreement with Brazil to implant the model of Carnival pertaining to Rio with “a lot more thigh, a lot more plumage, and a lot less satire” (Diari de Vilanova 2006o).

The following week the newspaper announced that fifty decorated carts (carrosses) and masked groups would participate in l’Arrivo “to receive a king who wasn’t coming.” The report included a new missive from La Medusa which called for a year of reflection and a delegation to Rio, stating:

Following several years of evident decadence, it has become clear that the satiric model of Carnival is an archaic anti-spectacle. The Medusa has tried to save the arrival of the king, Carnestoltes, but in the end realized that the best way to save Carnival is not to prolong its agony but to reinvent the act: an act that has to reach the level of our times, more media-friendly and flashy (Diari de Vilanova 2006q).

The night of l’Arrivo, I accompanied the explosive crew of devils who lead the procession at the invitation of their chief (to be related in the following chapter). I broke off at the end of the route, ears ringing, directly in front of the imposingly pink Baroque
church of Sant Antoni at the Plaça de les Neus (Plaza of the Snows), thronged with people. There I encountered Jordi and his partner Maçana with whom I watched the rest of the procession. Dozens of imaginative carrosses with groups of dancers and musicians passed, each one embodying some form of satiric social criticism. Although recognizable international and national issues were mixed with local politics in the depictions, had I not been flanked by Jordi and Maçana, who decoded the burlesque symbolism in my ear, much of the referential content would have remained opaque to me.

Vilanova’s municipal government received its share of mild abuse being depicted as the cave of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves and feted by a crew of vampires advertising the message that “city hall sucks us” (l’Ajuntament ens xucla). The Spanish government came in for more pointed critique as a group dressed as proper Spanish ladies wore sashes emblazoned “Bitches of Salamanca” (Putilles de Salamanca) in reference to the recent refusal of the national archive (in Salamanca) to release historic material seized in Barcelona during the Civil War back to the Catalan government.

A carrossa devoid of anything save a potted palm and a man wearing a Hawaiian shirt drinking a cocktail was labeled “Traditions the Pixapins have brought to Vilanova,” pixapins being a term akin to “city slickers” referring to people from Barcelona who move to Vilanova without participating in civic life except to complain. This mockery of the pixapin reinforced the lesson I learned from Moixo Foguer, that standing apart offends community sensibilities. By targeting other Catalans as improperly integrated

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37 Literally, those who piss on trees, in reference to urbanites who drive to the country on the weekend and relieve themselves on the roadside. Less frequently used terms for people from Barcelona that I heard in Vilanova included quamacus, representing the expression que maco (lit. how lovely) in a Barcelona accent exclaimed by urban visitors to the countryside, and de can fanga, (from mudville), an expression dating from the times that Barcelona’s streets were made of clay.
newcomers, this figure also implied a general sensibility about immigration: that one's place of origin is less important that one’s willingness to engage with others as a community member. More explicitly, the performance locates immigration on the border of the community rather than the state.

Returning to Bakhtin’s claim that Carnival does not know footlights, I noticed that although those in the procession had possession of the center of the rambla and the spectators were arrayed along its sides, there were no barriers and no police or other monitors to regulate the boundary between performer and spectator. I then noticed that the performance was going on both sides of the un-patrolled border. A group of mock police officers passed through the crowd awarding spurious tickets for non-existent offenses, another uniformed group pushed around an “alcohol control unit” made of painted cardboard, apparently mounted over a shopping cart, from which they distributed cans of beer. Several teen aged boys wearing wool caps and bulky flannel shirts stood near us talking in an animated manner. Jordi explained that their exaggerated accents and characters represented a stereotype of the Catalan pagesos, or country people.

Meanwhile the carrosses and dancers continued to pass. In an apparent jab at the state of health care provision, scantily clad transvestite nurses with heavy beards abused and titillated a patient in the form of an inflatable male sex doll with a large erection. A convertible passed in which stood a man dressed as Generalissimo Francisco Franco, extending his arm in the fascist salute. His Falangist troops wore black with red borders and pointed red noses. The emblem they bore in place of the yoke and arrows of the historic Falange was the silhouette of a wrapped hard candy, the weapon of Vilanova’s greatest “sweet war” (guerra dolça), yet to come. The Falangists held signs in garbled
Castilian mocking the slogans of the dictatorship: “Viva Frasco!” “Arriba Espiña”

“España Una, Grande, Católica, y Libre.” This large Carnival contingent did not merely mock the dead dictator but the contemporary Partido Popular (PP) that represents his political legacy of unity under Castilian norms. Another sign read, Carod, enano! habla castellano! (Carod, you dwarf! speak Castilian!). Josep-Lluis Carod is the head of the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), representing the militant end of the three leftist parties making up the Catalan government at this time. The same slogan had been directed against former Catalan president Jordi Pujol by PP activists a generation ago (Tremlett 2006).

The mock fascists were accompanied by contemporary political figures whose masks depicted them as the leaders of the Spanish and Catalan governments. The Spaniards wore dark suits while the Catalan leaders were clad in the black and white stripes of prisoners. In addition to their masks they wore other prosthetic devices: erect phalluses for the Spaniards, large exposed buttocks for the Catalans. With the aid of fascist troops the Catalans were forced to bend over and submit to a vigorous mock sodomizing by the Spanish president and his ministers. This act requires little interpretation other than to provide the political context of the negotiations of the Catalan statute of autonomy discussed in chapter two. The statute had been approved by Catalan voters, then substantially watered down during a draw out process in Madrid. At the time of Carnival, the weakened statute of autonomy had been opposed by Carod and many Catalan citizens who proclaimed in a media campaign that “Catalonia deserves better” (Catalunya mereix més). Then Catalan president, Pascual Maragall—whose Carnival

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doppelganger was at that moment being sexually dominated by an actor representing
Spanish President Zapatero—had deemed the statute text an acceptable compromise. As
José Limón has pointed out, male homosexual aggression within a play frame can

In a more proximate context, I had noticed a group of Magrebi women wearing
headscarves holding a prime spot at the corner in front of us and I wondered about their
reaction to the graphic sexual simulations before them. The women were very animated,
pointing to and laughing at the scene before them while playfully grabbing each others’
arms and clearly enjoying themselves. While these women’s comportment does not
counterindicate that the sensibilities of other Muslims as well as those of pious Catholic
Catalans might have been offended by this display, it suggests that the modesty involved
in wearing headscarves does not constitute a fixed or universal ethical-aesthetic
orientation. It also suggests, as several Moroccan respondents later informed me, that
North African Muslims find Catalan Carnival intelligible in relation to their own noisy
street processions, such as for the circumcision festival, that may also includes grotesque
performances atypical of everyday comportment (Guindi 1990).

While the implications of various incidents of Muslim participation I witnessed
during Carnival, Catholic saints days and other festes in Vilanova should not be
exaggerated as evidence of untroubled cultural integration, the phenomenon does suggest
something about method. Attention to embodied practice may reveal nuances made
invisible by the distorting trade in oppositions. The imputed essentializing characteristics
of exclusive belief-worlds such as Christianity, Islam, or secularism, for example, are
preposterously disconnected from the complexity, variation, and overlap of human social
practices. The more nuanced account made possible through attention to the body is one objective of sensory politics.

I have demonstrated through the examples of myself and the Magrebi women that perception is not only actively performed but can be performed well or poorly. Learning how to appreciate a ritual performance, a meal, or a rose garden involves the development of sensory competence. Sensory competence may be socially demonstrated through situation appropriate gesture or utterance but also developed in the inward attention towards the discovery of one’s own sensations.

Sensory competence such as that demonstrated by the Magrebi women is bound to assessments of the success of Carnival. Sensory competence such as recognizing when to laugh facilitates communicative exchange between all those present and collective entrance into ritual space. A dancer who is also the head of the local ERC and the Deputy Mayor told me, “without spectators, there’s no festa,” and indeed, given the affective charge performers say they receive from a good audience, that there can be such a thing as a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ audience, reveals the poverty of such passive sensory reception terms as ‘spectator,’ ‘audience,’ ‘viewer,’ or ‘listener’ that fail to articulate the intersubjectivity of performance space and the competency required of spectators. As Abrahams has pointed out, the conflicts embodied during Carnival are performed in a way experienced as pleasurable to performers and beholders, who often exchange roles during the course of the festival (1972: 288).

This raises a problem of terminology. Vilanovins themselves use the term spectator but clearly make assessments about participatory competence as I learned to my chagrin. Substituting a term such as ‘co-performer’ or ‘co-participant’ erases the
performer/spectator opposition but also elides the asymmetry between the requirements of different orders of performance. For want of a term that succinctly characterizes the role of the co-present person who is not the focus of a performance yet whose sensory competence is essential to its evaluation as a success, I will for now deem this role the competent spectator.

Américo Paredes used the subhead, “interpreted to death” before relating an incident in a border legend in which two men were fatally shot due to the ineptness of a translator, an event that unleashed a brutal manhunt (1958: 58). The interchange between the Magrebi women and the grotesque performers also calls for caution before deploying an interpretive approach that frames the encounter as one of exclusion. I do not deny that in-jokes are part of the performance, nor that recent immigrants may not have the competency to understand the referential subjects of the jokes. The precise term for the semantic privation effected by the in-joke is excollusion (Goffman 1981: 134). To characterize this linguistic asymmetry as total social exclusion, however, extinguishes other possible ways of making sense of the encounter, and it would also follow that children, blind or deaf people, and recently arrived anthropologists are equally excluded from Carnival. Even at the semantic level, Carnival in-jokes could be seen as riddles posed rather than doors closed. The in-joke invites the observer to participate, to ask someone, “what is that about?” I do not know if, subsequent to the night of l’Arrivo, any of the Magrebi women asked a neighbor or coworker about the in-jokes they witnessed but I will not assume that they did not nor that they needed to. Since I did not ask at the time, I can not know if the women did or did not recognize the representations of the presidents of Spain and Catalonia and the nature of the power struggle enacted.
It is a tautology that every act of inclusion serves to exclude someone else. However, such an assessment only describes the situational and positional aspects of an action. As a zero-sum paradigm, inclusion/exclusion can generate an infinite chain of exclusion which may support abstract assumptions about the human condition but does not produce a nuanced account of specific encounters. With respect to each ritual technique I do not want to nail down its meaning or social function but to ask open questions à la Deleuze and Gauttari: “how does it work? What thoughts does it make possible to think? What emotions does it make possible to feel? What sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?” (Massumi 1987: xv).

As a heuristic parable, Deleuze and Gauttari described an encounter between a wasp and an orchid as the “coexistence of two asymmetrical movements” in which the wasp became a “liberated part of the orchid’s reproductive system,” and the orchid became the “object of an orgasm in the wasp, also liberated from its own reproduction.” They asserted that the encounter did not link, mix or conjugate the wasp and the orchid but produced a shared deterritorialization, launching each on a path of becoming (1987: 293-4). Applying this parable to the incident I have described, the Magrebi women enjoyed a momentary paroxysm of pleasurable laughter made possible by their communion with the performers, becoming persons they might not have been had they stayed at home or never left North Africa. Those within the radius of the performance who saw four women with headscarves laughing with everyone else were also becoming members of a sensory public made possible by the presence of Moroccans. The encounter is not evidence of inclusion or exclusion but of an opening of possible thoughts, emotions and sensations.
This momentary encounter, added to hundreds of others, forms part of a pattern by which community membership becomes sensible.

**Redundant body of the King: Part II**

At about eleven at night, as the procession came to an end, everyone shuffled to the central plaça to await *l'Arrivo de Sa Majestat el Rei Carnestoltes* (*l'Arrivo*, for short), in which the king, portrayed by a masked actor, customarily delivers a satiric sermon on a theme revealed at that moment. A corner of the plaça was dedicated to *La Botifarra de Sa Majestat,* (His Majesty’s Sausage), a smoky-fragrant mass grilling of sausages and an abundant flow of wine and beer. As the town’s celebrants thronged in the chill night air, the plaça suddenly went dark, followed by the sounds of shouting and tumult. The stage set up for the Arrival of the King was taken over in a mock military coup by black-shirted “Arrivolucionary Hordes” whose shrill-voiced General explained that the king, “offended by the ugliness of what you have done, has decided not to come to Vilanova this year.”

The textural detail of the general’s vocal tone provided a mimetic association to the shrill-voiced Francisco Franco, heightening the effect of verisimilitude for the community’s remembering of Spanish history.

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39 Sausages have a long association with the burlesque and were a central feature of the medieval Feast of Fools in which sausages were ritually displayed, paraded and eaten. Sausage shaped clubs filled with sawdust are used as weapons to assault passersby in the procession of giants and big-heads analyzed by Brandes (1980). Apart from being an apparent phallic symbol, thus related to fertility, sausages are also understood as an excrement symbol, being fashioned from intestines that once contained excrement and, for example evidenced in the French word *boudin* which means both sausage and excrement, hence representing fertilizing abundance (Schmaier and Dundes 1961). Although especially abundant during Carnival, sausages are habitually and emblematically consumed throughout Catalonia, even making an appearance in a Christmas carol, *Fum, fum, fum,* in which eggs and sausage form the diet of the shepherds of the annunciation.
The sermon, it appeared, would be delivered by the General who harangued the townspeople of Vilanova at length for failing to receive the "King of Excess and Debauchery," and more generally abused them for an overall lack of fervor in their Carnival observance:

What are you waiting for? Another Carnival in which on Friday you go out to the dance club, [on Saturday] take four steps of the Comparses, and on Tuesday say ‘Oh, no more, I have to work tomorrow’? Let your whore of a mother work! Here we don’t work until Ash Wednesday! I hereby install the anti-labor law with the further ordinance of incivility that you shit your pants!

The use of scatological and sexually abusive language drives attention into the body’s primal functions, inciting viscerality and the rejection of normative refinements. The ‘ordinance of incivility’ mocks a civility ordinance placed in force in Barcelona a few months earlier to crack down on graffiti, public drinking, urination, sidewalk vending, and related acts considered to be offensive to the sensibilities of a public imagined for that purpose. As I will discuss in chapter six, many Vilanovins communicate an opinion that top-down regulations of comportment as civility (civisme), are an infringement of the rights and duties of communities of neighbors to negotiate their own coexistence in shared space (convivência). The foul-mouthed tirade of the General served to articulate, in gross physical terms, a nuanced political position, sensibilities about local autonomy and cooperation, and the existence of a counterpublic.
Many of Vilanova’s Carnival rituals and motifs have been traced back centuries into the past, in some cases retaining a high degree of historic detail (Garcia 1972). These ritual practices are locally endowed with the vernacular category of the traditional (Rosaldo 1995: xvi), or sometimes the archaic, as a set of elements recognized to come from the past (Williams 1977: 122). In its broad strokes, Carnival is repetitive yet it is also the site of explorative engagement with a globalized and technologically advanced present. Every year, the King of Carnival arrives, Moixo Foguer springs out of a box, and the Malcasats dance. The embodied movements and sensory experiences remain relatively constant, grounding a sense of continuity.

Traditional genres of utterance such as the King’s sermon and the verses of the Malcasats serve as vehicles for commentary about current affairs. Media technology also serves as a medium for the extension of Carnival idiom, particularly for its engagement with contemporary issues. Items in the local newspaper framed what was to come and provided a forum for metacommentary about the organization of Carnival acts. By providing tongue-in-cheek information about the botched arrangements for the arrival of the King or the health precautions taken for Moixo Foguer, the satiric news articles cued participants as to ways to appreciate the farces yet to come. Printed pamphlets, televised news segments, and DVDs also provided cues or lifted ritual elements out of context for commentary. Technology was used not only in the production and extension of semantic content but of sensory experience as well.

As the General ranted on, images were projected onto an enormous screen behind the stage depicting various Carnival personages: homeless, tattered, scavenging through garbage or otherwise despondent. The Vilanovins I spoke to in no way found the ready
adaptation of new technologies to be inconsistent with their sense of the deep
traditionality of their Carnival. Repeatedly and consistently, through word and action, the
Vilanovins asserted that satire, the grotesque and the exhilarating crush of human bodies
are the essence of Carnival. Within these essential modalities, innovation is prized. The
Carnivals of Rio and nearby Sitges were not mocked for their novelties or large budgets
but because they were seen as reduced to tourist spectacles from which the grotesque and
satiric had been eviscerated, displaced by a glamorous eroticism.

The General’s vulgar screed continued with a general criticism of the townspeople for
allowing Vilanova to become culturally anemic and sold out to business interests, driving
out everyone that gave the town its character. In reference to a decline in the seafood
catch the General frothed, “Even the shrimp have fucked off because they can’t stand it!
Enough, man, enough!”

The General began naming those responsible for the lamentable state of affairs,
calling out politicians, journalists, neighborhood associations and businesses; abusing
their craven acts while averring “they will not escape.” He then announced the moment
of “Most Summary Judgment and Instant Execution” for those responsible. As giant
puppets depicting political enemies appeared on the balcony of city hall, each was put to
death by a shot from an outsized blunderbuss. This was intimate black humor considering
the probability that a number of the grandparents of those assembled had been executed
by order of the vindictive Generalissimo Franco.

His volume and intensity of delivery gradually rising, the General related his past
night’s dream: of thousands of masks, an orgy of hormones, of human heat, of the flow of
alcohol, of streets lubricated with caramel, an abundance of sausages, of rivers of beer,
that no one thinks of their jobs or their mortgages. “I’ve dreamed of a city, carnivalized,
caramelized, head over heels, legs open wide, to eat it! I’ve dreamed of a city
impregnated to the last corner with the obscene stench of the King Carnestoltes!”

Growing quiet again, the General reflected that Carnestoltes was not present because
of the lamentable state of affairs. Morosely, he piled up a large stack of objects
representing the irredeemable institutions of Vilanova and prepared to burn them in a
giant pyre. After dousing the pile with gasoline the General approached with a flaming
torch when Carnestoltes precipitously appeared on the giant screen and ordered the
General to calm down. The King’s body was shown from the chest up, in 18th century
wig and court dress, face covered by a half-mask, outside an illuminated church signaling
his location in the nearby rival town of Sitges, whose high-budget Carnival, resembling
that of Rio, receives thousands of international tourists and visitors from Barcelona.

Telling the General that “these shitty people are beyond help” the king began his
snide speech describing all that had gone wrong with Vilanova. The first point being that
many people had moved there just to sleep and that the long term residents are even more
boring but put all the blame on the newcomers. “Vilanova doesn’t know what it is, a big
town or a small city, and in the end it has the worst of both worlds.” Addressing the
General, the King asked, “Do you know what they call a place like that?” “Un ciutat
dormitori?” (a bedroom community) volunteered the General. “Ciutat de merde” (city of
shit) sneered the King.

The dialogue between the two continued, engaging a pastiche of idiom: of local,
contemporary civic life and of digital displacement, clothed in the reenactments of 20th
century Spanish history, while upending quotidian order and driving constantly into the
lower bodily strata in the transtemporal idiom of Carnival. Suddenly a disheveled maid, who had apparently been bent over the lap of the king, rose to standing before the king who patted her on the head in a gesture of appreciation. The sound of the crowd, that had hardly left off laughing and chattering, rose to higher pitch in light of the king’s obvious peccadillo.

Writing off Vilanova as utterly without merit, the King ordered the General and his troops to come to Sitges where they have everything from better food to an abundance of designer drugs. A disheveled young man rose up next to the King to receive his pat on the head and the crowd roared even louder in this acknowledgement of Sitges as the home of Spain’s most celebrated gay community.

The General then took the part of Vilanova and defied the arrogant King for refusing to give the town a second chance. Cutting the connection, casting the virtual monarch into darkness, the General declared himself for Carnival without God, Country or King:\footnote{This upends the Carlist slogan: Por Dios, Patria y Rey.}

I swear by my balls, this is the best Carnival in the world. Without King! Without City Hall! Without authority! I declare the Anarchic Republic of Carnival!...Tomorrow we'll execute the King! We’ll cut off his balls with a guillotine!...For the next six days, this is not Vilanova, nor Catalonia nor much less Spain. Let’s go wake the neighbors, let's defile the town and spread corruption!...Long live Carnival!
The life and sovereignty of the king, Carnestoltes, lasts just six days each year and is here threatened with an even shorter reign. The king, only tentatively born, has but a few days to live, but in order to emphasize the connection between birth and killing, these rituals of l’Arrivo included ritual execution, driving home Carnival’s characteristic grotesque concept of bodily life and the wish for renewal and rebirth: to die and live again (Bakhtin 1984: 248-9). Death and rebirth are joined to praise and abuse, as expressed in the Sermó, indicating not just a contrast of meanings but the “objective ambivalence of being… somehow dimly felt by the participants in the festival” (ibid). Whatever this ambivalence might have been in the time of Rabelais described by Bakhtin, in twenty-first century Catalonia it is the play of decentering. To defend one’s besieged language while accommodating newcomers, to hold onto distinctive local practices while negotiating global capitalism and new technology, to mock one’s oppressors while guarding against become oppressive: Vilanovins struggle waist deep in the making of their own history.

Despite the apparent finality of the mutual rejection of Carnestoltes and Vilanova, the next morning, masked actors portraying the King and his concubines visited markets, public squares, a convalescent home and other corners of the town. Among other activities, the day would witness bed races on the rambles, a Karaoke-sausage roast, the Ball de Malcasats (dance of the ill-matched spouses), the arrival of Moixó Foguer, and the Nit de Mascarots, or Masquerade Night in which costumed revelers filled the streets, drinking alcoholic beverages to uncharacteristic excess, and randomly pushing the decorated carts from the Arrival up and down the Rambla Principal. Carnival had begun.
The limits of satire

Between the sermons of the General and the King, the fifty Carnival entities of the procession and the many homemade acts within the sidelines, the satiric abuse seemed omni-directional, attacking the high and low of Vilanova with equal glee with an important exception: newcomers from North Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe were at no time the butts of joking. Although during the ensuing five days, I saw numerous members of immigrant communities either among the spectators or assisting the antics of their own costumed children, it appeared that they were neither depicted nor evoked. There are two important points to be made. First, that mediating the decentralized anarchy of Carnival in which ostensibly, anything goes, a consensual sensibility had operatively defined recognizable lines that were not crossed. This inference is also supported by the fact that several racially stereotypic images had been dropped from other Vilanovin festes within the past decade with the explicit rationale of avoiding hurt or offense.

Eight years before my arrival, the grotesque head of a legendary Moorish Pirate, Moro Manani who used to vomit candy for children on Christmas day at the end of a puppet show at town hall was replaced by the Caganer (shitter). The Caganer is a figure of a defecating Catalan peasant that has appeared in Catalan nativity scenes for hundreds of years. A newly invented Caganer puppet now defecates candy for the children at the climax of the Christmas play. While the negative racial stereotype was eliminated through the advocacy of local teachers who argued that Moro Manani gave offence to Muslims (who had not complained), the depiction of exposed buttocks excreting a torrent of candy was deemed so wholesome and charming as to be beyond reproach. In another
case, the *capgrossos* or big-headed dwarfs present in many Iberian saints day processions frequently include racial stereotypes as well as social stereotypes. Some years ago the Vilanovins replaced their black *capgros* with a new character, the *Tothosap* (know-it-all), associated with a satiric columnist in the town’s weekly newspaper writing under that byline.

The restraint from making fun of newcomers can be seen as respectful, as anti-racist or by other positive lights but at the same time it signals a lack of intimacy between old and new Vilanovins, a tentativeness and a failure to fully include. This is not to say that the ideal way to include newcomers is to subject them to ridicule, but to show evidence that Vilanova’s new immigrant communities have not been fully integrated into the parallel festa life that is so central to the sense of community belonging.

Carnival laughter is *laughing with* and I would suggest that a sufficient degree of *withness* has not yet been achieved. Another obstacle is the development of an idiom of joking ridicule based on shared experience which does not merely resort to broad ethnic slurs. Vilanovin Carnival deploys stereotypes of Catalans and Spaniards but these mock specific social roles—the haughty Spanish *doña*, the fashion impaired Catalan farmer, the venal politician, the blood-thirsty fascist—not ethnicity per se. The formulation *being able to take a joke* implies some kind of social capacity that I would argue is rooted in a confident sense of one’s belonging to a given social milieu, a degree of centeredness. One question to ask in any such case is: which members of a given milieu are secure enough in their position that they can afford to be laughed at? And it is quite one thing to achieve this capacity and develop a joking idiom among people with face-to-face relationships,

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41 Basso’s account of the development of intimate joking relationships demonstrates how carefully these relationships are built over time (1979: 65-76).
and another to extend this to a town's population, and yet another to deploy this kind of humor on the international stage.

The matter of the Danish caricatures

Carnival in Vilanova coincided with the intensification of international protest against the publication of satiric caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed by a Danish newspaper, which were subsequently republished in a number of other European countries. Presented in many Western press articles as evidence of the clash of civilizations, the issue was initially framed in terms of Western secularism and freedom of speech vs. Islamic fundamentalism (e.g. Moore 2006; Rose 2006). Some acknowledged that freedom of speech has its limits (Financial Times 2006) and others linked blasphemy to hate speech, considering the sense of hurt inflicted by certain kinds of utterance (al-Jadda 2006).

A further step would be to acknowledge that Western freedom of speech has never been absolute but has always been tempered by various ethical and aesthetic sensibilities and that members of different collectivities endorse different sensibilities, necessitating negotiation. The conservative Catholic Franco regime was no less vehemently opposed to what it considered blasphemous than the aggrieved protestors in reaction to the caricatures. Although their voices were often muted in the press coverage of the incident which highlighted violent protest, some Muslims took the position that while they were displeased by the caricatures, they had to be understood in the European context and that non-Muslims can not be held accountable to Muslim standards of blasphemy. Muslims also argued that the incident was a missed opportunity to educate the West about the peaceful teachings of Islam (Slackman and Fattah 2006). As Judith Butler has pointed
out, injurious speech does not necessarily paralyze its target but “may produce an unexpected and enabling response” (Butler 1997: 2).

Some Muslim and other commentators have pointed out there are lines that Western journalists also refrain from crossing. Material deemed racist is not only self-policed but in some countries legally proscribed. American newspapers have refrained from publishing photos of dead US soldiers, either out of sensitivity towards their families (al-Jadda 2006) or for fear of arousing anti-war sentiment. In response to the published caricatures of Mohammed, an Iranian newspaper sponsored a contest of Holocaust cartoons, one of the organizers, Masoud Shogai, explaining that “we wanted to challenge European taboos” (Hafezi 2006).

The aggressive, injurious aspect of humorous utterances directed against members of social groups deemed outsiders is long recognized (Canel 1859; Freud 1938; Oring 1992), and figures in contemporary problems of hate speech and censorship (Butler 1997). An argument that blasphemy should be regarded in parallel to hate speech can be made with the etymology of the word, blaspheme which derives from the Greek words to injure + through speech. Bakhtin argues that the satire of modern writers is wholly negative, in that the writer is set apart from the target who is to be brought low and stay there. The performative context of such humor is also critical: who is telling the joke and to whom cannot be separated from the text of the joke (Bourhis et al. 1977). The speech situation is a volatile place, not readily bounded: injurious utterance may disorient, disable, or displace the addressee (Butler 1997: 4). Joking content may be deeply offensive or playfully productive of solidarity depending on this context (cf. Basso 1979).

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42 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. blaspheme.
and part of the way that people cultivate the aesthetic orientation called a ‘sense of humor’ is to learn to recognize the differences between laughing with and laughing at. Carnival laughter is laughing with but removed from its context, whether that is the ritual festa, or any group whose members are cultivating a playful, convivial atmosphere, is liable to become laughing at. This is why public figures so often get into trouble as a result of humor that causes offense and also why they often attempt to excuse themselves with the formulaic defense that their remarks were taken out of context.

In his defense of publishing the cartoon images, Flemming Rose, the culture editor of the Danish paper Jyllands-Posten, made an appeal to the logic of Carnival laughter claiming that the message he intended to send to Muslims was: “You are not strangers, you are here to stay, and we accept you as an integrated part of our life. And we will satirize you, too. It was an act of inclusion, not exclusion; an act of respect and recognition” (Rose 2006). At face value, this statement betrays a fatal misrecognition of sensibilities held by a large number of Muslims and also of the necessary context of mutual trust, goodwill and familiarity in which the inclusive humor of permitted disrespect can take place. Because the Jyllands-Posten is notorious for its negative coverage of Muslim immigrants (Quraishy 2005), Rose’s claim cannot be accepted as merely naïve but rather disingenuous. In Vilanova, the local newspaper and television station not only refrained from negative coverage of immigrants but made space for immigrant voices through such measures as inclusion in panel discussions, interviews and opinion editorials. Yet the dialogue between old and new Vilanovins is still explorative, tentative and emergent: even during Carnival, the two communities have not become enough of a single community to enjoy a public joking relationship.
Redundant body of the King: Part III

Although children were present at many of the adult-oriented events of the Carnival cycle, there were three major events especially for children beginning with the *Merengada* (described in chapter four), concluding with a street party called *Vidalet,* and with the central high point being *l'Arribada del Caramel* or the arrival and procession of *Caramel* (candy), the children’s Carnival king. The Plaça del Mercat (Market Plaza), the largest open space in the town center, was filled with a sea of costumed children accompanied by their mostly costumed parents or grandparents. The assembled tigers, clowns, penguins, ancient Egyptians, flop-eared dogs, Native Americans, princesses, and a large group of miniature Picassos seemed to celebrate imagination and make-believe rather than satire and social comment, except perhaps for those dressed as nuns and priests. The public of this event included many Magrebi women with headscarves and winter robes who accompanied their costumed children. The women appeared in this context as quotidian rather than standing out as visually unusual.

A group of chefs with tall white hats appeared on stage next to an immense cauldron to begin the alchemical summons of Caramel. As befitting a confection, the chefs first added a huge burlap sack of sugar but without scruple of opening the bag. Next, various fruits were added, causing appropriately colored smoke to waft up from the pot. Indigenous local vegetables were added as gestures of Vilanovin pride and by the same

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43 Anti-clericalism has a long history in Spain and particularly in Catalonia. The Catholic church was a central pilar of support for the dictatorship and churches and members of religious orders were targets of vandalism and violence during the Civil War. For a thoughtful political study of anti-clericalism in contemporary Spain see *Luces Iconoclastas* (Delgado Ruiz 2001).
logic, a huge Vilanovin herring, six-feet long was thrown into the pot from which it tried
to leap but was held back with enormous wooden spoons. The cauldron emitted more
colored smoke, blasts of confetti and showers of sparks, when slowly the head of
Caramel tentatively appeared, followed by his giant, rotund body, dressed in the parti­
colored hues one might expect of candy come to life. Bakhtin reported that while any sort
of exaggeration of physical features qualified as grotesque and could be encountered in
medieval and renaissance Carnival, among the most typical personages were giants, and
persons with large stomachs, and long noses or phalluses (1984: passim).

Caramel, dwarfing the chefs around him, had a long sausage-like nose, and sausage­
like locks of hair extending from his head, and a body so blimp-like that he appeared to
be all stomach: the Carnival grotesque personified. The crowd cheered, the band began to
play and everyone danced including the Gargantuan Caramel at center stage. Caramel
made few utterances, needing to do nothing more than incarnate the bodily appetites.

**Redundant body of the King: Part IV**

Here I will continue to follow an overarching structure of Carnival and will skip ahead to
the rituals of the dead king’s body. Arnold van Gennep posited that the normative order
of rites of passage begins with a death, enters a liminal period and ends with a rebirth
(Van Gennep 1960). The Easter cycle of the death and resurrection of Jesus conforms to
this model while Carnival inverts it, King Carnival remaining alive just days longer than
Jesus remained dead. Both Easter and Carnival are mobile feasts, calculated by lunar
cycle and by convention there are said to be 40 days between them defining the Lenten period of abstinence and penitence.44

*El Rei* Carnestoltes died on Ash Wednesday (*Dimecres de Cendre*): syphilis, gout or other ills of excess were hinted at. Recapitulating a narrative pattern established in the 17th century,45 a newspaper account reported numerous speculations on the cause of death of the king of the senseless, but reported a consensus that he had succumbed in agony to a severe cold while charlatan doctors forced expensive medicines down his throat and injected him with gigantic syringes (Diari de Vilanova 2006r). The body of the dead king, with a head fashioned of papier-mâché, lay in state in the *Casa Mortuòria*, in this case, on the stage of Vilanova’s elegant nineteenth century *Teatre Principal*. The king was laid out in a frock coat and grey striped trousers, a large phallus extending from the crotch, and flanked by an honor guard wearing rose red military uniforms, silver helmets and fringed black masks covering their eyes. The king and his guard were surrounded by *ploraneres* (lit. criers, mourners), weeping concubines appareled in lavish mourning dress.

An austere pamphlet with a heavy black border had been passed out in public places throughout the day, inviting everyone to the burial, requesting that the mourners wear sumptuous costume and enjoining them not to bring flowers but rather “all manner of

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44 Easter actually falls 46 days after the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday, but because Sundays are not considered days of penance, Lent is calculated to be 40 days long. The number forty has been a sacred symbol signifying birth or rebirth in the West and the Middle East since antiquity (Brandes 1985).

45 The satire of the doctors engaged the attempt by university-trained physicians of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to dominate the practice of medicine and control practitioners whom they characterized as, “illicit,” “empirics,” or “charlatans” (Lingo 1986: 583).
phallic vegetables: celery, carrots, cucumbers, turnips, eggplants, zucchini, leeks,” etc.

The pamphlet featured the following prayer for the deceased:

Pregueu pel cos i l’albergínia, Pray for the body and the eggplant,
que és el carnet d’identitat which is the identity card
admirada i altiva insígnia, admirable and haughty insignia,
de nostra excelsa Majestat. of our exalted Majesty.

Sa graciosa Majestat His gracious Majesty
S’Altesa Sereníssima His Most Serene Highness
Sa Imperial Magnaníssima His Imperial Most Majesticness
Si li Alçava, OH!…Magnífica When he got it up, Oh!…Magnificent
Moltíssim més Honorable Very, very most Honorable
Excels, Illustre i Digníssim Excellent, Illustrious and Most Dignified

Rei de tots els Pocasoltes King of all the Senseless
Príncep etern de Cornudella Eternal Prince of Cuckoldry
Duc de xamples i corromputs Duke of fools and the corrupt
Marquès de la bona mamella Marquis of the lovely breast
Comte de tots els barruts Count of all the insolent
Baró de les Calaverades Baron of nocturnal debaucheries
Senyor de l’alt Plàtan florit, Lord of the tall Banana in bloom,
dels barraquers i gamberrades of the voyeurs and young punks
i artista d’honor dalt del llit\textsuperscript{46} and the artist of honor upon the bed.

Que ha mort d’exces divers avui Who has died of diverse excesses today
Dimecres de Cendra de l’any 2006 Ash Wednesday of the year 2006

These verses appear related to the Spanish baroque literary tradition of satiric epitaphs known as \textit{túmulos burlescos}, and to the contemporary mock epitaphs known as \textit{calaveras} in Mexico (Brandes 2006) or in Berga, as \textit{esqueles} (Noyes 2007). Unlike these examples, however, the subject is not an actual person living or dead but a sort of deity that in these verses incarnates the sins of the flesh of all the people. To the extent that Carnestoltes and Christ are ritually constructed in an inverse relationship it could be said that the maxim ‘Jesus died for your sins’ is here rendered as ‘Carnestoltes lived for your sins.’ The ritual logic of expiatory sacrifice (Frazer 1913; Hubert and Mauss 1964) is present in each case. Both Jesus and King Carnival can be seen as expiatory figures: Jesus as the sacrificial lamb and Carnestoltes as the (horny) scapegoat. The magical effect of the sacrifice of Jesus is the gift of eternal life whereas the gleeful death that characterizes Carnival recognizes death as a necessary part of the cycle of earthly life and fecundity. The sacrifice of consecrated victims and substances during Carnestoltes in Vilanova could arguably be seen to propitiate material abundance but even more obviously to constitute the collective vitality of the community. The public is the product.

\textsuperscript{46}Many of these terms are local colloquialisms and euphemisms and my translation reflects locally understood connotations as explained to me by a local aficionado rather than the literal meanings that might be understood by other Catalan speech communities.
The commonalities between church rituals and imagery and those of Carnival caution against portraying them as oppositional, in spite of the play of inversions. Manuel Delgado points out that the drama of Christ’s passion is itself grotesque. Jesus is the victim of summary judgment and executed before mobbed spectators. Holy Week processions in various parts of Spain include crowds who vociferously insult and reprimand the figure of Jesus and personages such as Picorochos, slovenly figures who play the drum out of tune while smoking cigars and drinking wine. Thus, for Delgado, carnivalesque irreverence, parody, degradation, and laughing at a tragicomic God are not negations of, nor peripheral to the sacred order, but intensifications of it. Drawing on Bakhtin he argues that the carnivalesque conquest of the world serves to convert that which is habitually separate, distant, and only accessible through fear or piety into the experiential and material, making the sacred “palpable, penetrated, measured, pinpointed” (Delgado Ruiz 2001: 175-6). In the following pages I will more tightly bind the liturgical to the carnivalesque as a joint project of collective embodied affect.

In the late afternoon, townspeople lined up outside the Casa Mortuòria and filed in to pay their last respects, many dressed in theatrically archaic mourning costume. As I moved up the line and across the stage in front the corpse of the King I heard several people refer to it as la Sardina (the sardine), and an elderly woman a few steps ahead of me playfully reached down to touch the erect phallus. At the feet of the corpse stood a large wreath made of escarole from which particularly long carrots protruded. At the king’s head lay all the makings of xató, a local salad which would seem to be Lenten.

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47 Foster described the variation and historical distribution of the ritual of burial of the sardine throughout Iberia and Latin America. (1960).
fare, containing salt cod, anchovies, curly escarole, tuna, radishes and a dressing of hazelnuts, but which was also served at feasts the preceding week.

The Sardine himself had brightly colored candy wrappers stuck to his shoes, evidence that, despite his refusal to come to Vilanova, that he had been there and danced les Comparses, in which dancers launched thousands of hard candies at each other. Many of the women passing through the line were dressed in mourning, carrying phallic vegetables, sometimes carefully crafted into an explicit representation of a phallus with testicles. Some of the masked mourners appeared to be transvestite men. The ploraneres wailed and lamented the dead king, sometimes one or more came out to the lobby to keen into a microphone connected to speakers mounted outside, the sound booming out for several blocks along the Rambla Principal. From what I could understand of the wailing, distorted by over-amplification, the primary source of their grief was their privation from the king’s prodigious sexual prowess.

At dusk, an increasingly dense crowd of local residents gathered outside the Casa Mortuòria on the Rambla Principal, the broad pedestrian boulevard of Vilanova leading from the church of Sant Antoni straight down to the sea. So many people came to pay their respects that the doors stayed open over half an hour extra, unusual given the normative punctuality of town events. After the visitors had all exited the building and following yet more delay, the corpse, now a solid papier-mâché effigy of the clothed model within, was at length carried out upon the shoulders of the honor guard, and placed upon a draped wooden cart drawn by sleek black horses.

Extravagantly dressed grandees were among those gathered to accompany the Sardine on the Cercavila de la Comitiva Fúnebre or procession of the funeral party winding
around the town to the central Plaça de la Vila. A brass band struck up a disconsolate dirge and the loitering mass lurched into a slow progress down the rambla.

The body of the king was eventually placed upon a bier on the stage which had been the site of so much mirth during the previous week. Pungent smoke wafted from the opposite corner of the plaça, where a team of men grilled salt herrings over coals. For a Euro one could buy one of these large, hot, greasy and extremely salty fish with a generous slice of bread and a cup of red wine. Everyone in the plaça appeared to partake of this meal, exceptional within local culinary practice, but legible within a framework of communion.

According to the Roman Catholic Church, the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist become the real body and blood of Christ: those who receive the Eucharist into their own bodies are time-dissolvers, actually participating in the sacrifice of Jesus, who is also symbolized as a fish. This technique of ritual embodiment is mimetically reproduced in the commemoration of the death of Carnestoltes. The ingestion of bread and wine in a mortuary context could suffice to mark the participants as consecrated to Carnestoltes, but in a further redundancy, the King's body is semiotically transubstantiated into a fish, la Sardina, which is then multiplied sufficiently to feed all of the assembled masses, echoing the parable of loaves and fishes (Mathew 14: 18-20). The congregants incorporate the multitudinous salted (embalmed) cadavers of the King into their own bodies where he resides until his next corporeal resurrection. This exegesis does not claim that Carnival signifies the same thing or the reverse of Easter, nor that determinate meaning is particularly crucial to either. I suggest that Easter/Christ and
Carnival/Carnestoltes are co-constructed from a common corpus of ritual practices, and that these practices dramatize the body as object and technical medium.

The rituals of the King's body concern pluralism and polyvocality. Deleuze and Guattari described the complete system of the rite of the scapegoat as containing the face or body of the God or despot, the interpreting priests who recharge and transform processes of signification, "the hysterical crowd of people outside," and "the scapegoat emanating from the center" (1987: 116). In Vilanova, the despot, Francisco Franco was present: standing for himself, the current Spanish government as the body of state power, and the politics of castilianization. Carnestoltes is the King and thus the state as well, but a counterking of a counterpublic. Carnestoltes is also a deity, or avatar of one similar to Jesus, but a countergod. The anonymous priesthood of Carnival organizers devised and presented the multiple faces and bodies of these tableaux while orchestrating their transformations. By unfixing the signification of Carnestoltes, ultimately redistributing it into the bodies of the crowd through ingestion, the rite enables plural becomings.

Echoing Bakhtin's claims about Carnival, the transformations of the rite of the scapegoat resist the establishment of an authoritative voice to declare their meaning: "thus forms of corporality, gesturality, rhythm, dance, and rite coexist heterogeneously with the vocal form" (op. cit.: 117). Deleuze and Guattari also suggest that the act of cannibalism, such as that found in the Vilanovin rite, resists the universalizing projects of the state by eating a part of the semiotic chain. Of the crowd, they assert: "Every time they eat a dead man, they can say: one more the state won't get" (op. cit.: 118). Finally, by eating death as a last ritual act, the celebration of bodily appetites is extended even to the condition of mortality.
The air grew chill and the sky dark. The Notary stepped briskly to a lectern beside the corpse to intone the Lectura del Testament de Sa Majestat Carnestoltes. The prayer for the deceased printed on the pamphlet is a fragment of the longer eulogy and reading of the will that changes a little from year to year. This satiric mimicry of the reading of the will, served as the opposite bookend to the Sermó delivered at l’Arrivo but was dispensed in a somber monotone to a distracted, chattering, herring-munching crowd that reacted with guffaws rather than the gleeful uproar of the previous days. The people assembled included children and elders, and despite the increasing darkness I recognized a number of acquaintances who greeted me in passing. It was not apparent that any tourists or out-of-town visitors were present, the only people I saw with cameras were local photographers.

The droning lecture ceased. The moment had come for the Burial of the Sardine (l’Enterro de la Sardina), which was not an interment but a fiery immolation. A torch was applied to the bier. The body of Carnestoltes, apparently packed with flammable material and doused with kerosene, burst into flames that leapt high in the air and belched coils of thick black smoke. A volley of rockets soared from the rooftops, filling the night sky with a thunderous pyrotechnic display just above our heads. The fireworks culminated in an explosive finale while the glowing cinders fell upon us, sulfurous clouds adding to the fragrant smoke of the herring roast, the body of the king, now reduced to smoldering embers. There was a moment of quiet before the crowd began to disperse. Carnival was over.

The redundant bodies of the King can now be provisionally catalogued: the off-stage Carnestoltes refusing to attend; the digital Carnestoltes hurling abuse from a distance; the
disconnected Carnestoltes cast out of light and power; the flesh and blood actor
portraying Carnestoltes in progress with his concubines; the Pantagruellesque Caramel;
the diseased King, medicalized to death by doctors; the phallic Carnestoltes in rigor
mortis, whose candy-wrapper shoes betrayed an additional, masked, dancing
Carnestoltes; the flammable, multiplied, embalmed, and cannibalized Sardine; the bodies
of the crowd ingesting and becoming Carnestoltes; and finally, the cosmic Carnestoltes,
his ashen molecules returning to the realm of fire and smoke.

These redundant bodies serve to catalogue Bakhtin’s attributes of the atmosphere of
Carnival: comic, abusive, satiric, anarchic, promiscuous, gluttonous, phallic, gleeful,
perverse, corrupt, animal, infernal, multivocal. Through sensation, imagery, mimicry, and
utterance, all of the rituals of the King serve to drive Carnival experience into the body.
Repetition and thus redundancy may be used to cultivate any aptitude or emphasize any
message but it is an especially apt idiom with which to incarnate Carnival abundance.
Carnival techniques attune the body to partake of abundance and variation. The bodies of
the King incarnate ontological multiplicities: of being untroubled by difference or
contradiction (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 33).

**Reason and riot/Seny i rauxa**

In addition to ritual techniques, Vilanova’s sensorium is partly cultivated in terms of a
vernacular construct of the Catalan character as oscillating between *seny* and *rauxa*. A
seminal, much cited work about the national character attributed to Catalans that still
resonates with many today is *Notícia de Catalunya* by Jaume Vicens i Vives, first
published in 1954. *Seny*, often understood to connote grounded common-sense, stands in
relation to a complex of attributed qualities and perceptual orientations. The first quality listed by Vicens i Vives is a perception of *la continüïtat* (continuity) rooted in a social sense of the land and a permanent ethic he claimed carried through Catalan history outside of contingency. *La continüïtat* is also a doubled Catalan historical consciousness, as located in Europe but also proximate to (and thus threatened by) Castile. This double condition leads Catalans to experience themselves as “externally dissociated” (1962: 213). *El seny*, is “that which situates us right in the middle of our lives” (214) and which is realized through the pursuit of what is just, consensual and proper. *La mesura* (proportionality) is a moderating tendency and a profound orientation toward materiality. *La ironia* (irony) is a vital mode that facilitates corrective repositioning, and “annuls the gangrene of the passions and fanaticism” (Ibid.: 213-14). I would apply the same caveat to Vicens i Vives as to Bakhtin, that irony, like the grotesque, has in other contexts been marshaled in the cause of brutality and other extremes.

Vicens i Vives’ assessment reflects the era of psychological portraits of national character and thus merits a more general skepticism. His essentialist construct of a fixed Catalan character meets skepticism among Catalans themselves. During one meeting of the Catalan language class I attended, one of my classmates asked our instructor Meritxell for the meaning of the word *assenyalat*, which had appeared in a newspaper article we were reading. In response, Meritxell arched her eyebrow and asked the class: “what is the supposed character trait attributed to Catalans?,” the phrasing of the question itself framing the attribution as dubious. The answer: *seny*, from which the adjective *assenyalat* derives. However subject to debate or outright disbelief, these attributed traits contribute a baseline to an ubiquitous discursive formation of Catalan experience and
reflexive commentary. The construction of the Catalan character articulated by Vicens i Vives is present in everyday speech, popular media and academic discourse.

As an oppositional quality, *rauxa* (recklessness) describes Catalans' frenetic, upside-down aspects, an attitude that blends exasperation, sentimentalism, rashness and explosiveness. This mode of being has been used to explain the great number of sudden, violent uprisings in Catalan history (Dantí i Riu 1990; Vicens i Vives 1962). With respect to the riotous delirium of Catalan festes such as Carnestoltes in Vilanova i la Geltrú, the terms *gresca* (tumult) and *avalot* (multitudinous cacophony) describe public behavior during ritual time (cf. Noyes 2003). Vicens i Vives argued that *rauxa* causes Catalans to lose their sense of continuity, of just proportion, and to destroy the work of years in a few hours. He described this aspect of Catalan collective comportment as a spiritual defect, in part derived from resentment of foreign tyranny and historical dissociation, and leading to an inferiority complex and permanent state of rebellion (op. cit.: 214-16). Whether or not this negative psychological self-assessment was ever widely held it was not in evidence in Vilanova in the twenty-first century. Although Carnival uses a tremendous amount of local resources, and results in broken windows, physical injuries, temporary deafness, hangovers, burns and scars, and leaves a sticky, sometimes malodorous residue for months, *rauxa*, and the associated terms *gresca* and *avalot*,48 are not characterized as destructive but generative, as an essential mode of being, definitive to full membership in the community. It is the Barcelonan transplant who complains of the noise that is branded the pixapin.

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48 The terms *gresca* and *avalot* appeared prominently in local news coverage of Carnival.
In drawing together the arguments of this chapter, I will start by returning to Vilanovin Carnival’s relentless driving of attention into the body. The ritual frame guides this attention past the taken-for-grantedness of the everyday and invests it with the task of self-fashioning and community-making. The festa sensorium intensifies and draws attention to bodily experience with its bright colors, sweet or salty flavors, intoxication, mock aggression, and other acts that can be characterized as visual, tactile, sonic, and olfactory assaults. Ritual performances evoking expectancy, laughter, vertigo, or fear, serve to yoke these sensations to affective states and evaluative notions of what it means to belong to the community. Apart from contributing to general characteristics of the sensorium, the performances I described articulated orientations to specific contemporary issues. The assemblage of these elements constitutes a coherent mode of subjunctive being in which social-political relationships are deconstructed and creatively refigured in grotesque, satiric logics of possibility following the idiom of the embodied senses.

The many-voiced community performs oblique enactments conflicts and anxieties, making sense of them through senselessness. The collective’s rituals reassess and renegotiate the rules of the world and even its categorical orders of reason and riot, modernity and tradition. The sense of community—at other times abstractly rendered into codes of law, governance, civility, or economics—is rooted by ritual techniques into collective sensory experiences that reside in Vilanovin bodies. These are multiplicitous bodies mimitically refracted through the redundant bodies of the King. Vilanovins communicate in different languages, vote for different political parties, belong to different faith communities, claim different roots, and compete for resources. Ritual techniques produce shared sensory orientations, facilitating embodied solidarities.
between these diverse agents not determined by the conscious registers of representation or of material interest. Such solidarities do not solve conflicts, at least not by themselves, and if conceived as forms of inclusion, must also be seen as predicated upon other exclusions. But at its best, the solidarity of collective sensory experience serves as a ground for negotiated coexistence. To better evaluate this potential of this sensory politics, the following chapters will further investigate the techniques of sensory production during Carnival and other ritual cycles and their linkages to ethical positioning.
Chapter IV: Sensory techniques

Within his analysis of ritual structure, The Rites of Passage (1908), Arnold van Gennep identified the middle state of liminality, or thresholdness, characterized by ambiguity, openness, and personal indeterminacy. It is a temporary, in-between state during which one's sense of self may become defused, or even lead to disorientation. Normative self-understanding and habits of thought and action are suspended, creating an opening for new experience and possibilities. This intermediate stage, produced through ritual, is the precursor to the incorporation of individuals into a social group (Van Gennep 1960).

Victor Turner further developed the notion of liminality together with the concept of communitas, a state in which human affective and cognitive capacities are liberated from normative constraints and social hierarchies are temporarily suspended to enable an egalitarian communal intimacy (Turner 1982: 44). While van Gennep focused on comparative structures and Turner on their symbolic or communicative aspects, here I am interested in liminality as an affective state produced by bodily techniques. Drawing on Talal Asad's essay, "Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual," I regard Vilanovin ritual as organized practices directed toward the full development of a locally specific version of the self (Asad 1993: 78). Rather than consider communitas as a general phenomenon that produces openness to anything, ritual practices in Vilanova point to the cultivation of openness toward specific, evolving aesthetic and ethical orientations. In this chapter I intend to show how Vilanovins act on their own bodies to construct these orientations and to relate what some of these practices look, taste, sound, smell and feel like.
In the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Maurice Merleau-Ponty set out to describe the nature of human perceptual contact with the world. Consciousness is not, he argued, exclusively representational, rejecting the Cartesian tradition that relegated sensory perception to mediated data that must be translated into mental representation before becoming intelligible. Rather he described consciousness as distributed between the mind, the body and the world. Human beings do not discover the world through their senses because the world is already there as an inalienable presence: “man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: xi). In this way Merleau-Ponty provides a philosophical argument that human beings have a “direct and primitive contact with the world” (op. cit.: viii).

Much of what has been written about Iberian Carnival, and related public rituals, has focused on symbolic content (Caro Baroja 1965; Gilmore 1998; Harris 2003). Such studies have generated many insights into the representational significations of these ritual phenomena but there are two risks associated with this approach. Firstly, if the rituals of Carnival are portrayed as carrying definitive meanings, suggesting stasis over time and place, there is no account of change and innovation. In the case of Vilanova, continuities may be discerned between Carnival before the Civil War, during the dictatorship and after the return of democracy, but it is also clear that Vilanovin Carnival is dynamically supple, its character and the meanings made explicit in its satiric content have varied considerably in response to its changing political and social context. The second limitation is more elemental. If one accepts Merleau-Ponty’s assertion that

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49 One writer goes as far as to describe the task of analyzing Carnival as the interpretation of a living fossil from the Paleolithic era (Gaignebet 1984).
not all human agency makes recourse to representation, then the intense sensory production of Carnival constitutes a relatively under-explored field of investigation.

In fact, the Vilanovins who spent a great deal of time preparing for, participating, and commenting upon their festes, very rarely made any reference to the meaning of festa ritual, even in their efforts to explain them to me, a newcomer. The specific references of satiric representations aside, when I asked people to talk to me about a particular ritual, if symbolic aspects came up at all, they were tersely dispensed with and followed by enthusiastic accounts of the sensations produced by the ritual and descriptions of technical terms and details. Two members of the crew of devils (*diables*) whose pyrotechnic antics lead many ritual processions, began by telling me that “fire is purifying,” as if repeating a catechism, then paused as if no more could be said about meaning before launching into other aspects of ritual with unbroken loquacity. Dorothy Noyes had similar experiences in the Catalan town of Berga where she studied their local festa, the *Patum*. She was told by one person that “you can’t understand the *Patum* by looking at it,” and over and over by others that, “the *Patum* has to be lived” (2003: 26). Noyes was able to productively explore the embodied sensory register of the *Patum* in the constitution of techniques of community incorporation.

This direction in the study of ritual does not negate the symbolic content of such rituals or necessarily bid “farewell to interpretation” (Gumbrecht 1994) but suggests that, for the participants, representative symbolism is not the primary mode with which they experience their own rituals, and that the researcher’s consideration may productively explore the embodied attentions of his or her informants. Nadia Seremetakis identified flows between the sensory and the semantic in the maintenance of social memory, for
example (Seremetakis 1994), and this articulation also requires attention to the senses in their own right, not as inert media nor as epiphenomena.

**Sweet wars, part I: La Merengada**

The Catalan suffix, -ada, (plural -ades) signifies a collectivity or grouping of the substantive to which it is added. A number of feasts forming part of the debauched abundance of Carnestoltes in Vilanova followed this name form: these included xatonades, arengades, and botifarrades, in which people gathered to consume escarole and salt cod salad, grilled herrings and grilled sausages, respectively. Bakhtin has pointed out the primacy of eating and defecating in Carnival idiom as acts that transgress the border between one’s body and the world (1984: 278-302).

The Merengada or Meringue feast, is the first Carnival act that takes place in the streets of Vilanova, prior to the arrival of the king, Carnestoltes, and the ritual begins with an initial gathering followed by a cercavila, or circuit of the town center called La ruta de la Merenga (Itinerary of the Meringue). The central officiants of the ritual are children and adolescents. Dijous gras (Fat Thursday) is the last Thursday before Lent, a day in Carnival tradition in which people gather to consume large quantities of forbidden foods, especially sweets. Although Dijous Gras is not an official holiday, Vilanova’s schools adjourn for the day, enabling the youths to participate without hindrance.

The Ruta de la Merenga is a processional food fight in which the weapon of choice is thick liquid merenga (meringue), made of whipped egg whites and sugar. Thought to be a Milanese invention, meringue was introduced to France in the sixteenth century by the Medici queens Catherine and Marie. It was a favorite food of Louis XIV, who, perhaps
lacking imagination, merely ate the meringue (Toussaint-Samat 1993). At some subsequent point, meringue oozed through the porous, mutant border between France and Catalonia. Meringue was well-established as a celebrated Carnival indulgence in Vilanova by the early twentieth century when pastry chefs began to display large, elaborate constructions of meringue called glòries in their shop windows. On Dijous Gras of 1972, one of these towering glòries caught the attraction of a group of passing students, their admiration leading the pastry chef to make it a gift to them. After sating themselves, and for no reason anyone remembers, the students undertook the carnivalesque gesture of assaulting one another with meringue, attracting a crowd of other youthful participants who collectively created the first Merengada, “the most white, sweet and sticky battle” (Francàs 2006: 28). The pastry chef took this new development in such good humor that thereafter, he, and eventually the other pastry chefs of Vilanova began to provide meringue expressly for bellicose purposes and create spectacular glòries destined for destruction rather than consumption (ibid).

On the morning of Vilanova’s Merengada, many of the children wore rain slickers and old clothes and the main preparation was to bring plastic bags full of meringue. The plastic bags were filled about half-way with meringue, tied-off at the top and then one corner was bitten or cut off to form a squirt bag similar to a pastry cook’s bag used to apply icing. This was then used to administer meringue to one’s own mouth, to squirt it directly onto a companion, automobile, or building; or most dramatically, to swing around one’s head, splattering meringue indiscriminately upon all within range. Clifford Geertz said of the Balinese cockfight, that whatever it has to say, it says in spurts (Geertz
1972). This is particularly true of the Merengada but perhaps not in the way Geertz meant it.

When I arrived to the meeting point a few minutes early in front of the Pastisseria Hildalgo a block from my home, a few dozen children were already there along with the ambulance I’d noticed present at many festa events. I supposed that while a sugar overdose was possible, that slipping and falling injuries were more probably anticipated. Some children were already partially covered in meringue. A number of parents were present, either standing at a prudent distance, or, decked in slickers themselves, helping to supply the combatants with munitions. The young people themselves represented Vilanova’s new diversity including the children of immigrants from North Africa and South America and the children adopted from Africa and Asia.

Next, a sound truck pulled up blaring pop music and serving to make announcements. The truck was an immediate target of squirts of meringue, also applied directly by the hand in broad smears. The crowd of children grew and, at the center, a scrum of adolescents gathered in front of the pastisseria (pastry shop) and engaged in heavy fighting. A four-foot long cylindrical meringue figure representing a rooster was suspended from a balcony above the pastisseria. An unseen hand pulling a rope from above started to lower the figure just out of reach and then haul it back again. One meringue plastered boy sat on the shoulders of another and he was the first to gain purchase on the rooster, slopping about a gallon of meringue onto those nearest to him who gleefully flung it at each other. Additional blows met their mark and finally the whole rooster was seized, dragged off to the curb and disemboweled.
As I followed the path towards the town center I found that the procession had become dispersed: groups of young people gathered for merenga fights at other public squares and street corners. The store front windows and any parked vehicles along the route were invariably spattered, whether incidentally or deliberately. Behind the procession, street cleaners were already washing the rambles and some shop keepers were out cleaning their windows and doors. I later understood their promptness in washing off the meringue. Some of the places where the meringue was allowed to harden were still visible the following summer. The shop keepers did not seem put out in the least. A week later City Hall reported that it had received no complaints from any businesses about the Merengada (Diari de Vilanova 2006h).

The sticky skirmish continued through the town until the procession reached the Plaça de les Neus, where a pitched battle broke out. By this point, many of the children’s heads were great masses of white meringue from which they had wiped just enough from around their eyes to see what they were doing. There is no doubt that a great deal of meringue had gone down their necks, up their sleeves or soaked through any permeable articles of clothing. The air was rich with the smell of the meringue and I also noticed that my shoes were coated with it, having squelched through plastered streets in the wake of the roaming battle. Some shop windows were completely smeared and then used as a surface on which to write messages or make designs with the fingers. Many of the children were grinning ear to ear and, thanks to their continuous sugar intake, had not seemed to tire of fighting. In spite of an interdiction published by the mayor, a delinquent element deployed eggs as additional projectiles which left their own characteristic marks
on the town, and which did generate complaints, even lamentations about those who step

Figure 8. Children covered with meringue. Child on left holds half-empty squirt bag.

beyond the spirit of the festa.

*Empastifar*, to cover with paste, is also a synonym for *embrutajar*, to make dirty.

After more than four hours of roving warfare, the town center seemed if not plastered or filthy, at least copiously anointed. The procession culminated at the Plaça de la Paperera for the *Gran Empastifada de Fi de Festa* (Grand Plastered Finale of the Festa) where four gigantic glòries or empastes were promised by the town’s pastry shops. These resembled enormous cakes and were made of meringue on cardboard carcasses which were suspended over the plaça. Adults standing on the balconies threw bags of meringue to the participants while an atmosphere of expectation mounted. A camera crew from the local
television station was present and provided live coverage to those safely at home. Each of the giant meringues were launched onto the ecstatic revelers who thrashed about in an orgy of sticky, sweet meringue. I contemplated the sensory implications of being redolently encrusted with meringue, one’s belly full of it while yet more hardens in one’s hair and causing one to stick to any object or person touched.

**Sensory prosthesis**

As I will explain, the bags of meringue are prosthetic extensions of the body that facilitate the launching of meringue towards others while getting less on one’s own body. The *empastes* are artificial bodies, entities that interact with the participant: teasing the children by descending just out of reach and inciting them to mock violence. The children subsequently attack and disembowel the *empasta* and feast upon its entrails. The meringue covered human bodies are cyborgs (Haraway 1991) of a sort, transformed beings —part human, part sugary crust—that move through space with unfamiliar affect.

Alfred Gell, an anthropologist of art, introduced the notion of art as a prosthetic, that is, as an instrumental or sensory extension of the human body that serves as a technology of enchantment (Gell 1992). The nature of this enchantment as it is cultivated during the Merengada is manifold. The substance of meringue produces unfamiliar tactile sensations in contact with the skin and hair, manipulating the border of the epidermis, extending it out into the world. The mass ingestion of sugar, or introduction of the world into the body, produces a form of intoxication invested with an affect of excitement and elation. The break from school day schedules and responsibilities is not marked by rest but achieved through actively expressed license in one’s comportment, most importantly with
respect to others who may be ritually attacked. The windows of shops and cars are also plastered, impairing the visual faculty they normatively assist. The air becomes fragrant with the rich aroma of the meringue, drawing even non-combatants involuntarily into the ritual atmosphere. The enchanted state of personal indeterminacy produced by the Merengada is not open ended nor generic but a specific sensory-affective complex.

The Merengada combines a number of elements that make it an ideal Carnival ritual for children and youths. I recalled a few episodes in my own childhood of the experience of mud, squelching bare feet into mud, having it sluice between one’s toes, stomping in mud puddles and becoming splattered or plastered with it. The sensation of playing in mud was extremely pleasurable but I was discouraged from this form of play in no uncertain terms. One of the chief pleasures of Christmas, Halloween and birthday parties was the extraordinary consumption of sugar, the child’s preferred intoxicant and focus of gastronomic enthusiasm. Other exhilarating experiences of my own childhood were mock battles such as pillow fights and water fights. The Merengada combines these forms of social and sensory play into one event and, rather than facing the censure of the adult world, it is sanctioned and enabled by adults. It is not a guilty pleasure.

A generic Carnival interpretation can be made. The rules of ordinary life are temporarily breached to facilitate the realization of an alternative social order. In this case children take possession of public space, can eat as much sugar as they want, make as big of a mess as they want, and can attack persons and property without censure: actions would be classed as misbehavior under other frames.

Apart from sugar consumption, Catalan adults don’t approve of these activities at other times and even though the Merengada only happens once a year, parents and
business owners are faced with a significant clean up task afterward. For their own convenience, adults could confine the Merengada to a determinate space, but they do not. I attribute this to a sensibility about the ritual technique of the processional circuit of the town, the cercavila. The cercavila is a prominent feature of most Vilanovin festes. I will suggest that the ceremonial act of walking upon the rambles and squares is a ritual of place-making, and in turn, this sense of place is constitutive of local belonging. In everyday foot traffic, but in a heightened sense during festa, the town itself is a kind of body, with arteries and organs in which living people are the pulsing blood. By marking themselves and the town with the sweet pleasures of meringue, the children form attachments, literally adhesive in this case, to local belonging. This sensory play is a play of becoming, of transformation into new, fantastic ephemeral confectionary beings but also becoming citizens of Vilanova beyond the ceremonial sphere.

**The meringue battle**

The children’s merengada gave rise to a sensory idiom in which adults also fashioned their own sense of citizenship and political identity. The *Repte de la Merengada* (Battle of the Meringue Feast) was held at midnight of *Dijous Gras* at the Plaça de les Cols. It was explained to me that this annual event is traditionally marked by a confrontation between the members of the crew of castellers, *els Bordegassos* and of the *Agrupació dels Balls Populares* (Association of Popular Dance). I had not yet become a member of the Bordegassos but lived near their locale, where I arrived a few minutes before midnight. A boisterous delegation had filed out onto the street and were making their way to the Plaça de les Cols. A flag bearer and a drummer led the group of “uniformed”
fighters wearing helmets made of plastic jugs and the like. From a block away I heard boisterous laughter, and indistinct chants or fight songs I couldn’t make out. A non-combatant contingent followed behind. The Bordegassos had enjoyed a big dinner in their locale and it was evident from their comportment that many of them were more or less inebriated.

As they arrived at the plaça, they were met by an opposing army, who yelled their defiance and engaged the Bordegassos in combat immediately. The combatants deployed the same squirt bag technology and hand-smearing technique as the children but adding to this arsenal the dumping of whole buckets of meringue over the head of one’s opponent. As I was taking a photo from the sidelines, one of the combatants ran up to me, and I supposed that I was about to received a thorough smearing. At that point I noticed that most of the non-combatants prudently stood at either end of the plaça, well away from the action. However the figure that accosted me uttered the words “Sóc jo” (it’s me) and I recognized the voice of my friend Jordi, the historian. He was already liberally covered with meringue, his glasses askew with one lens completely opaque. The meringue masking his face served to playfully redirect my act of recognition from the visual to the auditory, the sensory shift producing a sensation of surprise and relief.

The mock battle took place annually but Jordi briefly explained to me that this year, the day coincided with the 25th anniversary of an attempted coup and that the mock battle on this particular night was a satiric reenactment of this event. On February 23, 1981 lieutenant-colonel Antonio Tejero Molina marched into congress with his men and
held nearly every important politician at gunpoint for 24 hours until the king, Juan

Figure 9. Sóc jo! (it's me). I recognized Jordi's voice when he approached but not his face, the meringue coating causing me to shift the sensory array of identification.

Carlos, in a deft act that earned him an enduring public respect he might not otherwise enjoy, quickly brought the rest of the armed forces to heel and defused the crisis (Hooper 1995: 47-48). Jordi pointed to his hat and I realized that half the combatants were wearing black tricorn hats (made of paper) and white coverings, to approximate the uniform of Franco's feared Guardia Civil. The other group, representing the pro-democracy Republicans, wore blue and red. A target of mockery and mirth on this
evening, twenty-five years ago the coup attempt was terrifying to a populace who had but recently emerged from under four decades of dictatorship (ibid).

The battle continued on with many combatants positively wallowing in meringue, slipping and falling, their costumes disheveled and spectacularly plastered. The spectators appeared to gain confidence in their personal security and drew nearer to the action when someone yelled “the populace! the populace!” and both armies ran to attack the spectators who scurried down the Rambla Caputxins to escape. I involuntarily recoiled when a woman combatant approached me with a heaping handful of meringue, but when she sweetly asked me “una mica?” (just a little?), I acquiesced. She carefully placed a generous blob on my cheek, which stuck there, slowly migrating down my face like a gelatinous ice floe until I got home. As in the incident of Moixo Foguer in which I also intruded as a camera-wielding outsider, a technique particular to the ritual was deployed to incorporate me, in this case, to mark my body with the prosthetic substance that enabled me to share, however nominally, the tactile-olfactory sensations of meringue upon skin.

Most of their weaponry now expended, the combatants began to mill about in conversation. Several people came up to speak to me after I had been marked as a part of the community of people who were empastifat, or “plastered.” I was greeted by Maçana who had also been a combatant and by Antoni, one of the town’s professional photographers whom I often saw at public events.

That the adult’s Merengada was readily adapted to social comment is typical of festa in Vilanova i la Geltrú and also of Carnival tradition. Carnival laughter and mock battles are both forms of permitted disrespect that intensify a sense of local belonging, and,
while directed outward, demonstrate resistance to dominating powers. Combining
embodied practice with symbolic expressions of satire, the *Repte de la Merengada* forged
a sensory-semantic circuit, in this instance giving democracy and autonomy a pleasurable
taste, smell and sticky feeling. To ‘grab the skin’ (*prendre el pell*) is a common
metaphoric description of playful teasing that emphasizes the relation between
carnivalesque laughter and mock warfare, again suggesting that the affective state of
indeterminacy is constituted though embodied sensations at the border of one’s skin and
the world that might be seen to serve as a model for symbolic verbal play.

Mock battle is a common Carnival idiom (Caro Baroja 1965: 225; Humphrey 2001: 1) as are gluttony and the abundance of food. Thus it is not surprising that ritual food
defights combining both idioms should break out in Carnival history, particularly in the
form of an egg. When Lenten fasting was instituted by the Council of Aix in 837, all
animal products such as meat, cheese and eggs were off the menu until 1784 when eggs
were reclassified as acceptable fare for penitents. The long period in which eggs were
forbidden during Lent gave rise to certain practical measures independent of the
presumed archaic or universal symbolism of the egg. In addition to the distribution of
eggs laid and preserved during Lent at Easter, any pre-Lenten eggs would have been used
up during Carnival. Numerous concomitant egg rituals have been documented since the
Middle Ages including widespread and still familiar games such as egg hunts, egg races,
egg-rolling, egg-tossing and of course, egg fights, such as the famous battles that took
place in Medieval times at Chester Cathedral between the bishop, dean and choristers
during the midst of Easter services (Toussaint-Samat 1993: 355-62).
Apart from egg whites, the other component of meringue is sugar, which in Catalonia, as was the case in much of Europe, underwent a transformation from a rare luxury into a universal staple within a few generations (Mintz 1985). The modern abundance and ritual destruction of sugar in Vilanova is one of many reminders of the joined past of the town with the Cuban cities of Havana and Matanzas where a number of Vilanovins made their fortunes in the 18th and 19th centuries and financed the town's golden age. The town was considerably expanded during this time beyond the old medieval fortifications and the grand houses and public buildings built by the returning Indianos, as they were known, are embellished with an iconography of this trade relationship rendered in wrought iron, stone, stucco and terra cotta. The staff of Hermes (patron of travelers), romanticized Native Americans, tropical fruits, ships and ports laden with goods, grapes (exported from the Garraf) and cornucopia may be found on the façades of many buildings around the town center.

Mock battles are a widely distributed ritual idiom. The medieval Catalan language epic romance, Tirant lo Blanc (1490) presented gleeful yet realistic mock battles with leather projectiles simulating those of iron and stone in conjunction with nuptial feasting and lethal jousts (Martorell and Joan de Galba 1984: 64). Water fights and flour fights appear in Carnivals from England to Brazil (Turner and Schechner 1986: 134) and Goethe described intensely realistic battles of confetti (sugar coated almonds) during Carnival in Rome in the late eighteenth century (Goethe 1962: 402-4). The Catalans of

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50 The bronze figure atop the pedestal in the center of the Plaça de la Vila is Josep Tomàs Ventosa Soler (born in Vilanova, 1754 — died in Havana, 1824). From fortunes derived from the textile trade he built and endowed public institutions in both Matanzas and Vilanova such as free schools for poor boys and girls, hospitals and libraries. The bronze statue in Vilanova was founded in Matanzas. Two of the statues were made and the other identical statue stands in Matanzas (Puig Rovira 2003: 352-3).
Berga perform a dance-battle called *Turcs i Cavellets*, a variant of the Moors-and-
Christians dances common though much of southern Europe, representing medieval battles (Noyes 2003: 48). The *Ball de Bastons*, found in many Catalan towns,\(^{51}\) features an intense exchange of blows with thick wooden sticks that may leave dancers with bleeding hands or injured wrists at the end of a procession.

Although the Merengada appears to be unique to Vilanova, similar food fights are common throughout Catalonia, the weaponry including tomatoes, flour, grapes, water, candy, and hazelnuts. Other mock battles involve the use fireworks, muskets, mortars, canons, confetti, snow and even a war of kisses (Festes.org, Carrutxa, and Presència). The most venerable of these Catalan food fights are the *Compares* of Vilanova i la Geltrú.

**Sweet Wars, part II: Les Compares**

On Saturday evening the shop and business employees throughout the town center used cardboard and packing tape to cover all of their windows, signs and display cases that faced any public thoroughfare as if a storm or revolution were imminent. They were taking these prudent measures in preparation for the comparses, a couples dance also known as *la Guerra dels Caramels* or the Candy War. Vilanovins consider this dance/battle the most unique and impressive aspect of their Carnival and that to go through the Comparses is to experience the essence of what it means to be Vilanovin. Many even consider it the touchstone of Carnival in all Catalonia (Garcia 1972: 341-3).

\(^{51}\) Similar dances are found in France, Italy, Germany, Croatia and England where it is known as Morris dancing (Forrest 1999).
Of uncertain history and thought to originate in Italy, the Comparses were already the distinguishing feature of Vilanovin Carnival in 1850 when the first detailed descriptions of Carnival appeared in the then recently established local newspaper El Diari de Vilanova, still in publication (op. cit.: 346-52). On the day I observed the Comparses, the various banderes (the crews who follow a banner) departed from their locales on Sunday morning wearing their distinguishing uniforms. The men of each bandera wore a barretina (traditional Catalan cap), with vests and jackets of a matching color or pattern. Over their shoulders were slung bags that, according to my barber, may start the day filled with as much as 60 kilos of caramels (hard candies) which they will hurl at the members of other banderes.\(^{52}\) The women wear wide skirts with a gipó, or short, belted jacket and around their shoulders tie a mantó de Manila, or Manila shawl, which is usually black and embroidered with floral designs. They will use these shawls to protect their heads and faces during heavy fighting.

In their hair, the women wore a white or red carnation, a tradition that, according to Guifré, came from the Philippines like the mantons. Each bandera, made up of fifty to a hundred or more couples, belongs to a societat (society) of which the dancers may or may not be a regular member, or to an ad hoc group. In the nineteenth century, many of the societats were trade confraternities or guilds (gremis) of fishermen, craftsmen or artisans, a few of which still exist as Comparsa societats. Most today are societies formed

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\(^{52}\) The caramels were formerly sugar-coated almonds (Italian confetti) (Garcia 1972), which have been used as weapons since the 15th century in Burgundy where a puppet representing a disgraced comfit-maker is pelted with sweets during the Carnival procession (Toussaint-Samat 1993). Ximo informed me that paper confetti came about as a less expensive projectile than sugared almond confetti and thus preserves the name.
especially to organize for the comparses and related festa activity, and a few of these
groups were also already established in the 1850s.

Guífré explained that in the past there was an element of class warfare to the
comparses: the fiercest battles occurring when the fishermen surged up from their shacks
on the beach to invade the bourgeois town center and challenge the artisans. Today,
construction workers, college professors, recent immigrants, and members of old
Vilanovin families may dance behind the same banner, this historical change indicating
an interpenetration of ideology and festa practices, of ethics and aesthetics as I will
explore in the following chapter.

As the comparsers took to the streets, various bars and restaurants had placed tables
outside laden with porrons of wine and beer with bread, olives, cheese and charcuterie
to help dancers keep up their strength. Each bandera was followed by a brass band
comprised of at least nine musicians playing the emblematic military march, the Turuta,\textsuperscript{53}
which accompanies various dance patterns. As the banderes encounter others, the men
commence throwing caramels, sometimes playfully, sometimes with surprising force. As
the various banderes converge on the town center, these skirmishes become more or less
continuous.

Townspeople line the route, children scooping up candy and elderly women standing
along the curbs holding umbrellas upside-down in which to collect a supply of candy: one
expects they might stock their candy dish the rest of the year with a good catch.
Supporters of various banderes standing above on the balconies also pelt the comparsers

\textsuperscript{53} From turutu, an onomatopoeic word that describes a bugle call.
in several locations. All of this might seem rather quaint until the scale of it becomes apparent.

In 2006, 95 banderes totaling 12,000 dancers participated in the Comparses and flung over 75 tons of hard candy (Diari de Vilanova 2006k). Vilanova’s annual purchase and deployment of candy not only has a significant regional economic impact but also requires a significant mobilization of civic maintenance and environmental clean up personnel. A week later the headline of the local paper declared “Complaints about Strong Stench of the Rambla: City Hall can’t explain the origin” (Diari de Vilanova 2006p). News inquiries to four passersby produced these responses: “It’s horrible, it can’t be stomached. I thought it was caused by the Merengada. You have to hold your nose because it’s unbearable,” “Yes, it started with Carnival. It’s an unbearable acrid odor, perhaps a mixture of candy and rainwater,” “Yes, I noticed it and I’m avoiding the rambla because it really reeks,” and finally “It’s a strange odor, like a sewer or rottenness. I’m avoiding the rambla, not just because of the smell but because the ground is still sticky” (Diari de Vilanova 2006i). The week after that, a technical team from the Department of the Environment determined that, as one of the passersby suspected, the sugar from the large volume of candy collected in the drains had mixed with rainwater and begun the chemical process of fermentation (Diari de Vilanova 2006e).

In fact, it had rained off-and-on all day of the comparses, sometimes heavily, which hardly seemed to dampen the spirits of the dancers or discourage the estimated 11,000 spectators, many with umbrellas now right side up. The nearby town of Sitges cancelled their Carnival procession that day and the Sitgetans were not faulted for this, rather the
Comparses of Vilanova were credited with an indomitable agency that could not be vanquished by the rain (Diari de Vilanova 2006).

My family and I had met up with Ignasio, Ursula and their five year-old son Pep, to watch the culmination of the Comparses, la guerra dels caramels, in the central Plaça de la Vila. The arcaded plaça, flanked by the offices of municipal governance and the town’s main library had been transformed, not so much as a stage setting but rather as a large-scale diorama, a self-contained artificial world. The raised, central surface of the plaça, paved in an interlocking pattern of black and white marble of swirling movement was bounded by a white wooden barrier to contain the battle and protect the spectators. On the Saturday before Dijous Gras, the town “raises the cloth,” with nearly every house bearing some kind of decoration. The balconies facing the public squares and rambles were amply decorated with brightly hued triangular mantons (mantles, shawls) and banners depicting masks, stars, owls, or butterflies. These decorations were strung over the rambles from balcony to balcony where Christmas lights had hung two months before. Each section of rambla had a unified scheme, for example of green mantons flanking multihued butterflies.

Both the guarniments (lit. garnish, decorations) and the barriers served to enclose and contain the public space, drawing attention to the space itself and changing the movement of bodies through that space. One looks up to admire the décor and must walk around the barriers. A number of other banners bearing civic-oriented messages that had hung from balconies since my arrival had been removed to accommodate Carnival décor. This alteration had not been done at Christmas. Every procession, dance or feast invariably littered the public squares and rambles with material including feathers, paper confetti,
bits of ribbon, meringue, beer cans, candy, lost articles, bits of food and various sticky, slippery or wet substances.

David Morris has developed the implications of Merleau-Ponty’s thought with regard to human bodies moving through space to consider the different moving “grammars” one learns moving, at varying speeds, through different environments from sidewalks to tunnels to shopping centers. Morris says that “each movement-environment authorizes its own patterns, which become habitual guides of movement and depth perception” (Morris 2004: 12).

The transformation of public space during Carnival is then not simply a passively consumed visual spectacle but a disruption of embodied habits and an infrastructure that enables different patterns of movement. As one swims through the Carnival crowds who themselves might be boisterous, facetious, inebriated or otherwise unpredictable in their movements, one’s feet encounter uncertainties and familiar visual cues are found to be displaced by novel distractions. The pounding of drums, the blare of brass bands, the piercing plaint of the gralla or groan of the bagpipes approach and recede: echoing, muffled, now harmonious, now cacophonous, all driving against the background of a continual chattering hubbub.

At noon on the day of the Comparses the large Plaça de la Vila, often filled with people during festa, was the most crowded I had ever seen it. Soggy but jubilant Comparsers kept pouring in and lining up under the western portico, spectators crowded the periphery, pressing against the chest-high barrier, and the balconies and rooftops—exceeding the height of the tall Canary Island palm trees that ringed the plaça—were filled with observers. Ignacio told me, “there aren’t that many people this year, because
of the rain,” yet I found it hard to imagine how many more could have been packed into
the space. The members of one bandera were singing what sounded like an athletic fight
song with only one word “alcohol,” leading Ignasio to remark that this was a ritual crew
of borraxos (drunks). After being plied with beer and wine gratis throughout the
morning, I conjectured that many of the Comparsers might have been similarly
intoxicated.

The mayor and some visiting celebrities stood on the balcony of City Hall, television
news teams occupied the balconies in a corner building and an announcer called forward
the banderers (flag bearers) of all the Comparsers to the center of the Plaça. Each
wearing the colors of his ritual crew and waving a large flag perhaps four by eight feet in
dimension, the flag bearers forcefully swung their banners in wide, dramatic arcs while a
brass band played and both dancers and spectators cheered. At the end of this dance, the
flag bearers ran into the foyer of city hall and soon appeared on the balcony where they
resumed waving their banners.

The announcer called out six flag bearers onto the center of the plaça, the members of
each circling the plaça behind their flag bearer creating flowing lines of colors formed by
hats, jackets, scarves and bandanas. After a few circuits the announcer called for the
beginning of the dance and the couples began dancing together while the announcer
urged them on, eventually inciting them to battle. The music stopped and the men began
throwing candy by the handful, either at the members of another bandera at close range,
or high into the air where the multicolored candy turned the air above the plaça
kaleidoscopic. “It’s a shame that it rained,” said my landlady the next day, “In the sun,
the sugar and the wrappers of the candy in the air look like a beautiful cloud.” I heard the
colliding candy produce a tinkling sound like a room full of crystal chandeliers in the midst of an earthquake. The women pulled their shawls up over their heads and faced away from the center, creating tent-like shapes above themselves, often grouping into colorful bulwarks.

The battle raged on until the combatants had exhausted their ammunition. The men then swung their empty shoulder bags over their heads and cheered for several minutes while the band struck up another march. The announcer signaled another dance and all the Comparsers joined up into lateral lines with their arms around each other, swinging backwards and forwards while singing “o-e, o-e-o-e-o-e” in a triumphant finale. These banderes then filed out of the East portico revealing the surface of the plaça, the black and white pattern completely concealed by a carpet of multicolored candy.

Next a phalanx of municipal employees came forward in lime green vests bearing long poles fitted with wide blades like those used by window cleaners. These public employees formed a line and in unison pushed their implements through the carpet of candy, clearing large swaths until the central plaça was once again fully visible. Another group of flag bearers came forward and the process began again. It took most of the afternoon for all 95 banderes, including divisions for children, youth and adults, to take the plaça and engage in battle.

Two weeks later the streets were still sticky and I would continue to notice candy in drains and on ledges, and in nooks and crannies, for the remaining seven months of my stay. And during those months, as I observed or participated in other Vilanovin festa rituals, I came to appreciate that far more substantial traces of Carnival were distributed among these practices than candy wrappers and streaks of meringue.
Carnival is often considered as a discrete phenomenon in contradistinction to everyday life, in conflict with formal Christianity, or as a pagan or otherwise pre-modern survival. Whatever the merits of these approaches, they tend to neglect the cross-fertilization not only between ritual time and ordinary time and between tradition and innovation but between different kinds of ritual. Since the Christian gospels neither decree nor interdict any type of festival observance, festival origins are murky at best and pure distinctions are untenable.

Vilanovins will say of the varying characters of their festes that some are “more of the church,” others, “more of the street.” The distinction between secular and religious is not invoked. Among local festes my informants recognize Corpus Christi, observed the Thursday after Trinity Sunday in May or June, as being an expression of social hierarchy and church authority. In Vilanova, Corpus was the least well attended procession I witnessed while egalitarian Carnival was the most multitudinous. About fifteen children celebrated their first communion and then joined a procession through the narrow twisting medieval lanes of la Geltrú behind a priest carrying a monstrance\(^{54}\) beneath a canopy, followed by a small subset of the dance crews that take part in other saints day processions. I saw Núria there, her daughter Kanchi, adopted from Nepal, was one of ten girls between 7 and 10 years old who served as dancers in the Ball de Cercolets and one of two South Asian children in the crew. In contrast to her usual effusiveness about local festes, Núria expressed a marked lack of enthusiasm for Corpus, remarking to me with a deprecatory shrug that it was a “religious holiday.” Of course all of the saints day processions were arguably religious in some sense, but the lack of gusto for Corpus

\(^{54}\) The vessel used to display the consecrated Eucharist Host.
reflected the general indifference or antipathy towards the church as an institution associated with the dictatorship.

**Fire and smoke**

Regardless of the diverse and changing affective arrays with which different festes have been invested over time, sensory and representational modalities of the grotesque body can be found side by side with reverence for saints and saviors in the documented history of Catalan festa. Rituals of *foc i fum* (fire and smoke) are very popular throughout the Catalan territories. Fire-breathing beasts accompany most Saint’s days processions throughout the region, most commonly dragons (*dracs*) and mules (*mulasses*) but such beasts are found in a great diversity including at least one pullet, carp, worm, ram, goat, rat, camel, lion and even phylloxera, the wasp-like pest that devastated vineyards in the 1870s. One person carries the beast, legs visibly extending below, while accompanying members of the crew, in many cases dressed as devils, attach pyrotechnic devices to metal fittings and ignite them at which time the beasts prance, spin or charge the populace, spraying blinding sparks in their path.

Various representations of hell and the devil were very popular in medieval street theater throughout Europe, particularly in the form of didactic religious plays (Turner 1995). A particular Catalan form is described in the Barcelona city archives in 1424 as part of the Corpus Christi procession that year:

Hell with Lucifer above, with four devils with dragon of St. Michael. The major with a mace and twenty-four devils who engage in battle on foot with the angels.
Saint Michael with twenty angels armed with swords who wage battle against the devils (Duran i Sanpere and Sanpere 1930: 17).

The first documented evidence of fire rituals in Vilanova appears in 1710 on a receipt for four coets (pyrotechnic devices) for the mulassa (artificial mule) and a gross of xiquets (small ones) for the “diablots” (devils) of whom there were four or five. The drac (dragon) began to accompany the mulassa and devils beginning in the early 1800s, especially on the day of “l’Arribo d’En Carnestoltes.” The number of devils grew over time and by 1832 can be documented as having organized into the Ball de Diables as an element of Vilanova’s Festa Major (Ferrer i Soler and Anguera i Llauradó 1964: 50).

The structure of the current Ball de Diables of Vilanova has been more or less stable for over a century. The ritual crew is made of up twenty-four people wearing devil suits, made of heavy, protective cloth, painstakingly designed and painted by generations of local artists. These twenty-four include Lucifer, the Diablessa, four drummers (tabalers), one igniter (encenedor), and seventeen devils. One of their ritual forms includes the additional personage of the Archangel Michael, played by a young boy or girl.

The seventeen devils, portrayed by women and men, resemble each other but are distinguishable by the length and size of their tails and shape of their horns. In hands protected by pigskin gloves, each diable carries a maça (mace) with a metal spike on the top on which to mount pyrotechnic devices. One of the diables, Núria, explained the variety of these devices, known generically as coets. Carretilles are about five inches long and are fitted with a ring by which they are mounted allowing them to spin when ignited, creating a spiraling shower of sparks. Xiulets are carretilles that produce a
whistling sound like falling bombs when they spin, and the arboç creates a broader “umbrella of fire.” All of them may explode just as they reach the end, shooting forth white hot shards in unpredictable paths. Francesos are mounted pointing up and produce a fountain of sparks but do not spin and portuguessos are a more potent version of the same. Those that produce red or green colored light are simuladors and are sometimes placed on the ground to produce eerie illuminations within the smoke of a formation of diables. The diables of Vilanova pioneered a distinctive dance now emulated by crews in other parts of Catalonia. As they run, showering sparks from the maces held over their heads, with legs straight, they kick their feet high from side to side, resembling tormented marionettes.

Figure 10. Devils dance while holding maces with spinning carretilles above themselves, showering the crowd with sparks.
Llucifer is the head of the devils distinguishable by his cape, hat and a tall staff called a ceptrot that “dominates over everything,” as I was told by the chief of the ritual crew. This ceptrot can hold up to 30 carretilles producing a display even more blinding and deafening than that of the ordinary devils. The Diablessa is the only feminine demonic personage, always portrayed by a man throughout the history of the crew, second only to Llucifer in rank and importance. I was told the Diablessa is “grotesque, extravagant and exposed to the bad life.” She is dressed in a wide skirt, hat and holds a ceptrot slightly smaller than Llucifer’s that holds as many as twenty carretilles. The Diablessa demonstrates the most satiric tone of any of the devils. The drummers provide a pounding rhythm and the encenedor ignites the pyrotechnic devices and thus controls the pace of the dance. In this case, the encenedor is also the cap de la colla or chief of the crew, with overall responsibility for security and successful performances.

There are several different types of ignition: apart from the diable with a single coet there is the carretillada or ignition of all of the devils at once, the sentada, or ignition of devils seated on the ground in a line, and the ignition of the multiple devices of Llucifer and the Diablessa. There are also bosses, who carry the bags (bosses) of coets and supply the devils, their number depending on the quantity of coets; the farmaciola or first aid administrator; and the aiguader or water bearer responsible for hydrating the devils. Even on cold nights the diables become extremely hot dancing for hours inside their heavy suits while sparks rain constantly on their bodies. At the end of a performance their faces are red, sweaty and sooty. Their ears ringing, many will be slightly deaf until sometime the following day.
Ritual procession

As I have suggested with regard to the children’s Merengada, the processional circuit through the town (cercavila) is a core technique of incorporation within the repertoire of Vilanovin ritual practice. Foot traffic upon the rambles and social gathering in the public squares are features of everyday life that are intensified and massified during festa. In a cercavila, the footsteps of the participants thread together the town’s public squares and rambles, producing a sense of the town and often serve as a bridge of continuity between ritual events at either or both ends of the route. The town’s pedestrian infrastructure is itself a prosthetic: the technique of cercavila uses the rambles and public squares to fashion sociable bodies, to place them in relation to each other and to the determinate place of the town itself.

Appearing in a variety of contexts and at different times, the Ball de Diables has three primary ritual forms: the cercavila, the correfoc (fire run), and the parlament (parliament). This embodied practice of walking the town circuit is an elemental act of participation overlaid with varying sensory experiences, such as that facilitated by the diables. In many cases, particularly the big processions for festes dedicated to the patron saint of the town or of one of its neighborhoods, the column of dancing people and imaginary beasts and personages will be lead by the diables, who will take part in five to ten cercaviles every year as they will also be invited to join processions in other towns.

At the head of the cercavila for the arrival of Carnestoltes, at the moment the coordinating authorities gave the signal, the encendedor, a big diable wearing dark sunglasses to protect his eyes, ignited the botafoc, which he then used to light the coets of the ordinary diables lined up behind him. As he lit the first diable’s coet, she leapt
forward in a jagged dance, sparks shooting forth in a spiral while a high, vibrating whistle pierced the air. The encendedor lit the coet of the next diable once the first had advanced about six feet ahead and continued igniting the coets of each diable in turn until five or six danced in a jagged line, their sparks raining down upon themselves in fiery arcs four to eight feet in diameter, often falling upon the spectators lined up along the sidewalk who drew back against the buildings, retreated up alleyways, and flinched or delighted in being assailed by sparks. The succession of high pitched whistles, descending in tone, led the ear towards unpredictable culminations as the carretilla of the lead diable explodes with a loud pop, spurt ing white hot shards up to twenty feet away.

The advancing front of the procession is marked by a sonic and visual assault punctuated with a succession of intermittent explosions, leaving the air filled with clouds of smoke and the pungent reek of brimstone. After the lead diable's carretilla exploded, she turned around and ran to the back of the line to have the bossers reload her maça while the other sixteen ordinary diables ran their course. At the end of the line loomed Llucifer and the Diablessa, with 20 to 30 carretilles simultaneously ignited upon the tines of their towering ceptrots, they created blinding white holes in the world ending in deafening fusillades and impenetrable smoke.

Despite the typical precautions of the spectators to wear thick, non-synthetic clothing, hats and closed-toe footwear, burning shrapnel often makes contact with exposed human flesh, bouncing off harmlessly or searing temporary or permanent marks into the epidermis. After catching one such spark on my tongue, I asked Ignasio if many Vilanovins had permanent burn marks as a result of these sparks. He cocked his head knowingly and pointed to a large brown spot resembling a mole, half an inch beneath his
left eye. “A lot of us have these marks,” he said, and my subsequent inquiries determined that this was true of a number of my acquaintances and that such burn marks were sometimes the subject of friendly joking. Facing a common danger and bearing its marks help define who belongs to the group included by Ignasio’s use of the word us.

The phenomenon of stigmatization first appeared on the person of St. Francis of Assisi, whose wounds, received during a vision, mimicked those of the crucified Christ: the hardened scars on his hands and feet even being said to resemble nail heads. His stigmata were understood as evidence of his transformative episode. Similar marks would later be associated with various female saints and then with hysterical conditions in women. Devils marks, or stigmata diaboli, which, by the sixteenth century came to be taken as proof of concourse with Satan, were not visible marks but patches of insensitivity in the skin detected by painful poking with needles (Connor 2004: 120-31). More recently, the extremely popular Italian friar Padre Pio (1887-1968, canonized 2002), who “bore the wounds of our lord,” is said to have endured painful stigmata on hands, feet and torso, and is credited with numerous miraculous acts of healing (The Holy See 2007).

The visible stigmata diaboli borne on Vilanovin bodies are not read by anyone for imagined inner meaning but can be seen as testament to moments of liminality in the din of sensory saturation and ritual violence. Wounds are liminal in and of themselves (Gardner 1998), as ruptures between self and world. Bourdieu points out that the body itself serves as a “memory pad” for socialization whether by instruction to sit up straight, the largely unconscious learning of gendered physical comportment, or in painful rites of incorporation such as applying tattoos or scarification (Bourdieu 2000: 141) The scarred
body is a repository of memory, the scar testifying to the passage between sensory exteriors and interiors (Seremetakis 1994: 6). The scarred body also forms a link between the ceremonial and the everyday registers of local life: the burn-marks of Vilanovins serve—like the stigmata of St. Francis—as reminders of transformative episodes of becoming. Such memories are not of unpleasant trauma, but of the half-embarrassed/half-proud scars of mock battle.

**Fire run**

The correfoc\(^{55}\) is a new ritual genre invented at the *Festes de la Mercè* in Barcelona in 1979. Practiced in Vilanova since 1992, it has been embraced by virtually all of the crews of diables and *dracs* (fire-breathing dragons) throughout Catalonia. The correfoc resembles the cercavila but is made up entirely of diables and/or dracs along with anyone daring enough to dance among the sparks and explosions.

As with many of the town’s festivals, Festa Major began with a purifying ritual of fire. As he had done at Carnival, the chief (*cap*) of Vilanova’s oldest crew of devils invited me to accompany their infernal circuit as they led a correfoc through the rambles and public squares. This would be the last time they wore their old hand painted suits. Despite their heavy construction the suits were scorched and riddled with holes from the burning sparks of a decade’s use. In a few days they would unveil the new suits carefully designed and realized by local artist Pep Duran who had begun the process two years previously.

I joined the diables at their locale where they suited up, some drank a beer, perhaps to

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\(^{55}\) The term *correfoc* was coined by the Vilanovin author and popular theater proponent Bienve Moya.
steady their nerves, and joked with each other, calling each other by affectionate nicknames including petardete, poc a poc, martu, pollero, pollera, pollito, pollita, cadires, lula, nena, ojos, nen, tuqui, bet, xexes, benji, and miguelito. The use of nicknames is not as prominent in Vilanova as it was a generation ago but within the life of ritual crews their use is still very common, serving to cultivate an affect of intimacy as an aspect of the social bonds within the group (cf. Pitt-Rivers 1954: 31). The bossers loaded bag after bag with a variety of coets. For a short procession such as that for the saints day of St. Peter celebrated in the Barri del Mar (the seaside neighborhood), the diables will use up to 1,000 coets. For a correfoc such as the one the diables were about to embark on, they would use 2,500, or “una barbaritat” (an excessive quantity) as one diable told me. Many of the diables are smokers but within the locale, with its stockpile of combustible munitions, smoking is emphatically prohibited. The chief called for attention to make a few announcements. “I just want to remind everyone,” he said, tying off the last bag of several hundred carretilles, “that with all of these pyrotechnics, there is the real possibility that they could all go off.” After a moment’s pause, a young woman exclaimed “que guai!” (how cool!) and everyone, including the chief dissolved in laughter. I have no doubt that the simultaneous explosion of thousands of coets within the locale would have been a stunning spectacle but probably the last one we would ever experience. Following this brief assembly, the diables filed outside and walked the short distance to the Plaça de les Neus where the correfoc would begin.

Half a dozen crews of diables were assembled before the church, including one that appeared to be composed exclusively of women. Each ritual crew had distinctive, often extravagantly designed suits, maces of different designs and imposing ceptrots. Street
lights partially illuminated the plaça such that those diables in motion appeared and disappeared into the warm summer night. *Tabalers* tested their drums, the sound echoing off the back of the church. The two dracs (one of Vilanova and the other of la Geltrú) were present and children swarmed around them, touching them all over in fascination as the beasts lay on the ground within their reach.

It was time to begin the cercavila of Festa Major. The encenerdor placed a few red simuladors on the steps to illuminate the short path from the plaça down to the head of the Rambla Principal. The diables huddled in a circle at the top of the steps, francesos mounted atop their maces. As they ignited, fountains of sparks flew into the air, drums pounded and the diables marched down the steps amidst clouds of smoke glowing red from below. The diables emerged as from the mouth of hell onto the surface of the world of the living.

The diables of Vilanova prepared their carretilles while the *drac* of Vilanova came down the steps, prancing left and right, sparks spraying from the multiple coets mounted in its mouth, which randomly exploded, scattering white hot fragments. Other ritual crews of diables and dracs followed and soon sparks, explosions, drumbeats, pungent smoke and dancing infernal beings filled several blocks.

Many Vilanovins cowered at the edges of the correfoc, drawn to the spectacle but fearing burns and temporary deafness. A contingent of hundreds of teenagers and young adults took a different approach, wearing thick shirts and broad-brim hats, faces masked with bandanas, they danced among the devils, mimetically swinging their legs, sometimes with arms around each other’s shoulders, in gleeful submission to the reign of fire. The sensory inundation and sensation of vertigo cultivated by this type of ritual was
codified as *ilinx* (Greek, whirlpool) by Roger Caillois, described as an attempt to temporarily destabilize perception (Caillois 2001). The correfoc also cultivates the whirlpool through a sense of danger, of disorientation as one tries to watch for showers of sparks from multiple directions, and because once one is in the midst of it, it is difficult to escape. One is literally caught up in the correfoc’s intense sensory assault and the rhythms of the bodies all around one. The correfoc forces one to be in the moment, to abandon time.

Darting through the firestorm, attempting to snap photos while sparks burned through my inadequate cotton t-shirt, my ears ringing, throat parched, the sensory impulses triggered impressionist associations I cannot attribute to anyone beyond myself. Spiral galaxies of sparks and smoke bloom in the darkness, explosions and drums mimic creation’s big bang while the selfsame sparks spin infinitely inward tracing the microcosmic dance of electrons around nuclei: the inconceivable vastness of existence is made manifest only to be collapsed into the ungraspably miniature.

I should not have characterized without qualification the relationship between Vilanova’s youth and its diables as one of submission. In fact the youth enacted a play of resistance during the course of the correfoc. At several intersections, groups of young people blocked the way, preventing the diables from passing. In each instance, the diables were able to push through without great difficulty by showering the youth with a *carretillada*. As the correfoc progressed down a narrow street in the old part of town, intensifying the loudness, smokiness and closeness of the participants, a group of youth established themselves at the *Portal del Nin*, constructed in 1370, the last remaining gate of Vilanova’s medieval fortifications. The arched gateway was the perfect site to create a
bottleneck and cork it shut, and here the diables were unable to penetrate the scrum of youth, their sweaty, satisfied faces crowned with scorched, wide-brimmed straw hats.

I had passed through beyond the gate before the youths closed ranks and could see only a mass of people and a lot of smoke on the other side, dimly lit by the red glow of a few coets as the diables tried to pierce the blockade. Several minutes elapsed without movement when all of the diables simultaneously ignited francesos and pushed through the gate, raining torrents of blazing sparks upon the clustered youth.

As each crew entered the corner of the central plaça, its members manifested various types of dramatic combustion and then distributed themselves among the spectators. The smell of gunpowder and a thick pall of smoke hung over everything. The diables of Vilanova clustered on the stage and ignited a final _carretillada_. For a moment they were completely eclipsed by the blinding white light, as if swallowed by the sun. All of the other beasts and demons ignited their coets throughout the plaça and then the sky itself rained down fire, as lines of spark spewing francesos had been strung above the plaça earlier in the day. Festa Major had begun.

Many of the ritual techniques I have related in this chapter engage an idiom of conflict. Mock battles and permission to attack others with a range of material—meringue, hard candy, sparks—acknowledge conflict as a condition of social life. The mock violence of Carnival transgresses everyday norms of social interaction but can not be reduced to a release of tension. The liminal world constructed through these techniques is a realm of extended sensory and affective experience. The odors of sugar and egg whites, clouds of sulfurous smoke, and fermented candy; the tactile novelty of sticky meringue, burning sparks, and the impact of thrown candy; the sonic shock of
explosions, the collective hubbub of the crowd; and a sense of danger and expectancy: all constitute this experiential world.

Prosthetics include the physically transformed town itself, which redirects embodied movements, and also an array of mock battle gear. Squirt bags and devil’s maces extend aggressive capacity while Manila shawls protect faces from projectiles; rain slickers impede the saturation of meringue; thick shirts, bandanas and wide-brimmed hats reduce the exposure of skin to burning sparks. A play of resistance is present both in the youth blockades of the onslaught of the devils and the Republican defense against a military coup. All of this play is a play of becoming. Participants develop experiential capacities through these rituals that are charged with celebratory affect. A degree of risk and conflict is not merely tolerated but enthusiastically courted. The safe rationalities of everyday are put aside in order to pursue collective, unpredictable modes of being. I will argue that more than scars remain to testify to these moments of transformation. Rather than rely on the fleeting substances of meringue and smoke to connect the sensory to the political, in the coming chapter I will trace explicit articulations between ritual techniques and states of being with ethical orientations and practices.
Figure 11. Youth blockade the passage of the crew of devils at the gateway of Nin.

Figure 12. The fire run reaches the corner of the Plaça de la Vila.
Figure 13. Devils eclipsed by sparks and explosions.

Figure 14. Ceiling of fire in the Plaça de la Vila at the culmination of the fire run.
Chapter V: Ethical embodiment

The ethnographic data in this chapter demonstrate a clear relationship between the sensory and political spheres. Human castles (*castells*) are the ritual activity with the highest concentration of new immigrant participation throughout the Catalan territories. They are performances of social integration. Technical attention to sensory experience is here shown to be an investment in a local regime of value (Myers 2004) that includes forms of resistance and solidarity. It is the most reflexive chapter, based on my experience becoming integrated as a member of a ritual crew. It also forms a bridge from ritual techniques back to broader social processes explored further in the final chapter such as the prospects for practical convivència between natives and newcomers.

Pierre Bourdieu’s concern with the intersection between embodied individual actors and meaningful social collectivities provides a point of departure. Building upon a notion explored earlier by Mauss (2006 [1935]) and Elias (2000 [1939]), Bourdieu used the term *habitus* to link subjective experience to social context. Bourdieu argued that knowledge of the world is not passively recorded but actively constructed through durable embodied dispositions, the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977: 72), constituted in practice and oriented toward practical functions (Bourdieu 1990: 52). The habitus generates “thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions,” considered “reasonable” as well as “common-sense behaviors” (op. cit.: 55). Habitus can therefore be associated with the Catalan notion of *seny*, or centered, practical reason, (discussed in chapters two and three). *Seny* is more ideational than habitus but is also strongly linked to a sense of historical continuity, as in Bourdieu’s conception, which goes as far as to deem the habitus “embodied history” (op. cit.: 56).

Bourdieu’s model has been critiqued as emphasizing homogeneity between individual
experience and social structure produced by habitus, thereby muting the capacity for agents to improvise and to initiate personal or social change (Jenkins 2002). Other readers have pointed to aspects of the habitus as a generative system that is highly differentiated (Hanks 1996: 235). The latter argument is supported by Bourdieu’s statement that the habitus is a strategy-generating principle that enables agents to respond to unforeseen circumstances (Bourdieu 1977: 72-73). The crucial point is that the habitus consists of transposable dispositions (ibid.), thus the agent’s competencies in one sphere can be deployed in others. I will show here that sensory competencies honed in ritual performance are constitutive of practices of social integration outside the ritual frame. In Vilanovin society, the social space of the festa operates as a crucible in which embodied dispositions, however durable they may be at other times, become malleable, and that ritual techniques are tools that allow agents to reorient their sensory experience and shared expectations. In this way the analysis of sensory politics provides an explicit account of collective and individual change.

**Castells**

Castells (lit. castles) are the most ephemeral architectural structures in the world. Made of living human bodies, they are esteemed for achieving altitude, complexity and grace and as symbols of integrated cooperation. Castells may not be immediately intelligible to those accustomed to interpreting athletic activities through the framework of sports. When multiple crews display their art in public, typically at a Festa Major or other saint’s day, it is called a performance (*actuació*) rather than a competition. Aficionados evaluate
Figure 15. The Minyons de Terrassa complete a tower of eight, with foire. Plaça de la Vila, Vilanova.
castells with the subtleties of wine tasters but there are neither winners nor losers.

Preparatory activities are called rehearsals (assajos) rather than trainings. Unlike many sports, there is no narrow idealization of the appropriate physical types or phase of life, rather the opposite: the lack of bodies of all shapes and sizes is a liability. In the world of castells, avidly appreciated throughout Catalonia, there are no individual champions or professional players. The spirit of competition, while present, is neither absolute nor unmitigated: the members of what would appear to be competing teams take part in helping other crews to make successful castells.

One way to explain castells, is to begin with their anatomy. The vertical component is called the tronc (trunk). The members of the trunk who stand on the ground are called the baixos (bottoms), typically men of a physical type called cepat (lit. like a grapevine, stocky): of robust constitution, big boned, with strong musculature and generally no taller than about five and a half feet. Those standing on the shoulders of the baixos are the segons (seconds) followed by the progressively slimmer and shorter terços, quarts, quintos, and sisès. In formations of two or more trunks, the top level is capped by a pair of adolescents called the dosos, above whom climb two very nimble girls or boys, some as young as five years old. The aixecador (riser) straddles the dosos and the enxaneta (rider) stands above all and must salute the plaça with her hand in the air (fer l’aleta/make the fin) before the castell can be considered officially loaded. This top formation of dosos, aixecador and enxaneta, completed by the canalla, or children’s component of the crew, is called the pom de dalt (the bouquet above).

This description reveals an apparent limitation to the height such structures can reach. By my rough estimation, the shoulder of each baix could bear around 700 pounds at the
moment a castell of eight levels is loaded. In order to distribute the weight and add stability to the structure, the crew members who are not a part of the trunk, cluster together at ground level to form the *pinya* or base. Although it might look like an undifferentiated mass, the arrangement of different positions within the pinya is even more complicated than that of the trunk. Behind each baix stands a *contrafort* (buttress) a person roughly the size of the baix but slightly taller and slimmer, who presses his chest against the back of the baix and grips the arms of the other contraforts. Behind each contrafort stands *primeres mans* (first hands) made up of the tallest, stouter members of the crew who will grasp the buttocks of the segons. Facing the baixos stand the *agulles* (needles), who are tall and slim, who will buttress the baix from the front and hold the front of the legs of the segon. Beneath the armpits of the baixos and contraforts stand the *crosses* (crutches) women or men about 5 feet in height squeezed into place in the utmost darkness of the pinya. Behind primeres mans stand *segones mans* (second hands) who grips the wrists of primeres mans to further distribute the weight. *Terceres mans* (third hands) is a shorter person who stands behind segones mans, and places his or her hands on the back of primeres mans to provide shoulder support. The rest of the crew continues that spoke and also creates lateral spokes in between those directly behind the baixos and then *vents* (cardinal directions), form additional spokes between the lateral spokes. During rehearsal, any children, grandparents or visitors standing around might force themselves into gaps between the spokes to fill the holes (*forats*) that can destabilize the structure. During public performances, the members of other crews, and sometimes spectators, will pitch in to solidify and expand the pinya, often providing crucial support for a difficult castell. Thus, despite the close camaraderie of the group, its membership is

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permeable to outsiders even during the crucial moment of the ritual act.

The basic repertoire of castells follows a terminology derived from the number of vertical trunks and the total number of levels (pisos). A pillar (pillar) is made up of a single trunk and a tower (torre), of two. Thus a pilar de cinc is made by a single column, five individuals high and a torre de sis, by two columns, six levels high. A tres de set has three columns, seven levels high and a quatre de vuit, four columns, eight levels high. There are further complications and variations including castells of five columns, pillars that walk across the plaça, enxanetes who grab a bandana held from a balcony to be pulled into a building and formations of four columns with a pillar in the middle that remains after the outside structure has been unloaded. In addition to being built through climbing, castells may also be “lifted from below” which requires great strength and coordination. The very highest castells of nine or even ten pisos include a second pinya on top of the bottom one called the folre (lit. skirt, upper buttress) and a third pinya above that called the manilles (bracelets).
Figure 16. Segons and terços stand above baixos hidden within the pinya while quarts and quintos get into position to ascend. Bordegassos de Vilanova, Plaça de la Vila.

Figure 17. A walking pillar of four. Minyons de Terrassa, Plaça Sant Jaume, Barcelona.
Early in my sojourn in Vilanova, Ignasio introduced me to his friend Tito, the chief of the crew of devils, who was very attentive to me throughout my stay. He was a wealth of information about all things related to festa and was affable, humorous and forthright. He had invited me to coffee one day. I was interested in the vertiginous sensory experience of the devils and had asked if it would be possible for me to participate. Alas, he informed me, there were only 24 suits and thus a limited number of members in the ritual crew, and there was a waiting list of many years for people to join. He also told me that because Vilanovins are so passionate about festa, that with the exception of the dances of Carnival that are open to anyone, nearly every crew in town also had long waiting lists. He told me that he was also a member of the crew of castellers, the Bordegassos, and because hundreds of people are needed to construct the largest castells, that the
Bordegassos were always accepting new members. He invited me to join but warned that I would have to wait until after Carnival when rehearsals would resume after the winter break in the season.

In early April, I showed up at the locale of the Bordegassos de Vilanova in a historic building on the corner of the Plaça de les Casernes (Plaza of the Barracks). The building is comprised of a large hall with two structural arches and a wood beamed ceiling reinforced with steel girders. There are tables and a bar serving drinks, coffee and a limited menu of hot food. At 10:00 pm there was a medium-sized crowd of people eating, taking, drinking beer, soft drinks or coffee, including kids kicking a football around at one end. Through broad glass doors in the back is a large patio where rehearsal takes place. In the corner stands an office/archive upstairs from bathrooms and storage space. In the open space next to the office was a net, about fifteen feet off the ground with a large hole in the middle where a few children were perched, ignoring a posted notice not to play on the net. It was apparent that the locale serves as a general club house not only for making castells but for a range of social activities. I saw posted announcements about the scheduled events of the gastronomic committee, the canalla or youth section, organizational meetings, and broadcasts of football games.

I approached an older man and introduced myself, explaining that I was new. He asked where I was from, how long I had been in Vilanova, expressed admiration that I was already speaking Catalan and then introduced me to Vicente, the chief of the crew, who embodied the home cepat (stocky man), with his broad, powerful neck and shoulders and booming voice. Vicente began speaking to me in Castilian. Between the noisiness of

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56 I was told that this net, used for the practice of single-trunk pilars, was invented by Vicente, then chief of the crew and has been adopted by other crews throughout Catalonia.
the room and my ineptitude at jumping between Catalan and Castilian, I had trouble responding to his questions. The other man who was still with us exclaimed with pleased amusement, “he speaks Catalan, not Castilian!” as I appeared to diverge from the practice of many immigrants to learn Castilian first and Catalan later if at all. A group of people gathered to see this curiosity and I explained that I did speak Castilian but not as a native language and that I had been confused. Only one person heard me however and by that time the rest had decided that I didn’t understand Castilian and urged that Vicente speak to me in Catalan. It was not until later that I realized that Vicente, despite long residence in Vilanova, was a dominant Castilian speaker who normally spoke Castilian, albeit liberally peppered with Catalan terms related to castells, even in his emblematically Catalan role in directing the crew.

In chapter two I described the common Vilanovin practice in which native speakers of Catalan and Castilian converse together by speaking their native tongues in mutual understanding and that this constitutes a diglossic speech community and example of linguistic pluralism. This practice was constantly in evidence among the Bordegassos with whom I regularly overheard or participated in conversations formed of Catalan-Castilian, Catalan-Catalan, or Castilian-Castilian exchanges. I knew from various conversations over time that many members of the crew—including some who had learned Catalan as adult immigrants—are staunch Catalanists who advocate for Catalan language normalization in all social spheres. This political position, however, exists side-by-side with practices of linguistic pluralism that extended to placing a dominant Castilian speaker in the most public leadership position of the crew.
A number of other Bordegassos introduced themselves to me during the rehearsal and asked me where I was from, what I was doing, and, as usual, charitably exclaimed how well I spoke Catalan. I met Jaumet, a jovial Gargantua who was a primeres mans and his wife Llora, a crossa, both of whom consistently aided my integration into the crew. Another man, Guixot, often drank a beer with me after the rehearsal and volubly answered all of my questions on a variety of subjects. Yet another man Magi, who was also a Bastoner (stick dancer), invited me to visit the club house of the Association of Popular Dance where he introduced me a few weeks later.

I was asked to fill out a membership form with my personal data including weight, height and shirt size. Magi’s wife, Alba greeted me and brought me back to the supply room to receive a sturdy long-sleeved cotton shirt with a collar. Although all castellers throughout the Catalan territories wear the same basic outfit, the color of the shirt, in many cases bearing insignia, identifies the particular crew. All crews have a name but are in many cases familiarly referred to by synecdochic terms deriving from the color of their shirts. The color of the Bordegassos is groc terrós (lit. earth yellow, ochre) and the shirt bears no insignia.

With respect to the use of uniform clothing, Bourdieu cited the extreme case of the disciplinary training imposed by totalitarian regimes, characterizing uniform dress and training as “strategies of manipulation [that] aim to shape bodies so as to make each one an embodiment of the group,” also referring to the process as “somatic compliance” and a “subjection of bodies...that makes them function like a kind of collective automaton” (Bourdieu 2000: 145). Using language that evokes dehumanizing control, Bourdieu proposes this as the basic model of social cohesion for embodied practices such as sports,
playing music and even for spontaneous or otherwise less orchestrated social strategies. While uniforms can serve to construct unity and cohesion, and in the case of castells, I believe they do, Bourdieu’s emphasis on the top-down disciplinary aspects of uniforms obscures the bottom-up and liberating characteristics of ritual uniforms to enable not only esprit du corps, but also the expansion of practical embodied knowledge in the form of physical and affective competencies and to accommodate a plurality of diverse individual agents. Many of the prosthetic aspects of costumes and other ritual materials described in chapters two and three also apply to the castellers as I will discuss in some detail.

Starting from the ground, the complete casteller uniform consists of espardenyes, rope-soled sandals laced with black ribbon tied around the ankle, and white pants, demonstrating the relationship between castells and the white dances (balls blancs) from which they probably evolved (Capdevila, Brotons, and Mañé 1997). During rehearsal, these articles of dress are optional, as is the shirt although most of the castellers did wear the ochre shirt or another similarly heavy, somewhat loose fitting shirt for practical reasons that I soon came to appreciate in that ones clothing often served as a handhold for someone else. The essential article of the uniform is the faixa (sash), a long, thick length of black woven cloth wound tightly around the waist. The faixa functions both to support the lumbar region of the back and to serve as a hand and toe hold for climbers. At about a quarter to eleven, members of the crew began helping each other to don the faixa.

It is awkward to tightly and neatly wrap a long length of cloth around one’s own waist: castellers help each other with this task. The helper takes one end of the faixa with both hands while the first person tucks a corner of the fringe under her or his pants. Standing ten to fifteen feet part, depending on the length of the faixa, the first person
begins to turn while holding the top and bottom edge taut and slowly spins the whole body towards the helper until the faixa is completely wrapped. If the fringe has ended in front, the first person tucks it tightly behind the other layers, but if the fringe has come out in back, the helper tucks it in. I got to know and developed friendships with a number of members of the crew through this reciprocal action that serves as a practical means of social integration (cf. Miller 2001).

Figure 19. Bordegassos putting on the faixa. Plaça Sant Jaume, Barcelona.

In addition to serving to bring members of the crew closer together, the faixa is also a prosthetic device that extends the body’s sensory and instrumental capacities, and transforms one into a different category of person.57 The firm support to the lumbar

region straightens ones posture, causing the shoulders to rise and spread, and creates a sensation of solidity at the bodily core. The snug, solid mass of fabric enables the climbers to gain purchase as they pull themselves up the backs of those below. The climber ascends the back with three steps: the first with the foot wedged between the knees, the second dug into the faixa and the third upon the shoulder.

Putting on the faixa is a transitional ritual during which the diffuse atmosphere of eating, drinking, smoking, and talking, begins to shift and focus attention towards making castells. The physical change is also a change of status, of being marked as a member of the crew. The phrase posar la faixa (to put on the sash) is also employed to mean, to become a casteller, and has been explicitly linked to the integration of immigrants as castellers and as members of Catalan society. In an article titled, “Castells: Gateway of Entry: youth of other cultures are putting on the faixa,” Cristina Sáez evokes Jaume Vicens i Vives, citing his well-known description of Catalonia as a pais de marca (frontier territory) marked by waves of immigration, including the most recent:

The past—and also the present—teaches us that the Catalan associative world is an effective instrument for the integration of newcomers to the social fabric of the country. And in this sense, castells constitute a gateway of entry to our culture and idiosyncrasies, wherein one may encounter people of any social condition, ideology, age, sex, physical characteristics and origin, and wherein they unite to achieve a common objective: to build a castell. (Sáez 2005: 28).
The integration process I was experiencing, and observing in its application to other newcomers and to the native born, was never verbally articulated in this way by any of the Bordegassos who seemed to embody this abstraction. Yet Sáez recounted a string of specific examples, including one about the Bordegassos, whose solidarity, as she explained, extended beyond the plaça when making castells to helping undocumented immigrants get papers, find jobs and rent apartments. Sáez reported the account of a twenty-six year old Argentine: “I spent quite a while looking for a place in Vilanova without finding one. By chance, the treasurer of the crew heard about it and he was the owner of several properties and he got me one of them. Other members of the crew also helped both me and my wife to find jobs” (op. cit.: 30). In these cases, the embodied solidarity of ritual activity led directly to solidarity in other social spheres.

Bourdieu posited a transposable quality of dispositions (1977: 72), which would include the sensory orientation and ethical attitudes cultivated by the castellers. He claimed that dispositions have the adaptive capacity to structure and become relevant to social contexts beyond their original application (Jenkins 2002: 78), and more specifically, that the temporary sensory/affective states such as the collective excitement produced by ritual could produce “lasting dispositions” attuned to the objectives of the ritual action (Bourdieu 1977: 167). In fact the casteller slogan fem pinya (lit. we make a pinecone/pineapple, i.e. a tightly interlocked, organic entity) carries the extended sense of acting in solidarity used in many other social contexts from neighborhood cooperation to international aid. The notion of sensory politics pivots on such a capacity for
sensory-ethical dispositions to persist and transform dispositions in social spaces beyond their origin. The dispositions initiated within the crucible of communitas and the sensory-ethical re-orientations effected by ritual techniques highlight the salience of human agency. The mechanisms by which adults new to a social space can acquire the habitus pertaining to it is absent from Bourdieu’s explanation yet this is precisely the challenge faced by immigrants and host communities.

Political change from above or structural change from without impels individuals and communities to adapt but does not determine the course of that adaptation. What I seek to explore in detail are these intimate, embodied and rarely explicit processes by which agents transform themselves and their society. My own intimate, sensory-ethical integration into the Bordegassos of Vilanova placed in historical-social context provides fine-grained data about these techniques and their outcomes.

On the evening of my first rehearsal, as I watched from the periphery I noticed the large number of children and adolescents in one corner and reflected that the families I knew in the US didn’t participate in any family activities scheduled to conclude at midnight. Intergenerational sociability serves as a key pattern in local practices of social integration. Three stocky men stood in a triangular formation in the center of the patio. They pulled the tips of their shirt collars up and bit them with their teeth, then gripped each other’s shoulders. About twenty people were arrayed near them and this group began to gather more closely to the center. A few members of the technical team were engaged in calling out names, informing people of their position and getting them lined up and ready. Three other men placed their hands on the shoulders of the baixos and
placed one foot between the knees of the baix and the knee tightly against the waist of the baix, then in unison propelled themselves up until standing on the shoulders of the baixos. Two women and one man had placed themselves in position behind the baixos and the chief commanded "terços, amunt!" (thirds, upward!). These were followed by two teenaged dosos and two children. The formation was a tres de cinc, net (five levels of three, "clean," or without pinya), a short formation used as a warm up, and because there was no pinya supporting it, helped develop strength and balance. After a quatre de cinc and a pilar de cinc, Vicente directed me to join the pinya. People were lining up behind the baixos gripping each other’s arms, forming spoke-like patterns around the center. I joined one of these spokes (rengles) and people started telling me what to do. “Take off your watch, it could scratch someone” I was told, “keep your head down, if they fall, you’ll protect your neck.” Soon, these practices would become second nature.

In the pinya, the bodies are tightly interlocked. I became acutely aware of the proximity of others, of their body heat, of odors such as tobacco, sweat, beer or fresh laundry. One thing can’t be sugar-coated: sometimes the person standing on one’s shoulders has dirty, less-than-fragrant feet very close to ones face. Apart from the person directly in front of or beside me, I couldn’t be sure whose arms I was grabbing or who was pushing up against me from behind. I realized that if a climber were to fall, that there would be no place to go. This realization corresponded to a mild sense of anxiety. I participated as a member of the pinya in the remainder of the castells that evening and received further instruction and feedback about the degree of force to direct against the back of the person in front, how to grip another’s arms and to respond to directions for more or less pressure.
At the end of the rehearsal, Vicente climbed halfway up the stairs to the office and announced a performance on Sant Jordi's day, our first public appearance of the season. Vicente stressed that the next two weeks of rehearsal were therefore very important. He announced when the next rehearsal would be and that there was to be a dinner the following night. He approached me afterward to make sure I had understood as did several other members of the crew. No one person took responsibility for my orientation. It was achieved in capillary fashion by individuals predisposed to provide guidance who found themselves in proximity to me at a given time.

During the following two weeks of rehearsal I continued to serve as a member of the pinya, slowly acquiring techniques and beginning to understand the complex choreography of the castell from the perspective of my immediate surroundings within the pinya. The integration process applied to me was also being applied to other newcomers, and in a more systematic way, to the children who had an additional rehearsal night for them alone.

The normative, largely unspoken dispositions cultivated through this traditional pursuit included cooperative, respectful attitudes between members of different age cohorts, males and females, Catalan and Castilian speakers, natives and newcomers, professionals and working class, and a wide range of physical types including several people with developmental disabilities. As I learned about the history of castells, I came to appreciate the radical transformation of the demographic composition of the activity. During the nineteenth century heyday of castells, except for the children in the pom de dalt, the crews were composed of adult male day laborers and farmhands accustomed to bearing heavy loads and back-breaking agricultural work, as well as demobilized soldiers.
from the Carlist wars. During the summer months, the laboring men got out from under the thumbs of their bosses by traveling to saint’s day celebrations throughout the region where they were paid for making castells (Noyes n.d.; Suárez-Baldrís 1998: 49-88).

During the “golden age” of castells (1850s-1880s) a number of these crews began achieving towering heights of nine levels, the third of which in history was made in Vilanova i la Geltrú in 1852 (Manyer 2006: 46). But the spread of phylloxera that ravaged Catalan grapevines at the end of the nineteenth century also devastated workers, causing many to leave the region, not only greatly thinning the ranks of castellers but reducing every kind of festa observance among the economic bad times (Suárez-Baldrís, op. cit.: 65-66).

The Civil War (1936-39), in which the sort of young men who made castells were given a gun and pushed to the fore, nearly extinguished castells. By 1969, there were four crews in existence: Els Nens de Vendrell (est. 1926), la Colla Vella dels Xiquets de Valls (founded in the nineteenth century, reorganized in 1947), els Castellers de Vilafranca (est. 1948), and els Minyons de l’Arboç (est. 1958), all of them in the casteller stronghold of southeastern Catalonia. In the last years of the dictatorship, Catalans began to recuperate their traditions in earnest and by 1972 there were five more crews of castellers, among them els Bordegassos (the lads) de Vilanova (Capdevila, Brotons, and Mañé 1997: 24).

In 1972 the Bordegassos made their first quatre de sis (six levels of four) in the central Plaça de la Vila, which at that time still bore the title Plaza del 18 de Julio, commemorating the 1936 Fascist coup against the elected Spanish republic that initiated

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58 The words nen, xiquet and minyo are all terms for young men equivalent to boy, kid, or youngster. The majority of crews of castellers are similarly named by these or other infantilizing terms.
the Civil War. The seventy members of the crew included eight teenaged girls, a complete novelty in that era (op. cit.: 21-23). I had the fortune to encounter one of the parties to this early gender integration toward the end of my stay. I had been invited to the house of Guifré, a musician and musicologist, and had arrived to his house as arranged. His wife Imma met me at the door and showed me inside, explaining that Guifré had gone out to buy laundry soap and would soon return. She showed me into his office, and apologized for the “strangeness” of the dark house where dust covered objects moldered in corners and cabinets. There were stacks of things everywhere, especially books and papers that threatened to engulf two large painted tapestries on the walls. She explained that the house had belonged to her great grandparents, that her great grandfather had been a doctor and that this office had been the examination room. The tapestries had once been brightly colored but were now quite dark from age and tobacco smoke. These cues let me know that I was in the house of an old Vilanovin family, impregnated with local history and attachments.

Imma was working on some musical notation on the computer and I asked if she was also a musician. She modestly disclaimed any great talent but told me she had been the first female graller (person who plays the gralla), in 1972. She recounted that as Catalan festa began its recovery, there were not enough grallers to go around during Festes Majors and that the Bordegassos had to make castells without grallers. So she was recruited to play. In those days, castellers and members of balls populars (ritual dance crews) were, in her words, “very low class, associated with lack of education, rudeness, drunkenness and jobs as laborers.” Except for enxanetes, there were no female castellers,
and there were no women at the dinners or other events held by the castellers or other ritual crews. She would find herself as the only young woman among 100 men and receive surprised looks and comments.

There was a transformation of class relations as well. "Wealthy families didn’t want their sons to participate" Imma continued. She told of a young man she knew from a "good family" who started playing the drum for the Castellers de Vilafranca. The parents were distressed and asked their son: ‘We give you money—why are you playing the drum for the castells?’ As she explained, there was a lot of shame in the early days but within a few short years, most precipitously following the death of Franco in 1976, participation in practices marked as Catalan traditions rapidly became a source of pride. The crews became mixed in terms of gender and levels of education or profession. The
educated classes, previously ashamed of or pragmatically distant from performances that constituted Catalan identity, came to embrace such practices with the return of democracy.

Bourdieu would have it that the habitus is "the immanent law, lex insita, inscribed in bodies by identical histories, which is the precondition not only for the co-ordination of practices but also for practices of co-ordination" (Bourdieu 1990: 59). The deus ex machina of the decline and death of Franco, is certainly a critical event in Iberian history that facilitated a sort of openness towards new possibilities of expression and social relationships. The reflorescence of Catalan tradition and language can be seen as a reaction to repression under Franco. Likewise, the impulse towards social leveling can be seen as mutinous toward the authoritarian, hierarchical social model imposed by the dictator.

However plausible in its broad strokes, such an historically determined account of social change is inadequate in several respects. First of all, the "identical history" putatively experienced by all citizens of the Spanish state, far from producing homogeneity, was and continues to be differentially perceived and hotly contested between members of various ethnic/linguistic groups and adherents of different political orientations. All of the decentering processes I described in chapter two belie Bourdieu's treatment of communities as isolated, homogeneous, and stable, as per the mid-century culture concept. Bourdieu's model does not provide an explicit framework for making sense of plurality (with the possible exception of class identity) nor of multiple, overlapping social memberships. As I will relate later in the chapter, even among crews of castellers the process of social integration and the adoption of cooperative values has
been uneven and a locus of contention. The other major factor that disappears in the homogenizing dominance of history over the habitus is the improvisational and transformative capacity of individual agents and collectivities. This capacity facilitates and constitutes the emergent Catalan tendency towards pluralism.

To return to more recent history, among the Bordegassos in 2006, there were female members participating in most but not all ambits of the crew. There were no females among the positions held by stocky males, e.g. baix, segon or contrafort or tall males, e.g. primeres mans and agulla. Female castellers predominated in the upper levels of the castells including young girls at the top, teenaged dosos, young women quintes (fifths) and sisèses (sixths) and two mothers in the position of quarts (fourths) or quintes (fifths), both of them with their own daughters occupying positions above them. Females also predominated deep in the heart of the pinya where nine out of twelve members who habitually took the position of crossa (crutch), were women. The technical team was predominantly male except for the leaders of the canalla, or youth component. The grallers were all female and women were well represented in other organizational roles including the production of the crew’s magazine, l’Aleta.

Another form of integration I observed within the crew was that several adults with apparent developmental disabilities were active members of the crew, one of the more physically robust individuals performing in the critical position of baix. I learned that several Vilanova elementary schools, called “integrated schools” included children with developmental disabilities. I witnessed a group of severely disabled adults taking part in the children’s Merengada and learned that two crews of entremesos (dancing effigies animated by a carrier) of Festa Major were organized to integrate children with
developmentally disabled adults. These practices enabled a pluralism of embodied ways of being and appeared to produce an easy familiarity between people with and without disabilities. Such integration is consonant with the frequently expressed aversion to isolating any members of the community. \[59\]

The intergenerational contact within the crew was not remarkable but characteristic of Iberian society in which much of public space is shared by people of different ages who actively interact with each other. The different generations may cultivate their own differences, particularly adolescents distinguishing themselves from their parents in manifold ways, but not primarily through spatial separation. Among the castellers there is a greater degree of affectionate or playful physical contact between children and adults who are not related to each other. In fact, all of the members of the crew have a significant degree of physical contact by virtue of the activity of making castells itself, by helping each other with the faixa and frequent acts of eating and traveling as a group.

Newcomers are represented in nearly every crew of castellers in the Catalan territories where they may become visible symbols of successful integration. This phenomenon is invoked in the discourse of interculturality (interculturalitat).

Domingo et al make the case for the characteristic permeability and plasticity of Catalan society, largely as a product of history, but identifying festa as an important arena for the working out of intercultural relations, and specifying that: “crews of castellers all over Catalonia have now become a key element in cultural relation and

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\[59\] This is generally not presented in a self-congratulatory way as a finished process. One of the devils, Ximena, works for an agency dedicated to integrating people with disabilities into the economic structure of the town. She was proud of the placements the group had effected so far but told me, “we still have a long way to go.”
integration” (Domingo et al. 2004).

In the town of Vic, the castellers work with the Linguistic Pairs program, in which Catalan speaking volunteers meet weekly with a Catalan learner to provide language practice and engage in intercultural exchange. The volunteer castellers invite language learners to observe castells, and many have been drawn in to participate. In the town of Osona, the immigrant population is over twenty percent, the majority from Ghana. Ghanaians are well represented in the crew of castells where they took the leadership role in establishing a formal relationship with the Ghanaian Cultural Association. A concert series organized by the two groups in Osona to promote intercultural exchange has given birth to hybrid music combining the Catalan gralla and the Ghanaian drum, the *djembe*.

The chief of the crew in Osona acknowledged that such integration is not seamless, pointing out that constructing castells may involve breaking the norms of some immigrant groups, especially regarding physical contact between men and women. He and other native castellers stress their responsibility in helping newcomers to negotiate the cultural terrain (Sáez 2005: 30).

The day I joined the Bordegassos, another man was participating for the first time. Pedro had moved to Catalonia from Argentina a month later than I. He was invited by Nofre, another young man in the crew with whom he worked on a construction site. Some months later, his friend Paolo came from Argentina and also joined the crew, and the week before I left, he had recruited another friend who joined us on an away visit to the Festa Major of Ripollet on what was only the man’s fifth day in Europe.

I talked with the three of them (in Castilian) on the bus ride back to Vilanova. I asked them about their general impressions of Vilanova and they remarked on the preference
for public space. "In our country, we meet friends and family in our houses, but here, everyone is in the rambles and plazas, the bars and cafes, in public places." When I asked about the sensory experience of making castells they had little to say, whereas the sensory register was often engaged when long-term residents described their festa experience. The fact that these recent immigrants (who did not yet understand much Catalan) didn’t appear to share a vocabulary for much of the local sensory-affective experience suggests that this experience is socially constructed rather than the inevitable product of a set of embodied actions. Pedro even said that he didn’t consider serving as baix as particularly arduous. His youth, robust build and being accustomed to physically demanding work might partly explain why he did not share my experience, as a small-boned, not particularly athletic person who spends much of the day hunched over a book or a keyboard. Yet even a formidable stocky male of the Colla Vella de Valls, who was one of the baixos of the first castell of nine pisos made in the 20th century was able to communicate the intensity of that experience twenty-five years after the event:

“Hi havia por, ens trobavem davant una sensació desconeguda: no sabíem si podríem respirar, ni si hauria llum.” (There was fear, we found ourselves facing an unknown sensation: we didn’t know if we would be able to breathe, nor if there would be light) (Terraza 2006: 18). The affective and sensory experience of castellers is tightly bound up with these commentaries of fear, and for those hidden deep within the pinya, of heat, impending suffocation, of time standing still, and for everyone, of the elation that pours forth after a challenge successfully met. One aspect of liminality described by Victor Turner aptly captures this in-between moment in the construction of a castell, “of margin and limen, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended or abrogated, and the future
has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in
the balance." (Turner 1982: 44).

Sant Jordi

The holiday of Sant Jordi (Saint George) is celebrated on April 23 throughout Catalonia
as an accretion of traditions, practices and innovations. According to the hagiographers,
Sant Jordi (Saint George) was a Roman soldier and Christian martyred in 303 by grisly
dismemberment (Budge 1888). The cult of Sant Jordi was strong in Catalonia in the
medieval period with the result that he became Catalonia’s patron saint. In legend, Sant
Jordi, was a dragon slayer who rescued a princess and became associated with the
tradition of courtly love (Generalitat de Catalunya 2008). The holiday is also called el
Dia dels Enamorats (Lover’s Day) and a Fira dels Flors (Flower Market) has been held
on this day in Barcelona since 1500. As I mentioned in the second chapter, April 23 is
also the day of Cervantes’ death, celebrated as Dia del Llibre (book day) and the flower
vendors are joined by book mongers for the street markets of April 23.

In Vilanova, on Saturday, April 22, the Rambla Principal was lined with vendors’
booths and many people were carrying roses with stalks of wheat, tied round with gold
and red striped ribbons representing the Catalan flag. The schools and day care centers
presented the legend of Sant Jordi and the dragon, often with children acting out the
drama in costume. In the Catalan language class I attended that week, the instructor
explained the rituals of the day and gave the class romantic poems to read. Newspapers
explained the history of the holiday, and bakeries sold a special Sant Jordi cake. In the
late afternoon, one of the community centers held a story telling event for children with
games, hot chocolate and cake. With the children thus engaged, their grandparents played
*botxes*, and Muslim women gathered around park benches to talk while keeping an eye
on their children who joined the other children in drinking chocolate and watching a
dramatic enactment of Sant Jordi and the dragon.

A group of men with air horns and blue sashes passed through the streets, announcing
a concert in the Plaça de la Vila. Their little procession was led by a big, hairy man
wearing a pink ballerina’s outfit. It seemed that carnivalesque elements had intruded into
nearly every local celebration.

Sunday was the actual day of Sant Jordi. It began with a *matinada*, or wake up
procession by the Bordegassos, my first public appearance with the crew. We gathered at
7:00 am at a bar facing the port where many of my comrades were imbibing espresso
with a short glass of brandy or *anís* on the side. An old man sitting at a table saluted us
with his cup and warmly encouraged us to climb well. Out on the gravel plaça, we put on
our faixes and assembled, joined by three grallers, all of them women, and Vicente’s
young son as drummer.

Pau, a young member of the technical team, came to ask if I would be the baix of the
pillar. I said yes and asked if he would show me what to do. Quickly I was surrounded by
other guys, one of whom told me “*mossega’t el coll*” (bite the collar). This prevents the
shirt from slipping when someone climbs on one’s shoulders. I was facing Bernat who
had just had a shot of *anís*, thus the licorice aroma permeated my experience as if I had
drunk it myself. I was firmly gripped from the front and back and soon another man
climbed up and stood on my shoulders, placing his feet close to my neck where they dug

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60 Alternately *petanç*, from Provençal, *pétanque*; the same game is known in Italian as *bocce*.
into my trapezius muscles. Bernat asked if I was comfortable. I was not, but since I was
not in actual pain, I assented. The drummer commenced a steady tattoo and the grallers
rent the air with a violent blast, beginning the invariate melody that signaled the ascent of
a castell. A teenaged girl and then a small boy climbed up to stand on the shoulders of the
man above me. I felt the pressure of those on top, heavy and intense but not unbearable
because those on the sides held the legs of the segon and pushed upward as buttresses that
shared the weight. I felt those above trembling but I felt reasonably solid although not in
equilibrium. The whole pinya had shifted a little to the right and all the weight centered
on my right leg. At that moment I recalled my previous kneecap dislocations, both of
which had been the same knee now bearing all the weight on my shoulders. As I tensed
my leg and willed my kneecap to remain on the front of my leg where I had come to
prefer it, the grallers trilled, signaling that the child on top had stood erect and saluted the
plaça. Vicente commanded the descent and the grallers played the appropriate sequence
until everyone was back on the ground. After the pillar was unloaded, other Bordegassos
thronged around and congratulated me. Vicente showed me a photo of the pillar he had
captured on his cell phone and Pau explained that during cercaviles when the crew made
smaller formations, that it was traditional to initiate new members by placing them in
new positions.

As a spectator, I had appreciated the music of gralla as an integral complement to the
visual spectacle, jointly producing a differential affective charge around the three stages
of a castell: ascent, climax, descent. Serving as a baix, or other position inside the pinya,
the sound developed a more intense visceral faculty. Inside the pinya, one can see very
little and sounds are greatly muffled, the proximate senses of touch, gripping and being
gripped, smelling and being smelled, of labored breathing and one’s own straining musculature become dominant. The progress of the castell, obvious to the spectator, is opaque to those deep within the structure. The sound of the gralla pierces this perceptual muddle. At times when I felt I couldn’t bear the strain of the weight upon me any longer, the trill signaling climax and the descent melody directly mapped on to a gradual but immediate decrease in the total weight of the castell as climbers scampered earthward. Whenever I served as baix, the gralla became my lifeline, the voice encouraging me to persevere, guiding my endurance and facilitating the collective embodied performance of the crew. Other castellers I spoke to affirmed the primacy of the sound of the gralla in their own practice, often expressing a sense of incompleteness or disorientation about making castells without gralles.

Figure 21. Grallers and tabaler.
Steven Feld has argued that globalization's transnational flows of technology, media and cultural products make all musical worlds potentially transportable and hearable in all others (2000: 145). The melody of the gralla, however, is embedded in a multisensory world of physical danger and collective purpose. The music that accompanies castells resists reduction to a purely auditory music world. Such music also draws attention to disjunctures between two regimes of value (Myers 2004): that of the consumers of commercially viable recordings and that of a sensory public oriented by ritual techniques. The auditory world of a sensory public such as this may in fact be indigestible to global capitalism.

We passed in a cercavila led by the grallers to different public squares where we made more pillars of four levels. Tables were set outside where we were served snacks on the order of peanuts, potato chips, or in a few cases, cheese, bread and charcuterie. Wine, beer and cava was served in porrons, spout-necked carafes that direct a stream of liquid from the container to the open mouth. Guixot counseled me to drink slowly because there would be many stops. I drank water at alternate stops so as not to become lightheaded. The alcohol, the sound of drums and grallers, anticipation and anxiety about the castells, moving in group procession, wearing the uniform of the crew and feeling the constriction of the faixa around the lower body, contributed to a special physical-sensory state. Guixot told me that when a casteller was to be recruited to act in a new position, for which she or he might feel a lot of anxiety, it was customary to ask at the last moment to minimize the temptation to back out (cf. Terraza 2006). When we reached the Plaça de la Vila there was a small crowd and I was the baix of another pillar, that time feeling more confident. Again I felt pushed onto my right leg but learned to tell the people around me "a mà
dreta” (to the right) or “a mà esquerra” (to the left) to maintain equilibrium. The rites of passage organized to integrate me into the crew were tightly bound up with all of these sensory orientations: inebriation, constriction, anxiety, and coordinated physical performance.

At 12:30, the Bordegassos held their first actuació of castells of the season at the Plaça de la Vila. The first castell we made was a torre de 6. I was appointed terceres mans (the third of a central spoke) with climbers stepping on my shoulders on their ascent. The grallers signaled the progress and I looked up when the castell was complete. I saw it was trembling a lot. I had seen and felt trembling before, but in this case it seemed to border on loss of control. “Tranquil!” (stay calm) urged the chief but as the young members of the pom de dalt dismounted I knew the castell was going to fall. I put my head down and the castell collapsed. Some part of a falling person hit my head hard, soon raising a bump. I felt a sense of shock. Guixot, directly in front of me had also received some lumps. A bit later, Jaumet asked if I had a headache because if I did it was important to tell someone (presumably a doctor). The girl who fell on us was crying and her father carried her to the side. She was scared but unhurt, the members of the pinya having broken her fall. When a castell collapses it is said to “have made kindling” (ha fet llenya).

Most castells do not fall but it is a common occurrence. Of the 6,067 castells constructed in 2004 by 57 crews around Catalonia, ninety percent were successfully “unloaded,” and about five percent were “dismounted” (desmuntat) before completion when the castellers decided not to proceed. Ninety-five castell “attempts” (intsits) collapsed before the enxaneta reached the top and 147 castells fell after having been
“loaded” (Castañeda 2005).

During the 2006 season that I participated in, I witnessed three falls by the Bordegassos while I was in the pinya and collapses by half a dozen other crews including the spectacular fall of a tres de deu, carregat, (three troncs, ten levels high, loaded), by the Castellers de Vilafranca. These falls are dramatic, sometimes terrifying and injuries do occur, more often to those fallen on than to the children and lighter persons highest in the structure whose fall is softened by those below them (Godoy n.d.). Despite a common perception of being especially at risk, castellers receive a similar percentage of injuries and similar types of injuries as soccer players (Roset et al. 1998), including some injuries that cause them to discontinue making castells. An ambulance is always standing by for public performances but I never saw medical staff administer any treatment beyond icepacks. The real danger is augmented by perceived danger, apparent in the spectacle of the towering structures that appear all the more dramatic in their usual juxtaposition to public buildings.

Castellers often recall the fear they felt before attempting a difficult castell and spectators also report feeling a chill of pure elation when the construction is successful, of anxiety when a trembling castell appears to be on the brink of collapse, and of deep concern for the frightened, crying children after a fall. These intense affective states are an integral part of intimate commentary about castells among those taking part or those spectators in close proximity, whereas televised and published commentary tends to emphasize technical accomplishment. These conflicting commentaries point to differences between a sensory public and one addressed by texts and images. Local commentators elucidate that there are intimate embodied-affective dimensions of castells
and other festa rituals, "it is the word contraposed to the skin...at the margin of what
awakens touristic interest, it has a component of emotion and identity that can only be
understood within the Vilanovin ambit" (Capdevila, Brotons, and Mañé 1997: 17).

On the day of Sant Jordi, the remainder of the castells made by us and the other crews
were successful. The Castellers de Barcelona were quite accomplished. The crew from
the Barcelona neighborhood of Gràcia was smaller but also competent. The Bordegassos
made a quatre de set amb agulla, in which a central pilar formed inside four trunks seven
stories high which then dismounted leaving a tower of six standing. We made another
tower of five by lifting up each part from the bottom (aixecat per sota). The physical
press of the pinya began to make sense to me, being a part of the overall stabilizing and
weight bearing structure of the castell. The making of this sense entailed both getting an
embodied feel for as well as learning techniques and principles. As I pushed my hands
against the back of the man standing in front of the man in front of me, my chest pressed
against his back, I was instructed to listen to the person in front of me who might say
"apreta" to push my hands more or "afluixa" for less force, or "pit" (chest) to push my
chest more. One day a baix I was standing behind instructed, "Brad, pit!" making a pun
and generating a nickname for me in the crew.

Ignasio was in the crowd and saw me in the uniform of the crew and told me "now
you're really an anthropologist. You have your tribe." Magi approached and asked me
"vols pujar?" (do you want to climb?). I thought he meant in a castell: I gulped and said
yes. He then took me up to the balcony of the Ajuntament to watch a castell in progress
from above which he said was an excellent way to understand their structure and

61 This word is a castilianism.
technique. Magi explained that strength is not the most important asset but rather the
technique learned by all of the crew members for the positions they occupy and their
effective deployment by the technical team. The integration process can be provisionally
catalogued: physical practice, verbal instruction, joking and nicknames, explanation,
demonstration.

Four qualities that castellers are said to need are strength, balance, bravery and
practical reason (força, equilibri, valor i seny). As these traits are understood as collective
as well as individual, the discourse of making castells highlights the physical, affective
and social aspects of the training of the human being that Mauss invoked in his essay
“Techniques of the Body” (2006 [1935]). Mauss described how British soldiers had been
unable to march in step when accompanied by French buglers, and in a correlated
manner, the successful construction of castells is intimately intertwined with the sound of
the tabaler and grallers.

Mauss pointed out that in these various aspects of the “art of using the human body”
(81) that the socially specific education of the body, which is both technical object and
technical means, is of paramount importance (81-3). The training and discipline of
castellers constitutes a specific cultivation of the self in which embodied practices,
sensory and affective experiences and ethical orientations are interlaced. In the essay
“Technologies of the Self,” Foucault described the conceptual divergence between
physical and mental discipline in Western classical tradition that produced practical
categories of disembodied meditation on one hand and strictly physical gymnasia on the
other (2003b). In popular terms this is the mind-body split attributed to Western society.
At an opposite pole in another society, the Yoga Sutra attributed to Patanjali described
the asanas (lit. seat, position of the body, position of the spirit relative to divinity) as preparation for meditation, as physical techniques to cultivate openness to illumination. Moreover, physical yogic practice was conceptualized as part of a total organization of the self including social obligations, devotional practice and sensory training (Patanjali and Miller 1996).

Western monastic orders also organized the self in an integrated way. Even if the body was viewed with distrust, it was also an instrument of devotion, most conspicuously in the practice of singing the offices, which framed the temporal order of monastic life and enmeshed religious observance, technically demanding vocal performance, precise collective coordination, within a rich sensory and affective texture (Asad 1993: 62-5). The profane, beer-drinking, cigarette-puffing Bordegassos made no pretense to devout or abstemious forms of spirituality but resolutely engaged with a range of ethical concerns that I came to appreciate.

**Ethical orientations**

Apart from local festes and the festes in other towns for which the Bordegassos received payment, the Bordegassos have, since their inception, performed several “solidarity performances” a year. In recent years the Bordegassos have performed gratis in support of the Campaign for an Inclusive School and Society, dedicated to the integration of children with disabilities. The crew consistently performs on the Day Against Violence Against Women and very often for Vilanova’s primary senior citizens facility. “We try to fulfill our obligations to society to the extent possible” explained the president of the crew.
The Bordegassos are not directly engaged in the arena of formal politics, claiming that their only ideology is that of democracy and assemblearisme, a system of organization in which those assembled have decision making power. This principle is applied broadly in Catalan society, being the norm for neighborhood associations, ritual crews, and all manner of clubs and volunteer associations. Through assemblearisme, the sensory public is privileged by the requirement of co-presence and participation.

Two founders of the crew, no longer active, went on to become mayors of Vilanova. There are a number of famous castellers who went on to achieve prominent public office. A former casteller from Tarragona once jailed by the dictatorship, Josep Carod-Rovira, rose to the position of Conceller en Cap (Prime Minister) of the Catalan government in 2003. While being a casteller appears to add to the Catalanist credentials of candidates for office, for the majority, participating in a crew of castellers is not a platform for political or career advancement.

The attitude of the Bordegassos towards the competitive model of athletic activity became clearer to me after a trip to Barcelona for the anniversary of the Castellers of Barcelona on the eleventh of June. After the two buses we had filled dropped us off near Barcelona’s Cathedral del Seu, we put on our faixes and marched behind our grallers to the corner of the Plaça Sant Jaume, a grand square established by the Romans, and flanked by the baroque edifices of the Catalan and Barcelonan governments. The Bordegassos formed a pilar caminant or walking pilar, which made its way from the corner to a central location facing the velvet draped balcony of City Hall. The Castellers de Barcelona in their red shirts also entered with a pilar caminant, followed by the

62 Corresponds to the position of Prime Minister in the French model or Vice President in the US.
Minyons de Terrassa in lilac shirts. The Minyons are the only crew that has successfully unloaded a castell of ten pisos.

The plaça was crowded with people, including a conspicuous number of camera toting visitors speaking non-Iberian languages. I also noticed the camera crew for the main Catalan television station, TV3. Their evening programming would feature an hour long round up of castells made throughout Catalonia on that day. Each crew took a turn at making a castell, with many members of the other crews helping to form the pinya of each one. We began with a quatre de vuit (four trunks, eight stories high). I was assigned to be terceres mans (third hands) on one of the central spokes which meant that all of the members of that trunk clambered up my back on their ascent until more people filled in behind me to fortify the pinya. I don’t remember the specifics of what happened next but I experienced a familiar capillary sense of the set up of a given castell. On some occasions, a castell is assessed as “badly planted,” “unsquared,” or “too open,” thus unstable. In these cases the castell will be dismounted and attempted again from the beginning. Some castells trembled so violently that I experienced disbelief that they didn’t collapse but somehow the crew succeeded. These assessments may be made by members of the technical team reading the collective sense of the castell, or groaned out by one or two castellers on the brink of collapse. And some castells do fall and their collapse is invariably preceded by fear and trembling. In this case, the castell felt very calm and secure, “almost effortless” as one person remarked later. Before I knew it, the grallers trilled the signal that the castell was loaded and the plaça erupted in triumphant cheers. It was the first castell of eight of the season for the Bordegassos. Castells of eight are not record breaking but are still awe-inspiring structures that only some crews can
achieve, and only after many years of practice. The members of the trunk quickly
dismounted as the grallers piped them down and then we were all swept up in a rush of
euphoric expression: hooting, hugging, and singing the Bordegassos song, which I hadn’t
known existed and was not to hear again after this day.

During the three rounds in which each crew took a turn, the Minyons constructed a
towering tres de nou amb foire (three trunks, nine stories high, with second pinya on top
of the bottom one) and the Castellers de Barcelona “made kindling” (collapsed) before
they could complete a torre de set (tower of seven), in a dramatic fall.

For the third and final round, the Bordegassos made a tres de set (three trunks, seven
stories) for which I was assigned to the position of contrafort. Placed behind a grey-
haired veteran baix, I gripped the upper arms of the other two contraforts. Apart from the
general contribution to weight-sharing and stability, the specific role of the contrafort is
to regulate the amount of pressure on the back of the baix to prevent the pinya from
“opening,” or becoming “unsquared,” which can lead to collapse. The crosses scrambled
underneath us and bore up our arms with their shoulders as all the parts of the pinya
meshed into interlocking positions.

The segons had gotten in position standing on the shoulders of the baixos when the
chief bellowed out terços amunt! (thirds, up!) at which point the grallers rent the air with
a blast and then melodically traced the path of the ascending climbers. We were sweating
copiously in the sun, our shirts damp and sticking to one another. Seeing nothing, the
crowd noises were muffled and confused. I focused my attention on maintaining steady

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63 As recently as 1990, fewer than ten crews could achieve a castell of eight pisos (Miller 2001). As of this
writing, fewer than ten crews can construct a castell of nine pisos. The Bordegassos were among this elite
group from 1999 to 2002 but have not surpassed castells of eight pisos since then.
pressure with my chest tightly pressed against the back of the baix and began to feel an intense muscle fatigue in my arms which were being simultaneously pressed down from above and pulled out from my shoulders by the other contraforts. I felt the trembling of the trunks above us and the onset of fear which many castellers speak of confronting in a battle of nerves. The dominant sound was the labored breathing of the impacted members of the core of the pinya when the trill of the grallers again signaled success. I took courage in the knowledge than we were in the home stretch, gritted my teeth and endured the unloading.

Figure 22. The Castellers of Barcelona “make kindling.”
While castells are often experienced as deeply moving to co-present spectators, I have described the experience from deep within a castell as the embodied generative source of the affective charge bound to castells. The single trembling, enduring body of which each individual becomes a corporeal member succeeds though discipline but there is no manipulating hand from outside, channeling individual desires into the needs of larger institutions as in Foucault’s model of governmentality (2003a). The hive mind of a castell in which individuals must become decentered, sacrificing the safety and comfort of their own bodies in order to enter an intimate space of reciprocal sensing and responding as part of a being greater than themselves is not the same thing as Bourdieu’s collective automaton. However inadequately I may have described it, apart from camaraderie and pride in accomplishment, castellers experience transcendence.

As the event began to disperse, the elation of the Bordegassos at having unloaded the quatre de vuit was infectious. On the bus ride home the boisterous crew broke into the Bordegassos song from which evolved a series of improvised ribald verses. The clowns of the crew were in rare form, keeping everyone entertained, exchanging rapid-fire repartee switching between Catalan and Castilian. Like others I spoke to, I felt exhausted, satisfied and sore.

What had become clear about the attitude of the Bordegassos toward competition was that the moment of triumph in the Plaça Sant Jaume and the atmosphere of victorious joy that followed was not contingent upon the performance of the other crews. That the Minyons had made a quatre de nou and the Barcelonans had “made kindling” neither detracted from nor enhanced the sense of achievement expressed by the members of the crew. I learned from Guixot that the Bordegassos were in fact the patrons of the Minyons,
having provided them with their initial training and support when they were founded in 1979. That the Minyons have gone on to become the most accomplished crew of castellers in all Catalonia seemed to be regarded with warm satisfaction by the Bordegassos. In addition to the elation I shared with the Bordegassos in Barcelona I also witnessed and partook of disappointment when we failed to construct another castell of eight in other attempts that season. The sense of pride in achievement cultivated by the Bordegassos was primarily constructed in reference to the crew’s own assessment of its current capability and whether or not the group performed to the best of its potential.

Contests? No, thanks.

The castellers of Tarragona hold an annual contest in which judges name an annual winner for best crew of castellers. However, many crews throughout Catalonia do not enter it, and not because they don’t think they could win. Even the Minyons de Terrassa do not compete despite a commonly voiced assessment that they would be the likely winners. There is an ideological divide about the role of competition in the world of castells in which the Bordegassos de Vilanova have played a critical and vocal role.

In 1973, towards the end of the dictatorship, there were two new crews in Vilanova, the Bordegassos and the Colla del Mar. Both traveled to the nearby town of Vilafranca del Penedès for a contest. While there, a few spouses of members of the two Vilanovin crews engaged in some nasty name calling, reportedly in Castilian, such as: “you’re the biggest whore in Villanueva.” This experience left a bad taste in the mouths of the castellers, violating incipient sensibilities of what it meant to be a casteller.
The political context was salient. The chief of the crew at that time, a pro-democracy leader of a clandestine labor union, was engaged in a struggle among the leadership of the castells between progressives and the conservatism attributed to the *Colla Vella de Valls*. The conservatives wanted to structure the activity of castells into a strict social order and viewed ranking through contests as legitimating (Capdevila, Brotons, and Mañé 1997). The Bordegassos released a famous statement, reiterated to this day: “els concursos castellers són una aberració, els castells no es poden puntuar, el poble que omple la plaça és l’únic jurat que pot avaluar un castell.” (Castell contests are an aberration, castells can not be qualified by a point system, the people filling the plaza are the only jury that can evaluate a castell) (ibid, 29). This claim of the primacy of the sensory public was not a case of sour grapes, the Bordegassos had achieved their first castells of seven pisos that day. The defiant cry of the crew became “Els Bordegassos fem els castells per nassos” (We Bordegassos make castells for the hell of it) (Capdevila 2005).

The aversion towards a certain model of competition corresponded then and now to a political orientation towards autonomy, pluralism, and democracy. The physical practices, integrative social sensibilities and sensory/affective production of making castells are also bound up with the ideological consensus of the crew, none determined by the other but mutually supporting and interpenetrating (cf. Erickson 2006). The tension

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64 Labor unions, except for the official state union, were banned during the dictatorship.

65 *Nassos*, literally noses, carry a defiant connotation, such as thumbing one’s nose in English. The phrase is word play rhyming *nassos* with *Bordegassos*. The Minyons de Terrassa who share the Bordegassos’ opposition to contests adapted the slogan as “*Els Minyons fem els castells per collons,*” *collons*, lit. testicles, is a frequently heard expletive expressing exasperation and also serve as objects to swear by or to describe things gone wrong.
between the two orientations recalls Bakhtin’s conflict between the world of authoritarian hierarchy that seeks to define official truth to that of the carnivalesque world of abundance in which multiple truths are possible and the status accrued in making castells is not seen as a limited good as in Bourdieu’s model of social capital.

In line with a commitment to democratic practice, for many years, the Bordegassos have held an annual meeting deciding whether or not to participate in the contest in Tarragona. The Bordegassos took on the question at a meeting held at midnight after one Friday rehearsal, the children of the canalla perched atop a stack of bleachers. Most of the speakers opposed the contest, either with explicit ideological arguments similar to those I have related, or finding the logistical aspects of the contest to be onerous. One woman stood up and made a case to the effect that ‘the opposing arguments were all very well but that the contest was an opportunity for the canalla to make castells and that the canalla should have a voice in this and that the adults shouldn’t make a decision for or deprive the canalla of their chance to participate.’ The consensus response was that the speaker made a valid point and after hearing out the last few individuals who wished to speak, the Bordegassos held a vote. Some adults favored attending the contest but the majority raised their hands in opposition. As Guixot pointed out to me with a nudge, the canalla was unanimous: every child voted to oppose the participation of the Bordegassos in the contest.

The desire for more autonomy for Catalonia and the protection of the Catalan language was rarely if ever expressed in a zero-sum equation with the rights of Spain or Spanish speakers (or with recent newcomers) but very often in terms of a pluralistic, if idealistic, aspiration for the self-determination and well-being of all communities. In
Vilanova, where plenty of people are fanatical about competitive sports, the sensibility attached to castells seems to correlate to that regarding autonomy. One day I was talking with Xavi outside his barber shop. He had never been a casteller, preferring to practice tae kwon do. I asked him about castells and competitive sports and he said: “Castells are not at all like football. When I see the Bordegassos in the plaça I want them to do well and feel proud when they do. In that sense, I want them to win but I never want the other crew to lose.”

**Pantagruelism**

Many of the Rabelaisian carnivalesque idioms described by Bakhtin echo strongly through the practices of making castells. The drive into the body is forcefully visceral in a practice that consists of stacking up living human bodies as building material. In the overheated hive atmosphere, one’s attention is aimed both toward disciplining one’s own body and affective state and also assessing and responding to the collective body with which it is enmeshed. The life of the belly, explosively celebrated by Rabelais through such passages as the tripe feast preceding the birth of Gargantua or the sacrifice of the Gastrolaters (Rabelais n.d.: 13-15, 516-20), is prominent in both the ritual and recreation of the Bordegassos. The indispensable prosthetic, the faixa, doesn’t hide the belly but exaggerates it, adding to its bulk and causing it to protrude. The belly is a focus of strength and equilibrium and it is also celebrated in the social life of the crew.

A ranxo (lit. ranch) is simple meal made for a lot of people, associated with the hearty stews historically served from a single giant pot to fuel Catalan rural laborers. Ranxos today are a kind of buffet featuring copious quantities of a limited choice of dishes.
Ranxos were served to us by the Bordegassos’ hosts when we traveled to make castells in other towns and the crew organized its own ranxos as celebratory feasts. On the 23rd of June, the Bordegassos held one such feast proclaimed on a printed announcement as “Sopar Sant Joan Pantagruelesca” (Pantagruelesque Supper of Saint John), to my surprise, explicitly portraying themselves in Rabelaisian terms.

Long tables were set up with a serving area on one corner of the patio. Vicente and Bernat stood behind the table dishing up platefuls of food to the line of Bordegassos. Vicente handed me a plate brimming with fideuà (similar to the Valencian rice dish paella but made with noodles) and huge galtes de porc, juicy braised pig cheeks on the bone. The tables were laid out with wine from Celler Can Pujol, a product so intensely local that it was made only two blocks away by relatives of the president of the crew. After everyone had been served Vicente enjoined those who wanted, to come get a second helping. My family and I were engaged in lively conversations with the others at our table. Jaumet and Llora made me a gift of George Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia. Bottles of full-flavored Catalan rum were passed around the tables with small dishes of ice cream. As desserts were consumed, the serving crew brought out bottles of cava (Catalan sparkling wine) and everyone filled his or her glass.

Ritual mockery

At this point in the evening, Bernat, a member of the crew in his twenties who was also the coordinator of social activities stood up on his chair, faced the rest of us and lifted his glass. In the manner of a priest chanting the office, he intoned the Sermó del Sant Roc, the congregated members of the crew repeating each line in lusty response. This sermon
is a toast that has been used by the Bordegassos for thirty years and which is varied by each person who recites it in each performance.

_Sermó del Sant Roc_  
_Sermon of Saint Roch_

_Sant Roc del pi gloriós,_  
_Saint Roch of the glorious pine tree,_

_Patró de les borratxeres,_  
_Patron of drunken blowouts,_

_Inventor de la canya de rom,_  
_Inventor of the rum cane (sugar cane),_

_Feu que sigui per tothom,_  
_Make it be for everybody,_

_Aquesta religió tan fina,_  
_This most elegant religion,_

_I que amb una bona paperina,_  
_And with a great drunkenness,_

_Fotem el camp d'aquest món._  
_We get the hell out of this world._

At this point, Bernat made various circular gestures and the sign of the cross with his wine glass and assumed the mannered tone of a priest saying mass. 66

_Setrill, setrill, setrill,_  
_Cruet, cruet, cruet,_

_Oli pels pobres;_  
_Oil for the poor;_

_Qui té duros fuma puros,_  
_Who has dollars, smokes cigars,_

_Qui no te res fuma paper,_  
_Who has none, smokes paper,_

_L'Evangeli no diu pas que Cristo,_  
_The gospels do not say whether Christ_

_Encengués mai cap misto,_  
_Ever lit a single match,_

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66 Saint Roch (c. 1295-1327) was an Occitan credited with curing the plague with the sign of the cross (Catholic Encyclopedia 2008).
Nor whether Saint Bartholomew,
Wiped it [his anus] with paper
Gold coins, goblets, swords and staffs
The one who drinks last, pays the bill.
Come on let’s go companions
Come on let’s go, let’s go, let’s go,
Whether you are broke or not...

As he chanted the following words in mock Latin, the officiant raised, lowered, and swirled the cup of wine below his nose, and the congregation followed by raising, lowering and smelling their own cups.

Raise it,
lower it,
smell it,
rest it,
raise it, etc.

Bernat repeated these words, playfully changing the rhythm and order, causing laughter and then said:

Look at it suddenly

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These are the suits of the deck of cards used in Spain.
At this moment everyone emptied their cup in one draught and then checked to make sure that the cup of their neighbor was also empty.

I visca els Bordegassos! And long live the Bordegassos!

Sacred parody is one of the forms of ambivalent humor identified by Bakhtin who cited examples preserved from the eleventh century that suggest a relation to the Sermon of Saint Roc, including a “Liturgy of the Drunkards” and “Gospel of the Drunkards” (85). Appropriating sacred language, gestures and themes, sacred parody translates solemn matters of life, death and salvation into the idiom of the material body. Parodic wills and epitaphs, documented since the seventh and eighth centuries (ibid.), the latter still popular in Vilanova, directly laugh at death, danger, and illness. Carnivalesque laughter directs its satiric bite at social relations but also expands into cosmic dimensions of existence and the place of the body within it.

Laughing at danger

The Bordegassos organize numerous activities and events in addition to the primary activity of making castells. Apart from those associated with Carnival or Festa Major, the Bordegassos initiated yet another festa into the Vilanovin calendar: la Festa de la Vedella (the feast of the calf). Set in the public park next to the beach, the Festa de la Vedella began modestly at midday with children’s activities and booths selling Bordegassos t-
shirts and a makeshift bar selling beer and soft drinks. In a sandy area away from the pine
trees, a group of men prepared a large wood fire over which they placed an iron frame,
the size of a large bed. Using a tractor equipped with a winch, they positioned an entire
cow carcass, split down the middle and unfolded, legs splayed, upon the platform. This
was carefully tended and slow cooked until it was served late in the evening to the
assembled participants. At midnight the sated revelers danced to live music in the warm
air of a summer night while moonlight shone silver on the surface of the Mediterranean
stretching to the horizon.

I asked Guixot about the history of this festa that, to me, seemed to resemble nothing
so much as an extravagant barbecue. He explained that in the year 2000, the first case of
mad cow (*vaca boja*) disease was detected in Spain and that following some alarm in the
news media, that some people stopped eating beef out of fear. The risk of contagion was
extremely low and the Bordegassos decided that the best response would be a public
celebration of beef consumption, made all the more dramatically explicit by roasting an
entire cow and inviting the town. The act of eating was deployed as a carnivalesque
gesture, a satiric commentary aimed at overblown anxieties. The ritual performance of
Moixó Foguer and the burial of the Sardine also laughed at infectious disease, but the
Festa de la Vedella adopted that Carnival idiom and raised the stakes by inciting
participants to literally open their own bodies, to defiantly court infection, however
remote the odds.

Cultivated danger is a constituent in the affective production of festa. There is an
element of simulation in this cultivation, similar to the affects produced by a horror film,
but there are also real risks to participation in Catalan festes as plenty of burns, bruises,
and broken noses and eardrums could testify. Confronting fear is part of the sensory/affective play that pushes the boundaries of the self, to decenter it with the hope to reconstitute it as something more richly connected to the world, through “the smell of sweat and the most primary and immediate emotions” (Ibañez 2006: 15).

Death of a child

The Saturday evening cercavila of Festa Major was one of the most joyful experiences of my stay in Vilanova. By this time my family and I were well integrated into town life and had established many warm friendships. Golden light filled the passages and squares behind the church and medieval castle of la Geltrú while all of the dancers and entremeses prepared in the backstage atmosphere. There was an air of euphoric expectancy, a number of people talked to me and expressed their excitement that this was my first Festa Major, sharing their delight not only that I took an interest but to see me in the ochre shirt of the Bordegassos, participating in this pinnacle of community life.

The organizing committee (pabordes) of the Festa Major had chosen the slogan “L’essència de la festa,” the word essència summoning both scent and fundamental quality. In an invitation published in the town’s monthly magazine, the organizers stated that the slogan invokes each of the senses: taste, hearing, smell, sight and touch and all of the possible modes of participating in and prehending the festa in the manner most agreeable to each person, concluding: “Així doncs, esdevindran i conviuran plegades tantes essències com ciutadans habiten a la nostra vila” (Therefore, there will arise and coexist together as many essences as there are citizens living in our town (Pabordes 2006: 3). This statement explicitly grounds local belonging on the emergent pluralism of
embodied sensation and participation, echoing Herder’s broader claim that “a nation has more sensations than thoughts” (1845: 164). Moreover, the organizers framed the participants of Vilanova’s Festa Major as an emergent sensory public.

The manifest olfactory theme of the festa was basil (l’alfàbrega). Flower pots of basil were hung from light posts and the programs were scented with it, and were labeled, “take it, look at it, smell it.” I asked Núria about the role of scent and she told me “The aroma of basil is an antique smell of the Mediterranean coast, an intense aroma, above all, of summer nights. It brings me back to my childhood and the walks I took with my parents near the ocean, past the window boxes planted with basil and the intense aroma they gave off at night. This year, the organizers of the Festa Major have chosen it and that it why the theme this year is the essence of festa.”

“I was looking at the exhibition of Festa Major programs at the library,” I said, “they have all of them since the twenties. The first one after Franco, the first one in Catalan after forty years, had a similar theme, the return of the essence of festa.” “Yes,” Núria replied, “then it was other smells, not of basil but the aroma of liberty, the scent of democracy (l’olor del llibertat, l’olor de la democràcia). Those were the essences of festa that had been prohibited, the essences we had to recuperate.” “Can the senses be prohibited?” I inquired. “What a good question” she exclaimed with a laugh. Then more seriously, she said: “I believe that under a dictatorship the senses can be prohibited. You don’t see the things that could be normal to see, you don’t smell that which could be natural, you smell misery, you smell fear. Neither do you hear the truth. You hear what they want you to hear.”
The organizers had announced: “This year we will smell it all over, the environment will be permeated and charged with basil, the plant per excel.lencia of our festa” (op. cit.). Behind the castle, a number of people handed out sprigs of fragrant basil to be tucked behind one’s ear, into one’s hair or elsewhere on one’s person, and the scent indeed perfumed the air. The giants (gegants) were lined up against the church holding massive fresh bouquets and I saw Neus who worked at my daughter’s school, in her costume as a new member of the ball de gitanes, with several of her fellow dancers on a balcony above the plaça, drinking glasses of cava. The jolly, grotesque heads of the capgrossos (big-headed dwarfs) lay on the ground to one side while the teenaged girls who would wear them in their spirited dance, helped each other to arrange the rest of their costumes. Children were everywhere underfoot looking at everything with wide eyes or peeking under the skirts of the gegants and mulasses, while grandparents observed them smiling from the side of the happy chaos. One by one, the crews of diables, dracs, bastoners, gegants, mulasses, capgrossos, cercolets, panderos, moixigangues and all the other dances and entremesos emerged in front of the castle of la Geltrú to give their first performance in the long procession crisscrossing the center of the town, each followed by their band of musicians.

68 As sometimes distinct entities, Vilanova and the district of la Geltrú each have their own dragon (drac), to which a smaller third dragon has been added. Bastoners are stick dancers whose performance is similar to that of the Morris Dance of the British Isles. Gegants are giants, of which Vilanova i la Geltrú has two male-female pairs, the tallest pair is a Moorish king wed to a European queen. There are three mules (mulasses) of different sizes. Capgrossos are big-headed dwarfs. Cercolets is a dance by young girls with flowers affixed to half hoops. Panderos is a girl’s dance with tambourines. The moixigangues are a mixed dance crew whose movements represent the passion of Christ. Other entremesos included recently incorporated fire-breathing fish and porron (carafe), both based on local tradition. A full-length study of the entremesos of Vilanova i la Geltrú was published during the dictatorship (Ferrer i Soler and Anguera i Llauradó 1964).
The Bordegassos came at the end of the procession, stopping to make modest pillars at every plaça and major intersection. At times, the procession moved slowly or not at all, affording plenty of time for leisurely conversation and watching other performances. As we approached one of the larger public squares, the Plaça de les Cols, crowded with people, I was asked if I would be the baix for the next pilar. "És clar que sí" I assented, biting my shirt collar and shouldering the burden of the climbers above me to the applause of the crowd. I had gained confidence over months of experience, causing my level of anxiety about serving as baix to fall considerably. As we continued, Montse, one of the quarts whose young adult daughter was one of the quints, asked me if I had been a segon before. I told her I hadn’t and she asked if I would try it. My sense of comfort and confidence faltered but I agreed and expressed the hope that someone would explain what to do. She assured me that I would be guided through it and we continued the cercavila.
Some twenty minutes later, at a street corner behind City Hall, a block before we reached the Plaça de la Vila where we would attempt to make our second castell of eight pisos for the year, I was told to take off my espardenyes and get ready. I was nervous and Jaumet told me, “there’ll be a beer waiting for you when you come down.” Clouds had gathered, and they appeared strangely dark and luminous in the dusk. Because Vicente had injured his foot in a motorcycle accident, Lluc was serving as crew chief, and was thus responsible for calling out instructions for each construction. However, once I had climbed up and stood upon the shoulders of the baix, Lluc’s authority was ignored as several people started shouting instructions at me that I couldn’t make out in the overall din. It was clear I was doing something wrong. One of the men however mimed bending his knees and I got the message, bending my own, while primeres mans and agulla gripped my thighs in front and back to support me. A teenaged girl, Anaïs, began climbing my back and prompted, “ajuda’m” (help me). I placed my left hand, palm up at the small of my back as a foot hold and bent my right arm, hand up, as a hand hold, just as I had seen other segons do. She then placed her left hand on my head and pulled herself all the way to a standing position on my shoulders while I gripped the back of her calves just below the knee. A child, repeating the procedure, climbed both our backs to the top, and stood and saluted the crowd. The grallers trilled, the crowd clapped and my comrades whooped and cheered. I felt surprisingly poised despite my initial confusion. After descending I was affectionately and extravagantly congratulated for passing another milestone and handed a cold beer as promised as soon as I had re-tied my espardenyes. I had passed another test in the training of a casteller, as usual, made and witnessed in public and charged with affect. I learned through my experience how a public ordeal,
carried out with the support and encouragement of comrades, cultivates a sense of belonging, showing how rites of incorporation are primarily sensory rather than symbolic.

So many people I had spoken to over the preceding months had described the euphoria of their participation in Vilanova’s festivals and their profound sense of local pride and belonging. I partook of these emotions myself as we neared the central plaça but just before we turned the corner to gather in front of city hall, Pere, the president of the crew called the crew together into a close huddle, Montse interjecting “els nens no cal” (the children don’t have to).

Pere had received grave news. One week previous, during the Festa Major in the town of Mataró, their crew of castellers, els Capgrossos (the big-heads), had attempted a castell of nine pisos which had collapsed. The twelve year girl at the top free fell directly on the pinya headfirst and received serious head trauma. She had been taken to the hospital and received two operations and appeared headed for recovery, even joking that she wanted to climb a castell immediately. But a post-operation infection set in to which she finally succumbed. The same afternoon, the CCCC (Association of Crews of Castellers of Catalonia) had communicated to all the crews and called for a suspension of castells for the weekend. Instead of the castells of eight pisos we would have attempted, we made a pillar, gralles silent, in the darkening plaça in homage to our fallen sister, Mariona Galindo i Lora (1993-2006).

I joined the carpools of Bordegassos to attend the funeral the next day in Mataró. On route, one of the old timers pointed out that, statistically, making castells is safer than many other athletic activities and this was only the third fatality in the history of castells.
(one in 1871, another in 1983). He said that, even so, this death would generate pangs of doubt in casteller families, and that it may take a while for the fear to be overcome.

Nine crews came in their colors—reds, greens, ochres, lilacs—to condole the loss of the blue-clad Capgrossos. It had just rained and the plaça was a glossy blue-grey mirror. We stood outside the church next to the funeral cortège loaded with giant wreathes of flowers from crews all over Catalonia and watched as the child-sized coffin was borne into the darkness of the church. The service was broadcast through loudspeakers as we stood in the shade of two immense plane trees as sunlight parted the dusky cumulous clouds. The officiant used the metaphor of the castell to describe the girl’s final ascent, all the way to the stars. A song of farewell was sung and many of us were choking back tears: even though none of us had met the girl, she could just as easily have been one of the children in our crew, and in a larger sense I suppose she was.

The service ended, those inside the church came out into the light and stood with the grieving Capgrossos. We others, arrayed before the church, made nine simultaneous silent pillars in a casteller’s memorial salute. We all left the plaça silently.

The Bordegassos made it back to Vilanova in time for the last great procession of Festa Major. The devils, the giants, the dragons, the big-heads, the fire-spewing fish, and all the many groups of dancers and musicians snaked their way through the darkening city streets. Finally, everyone converged on the plaça of the snows, named for the town’s patron saint, Santa Maria de les Neus (Our Lady of the Snows). At midnight, the bands played simultaneously and everyone started dancing at once, every devil and dragon showered sparks amid the crowd, and from the top of the church, a fireworks display was

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69 Many Catalans and other Spaniards who consider themselves Catholic will not enter a church because of clerical collaboration with the dictatorship.
launched, illuminating everything with colored strobes and raining hot cinders upon the
ecstatic revelers below. When the fires died, everyone was extremely hungry for dinner
and soon the bars and restaurants were packed. I suspected that no one would be getting
up very early in the morning and I, for one, did not.

The death of Mariona Galindo i Lora provoked not only soul searching in and about
the world of castells\textsuperscript{70} but brought to light an intensive production of statistical, medical
and biomechanical knowledge about castells that had begun in the mid-1990s. A week
after the funeral, I attended a meeting of the parents of children Bordegassos during
which a packet was distributed containing sections or extracts of a number of reports. The
top page was the press release from the Association of Crews of Castellers of Catalonia
(CCCC) announcing the death following craniocephalic trauma produced by the fall of a
castell, expressing condolences to the family and to the Capgrossos, and calling for the
suspension of the performance of castells for that weekend. A statement that stood alone
in the text read \textit{"Es tracta d’un fatal accident del tot exceptional dins la pràctica
casteller"} (This case of a fatal accident is wholly exceptional in the practice of castells)
(Coordinadora de Colles Castelleres de Catalunya 2006).

The following pages were a résumé of basic data prepared by the CCCC in reference
to castells and accidents. This included detailed information of the number of castells
made per year since 1995 and the number and percentage of those that fell; an analysis of
digital images by the Department of Biochemistry del CAR de Sant Cugat that

\textsuperscript{70} Apart from initial news announcements, the story continued to have legs in the media including opinion
editorials reflecting on the risks inherent to many activities and a report on the Capgrossos when they
resumed making castells three weeks after the death of Mariona including her two sisters and uncles who
are also members of the crew.

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determined rates of acceleration and velocity of falling castellers; a study published by
the Catalan Pediatric Society comparing the rates and types of injuries of castells with
those of football, basketball, handball and other athletic activities; and a Department of
Health analysis of children’s injuries comparing falls that occurred making castells and
falls that occurred during other activities. Each section of the résumé summarized the
conclusion of each study cited.

Each year somewhere between 100 and 400 castells fall, making up between 3 to 7
percent of total attempts. In most cases, the velocity of falling castellers is considerably
slowed by their contact with other members of the collapsing trunk and the impact is
significantly softened by the members of the pinya (who are more likely to be injured).
Free falls of members of the young members of the pom de dalt, such as the fall of
Mariona Galindo, are relatively rare. The enxaneta in the case of a free fall from a tres de
nou amb folre can reach a velocity of 35 kilometers per hour at the time of impact. The
injury rate per hour of activity is lower during castells than for football, basketball, or
handball. Serious injuries for adult castellers are comparable to the injury rates of many
athletic activities. Rates of serious injuries for children castellers are considerably lower
than that of adults and less than those of any other studied athletic activity including
cycling, handball and karate (Resum de dades bàsiques recollides de diferents estudis
referents a la sinistralitat als castells 2006).

The remaining three items in the packet concerned the use of helmets. A lightweight,
extruded polystyrene helmet (casc) had recently been developed by a Spanish
manufacturer of motorcycle helmets, specifically for enxanetes and aixecadors. Just two
months prior to the death of Mariona Galindo, seventeen crews of castellers began using
the new helmets as part of a comparative study to evaluate their efficacy. A similar number of other crews agreed to take part in the study who would not use the casc, the Bordegassos and Capgrossos among them. The rarity and unpredictability of serious injuries had impeded the arrival of any definitive scientific conclusions about the need for helmets yet the members of the CCCC initiated the study in the belief that potential risks could not be ignored (Soler 2006: 36). Prior to the fatal accident, parents and crew leaders did not have a clear consensus about helmets. Even when there was a proclivity to try them, many expressed concerns about increasing children’s responsibilities, restricting their mobility or impeding their vision or ability to hear instructions (ibid.: 37).

Following the death on August 4, many crews considerably accelerated their deliberations about the casc. On August 30, a group of young Bordegassos brought me to the Festa Major of Vilafranca del Penedès to see some of the most accomplished crews perform the largest and most complex constructions in the casteller repertoire. Only one of these elite crews had opted to use the casc before the fatal accident but I noticed that not one had failed to adopt it during the intervening weeks.

Apart from the intensification of technical-professional discourse and precipitous increase in helmet use, popular commentary outside of the world of castells contributed to debate about the safety of making castells. In an August 13 opinion editorial, Martí Rosselló pointed out that two twelve-year olds from the county of Maresma had recently died in accidents: the fallen enxaneta and a boy who drowned while swimming in the ocean. Acknowledging that the death of a young person always sets off alarms, the writer expressed his belief that no one would propose either the abolition of castells or the prohibition of swimming. Pointing out the element of risk in activities such as skiing,
hang gliding, swimming, football and correfocs, Rosselló noted that each has developed its own, often sophisticated system of safety precautions, and concluded: “the capacity to put ourselves at risk forms part of our learning to grow, and it is also good to play with real danger, however controlled and regulated, despite the fact that these activities carry the possibility of fatal consequences” (Rosselló 2006).

The following day, another opinion editorial indirectly commented by addressing the injuries sustained from castells and correfocs as integral features of the contemporary Catalan era of mobile phones and medical statistics. This writer contrasted the fears fanned by words to the pan Catalan post-dictatorship festa characterized by “acts without language, messages or speech,” such as “moving together with a trembling castell” and “excessively smoky correfocs” that carry a degree of “savage primitivism and atavism” (Ibañez 2006).

The first writer posited that playing with danger is beneficial to the development of the person, the second suggested that the play of danger facilitates a communal affect bordering on religious experience that grounds Catalans’ future in their distant past. In the discussions among castellers themselves, including casteller families, there was no question whether or not to continue making castells, neither was there any expression of comic defiance of death or danger in the abstract, as was common within contexts framed as carnivalesque. In the face of a real death, castellers grieved and then somberly engaged in the medical and technical evaluation of their precautionary systems. None of the Bordegassos’ families withdrew their children from the canalla. Nowhere did the tragic death produce an alarmist response.

In assessing the “reciprocal relationship between a society and the games it likes to
I would first point out that Vilanovins play with danger in two principle idioms. Carnival laughter defies fear in the abstract, and casts death and illness as subjects of titillating pleasure in the bodies of Carnestoltes, Moixó Foguer and the whole roast cow devoured during the Festa de la Vedella. The second idiom is play that courts the visceral experience of fear through rituals that subject one’s own body to a degree of real risk, mitigated by precautions yet ultimately unpredictable, particularly in the case of castells and correfocs.

The pleasure derived from taking chances is grounded in a communitas that cultivates integration and collective achievement that endures after vertiginous sensory play: dissociation that is anything but alienating. It could be that playing dangerous games moderates fear or puts it in perspective. It could be said that Vilanovins tend to embrace contingency rather than react precipitously to risk and uncertainty. In that castellers conjoin corporal risk to social integration, their form of organization is arguably prophylactic to the potential appeal of xenophobic rhetoric. In other words, the fear of the other could be mitigated by a sense of comfort with a degree of risk. The ritual life of Vilanovins arguably constitutes the ground for a form of deep vernacular pluralism in which difference need not be tamed and dialogic exchange is both discursive and embodied.
Chapter VI: Twenty-first century convivència: Catalonia in plural

We can define convivència in the broadest sense of the concept, to live in the company of others with whom we interact with empathy, sharing, communication, and the regulation of conflict. One should bear in mind that when people live together, conflicts arise: this need not be seen as a problem but rather as an impetus to change. From this definition we understand convivència (active relations between neighbors), in contradistinction to coexistence (minimal, passively produced relations between neighbors), and to hostility—Plan for the Convivència of Vilanova i la Geltrú, 2007 (26).

While the Catalan concept of convivència takes on distinct characteristics as rooted in the quotidian and ritual practices of a local community, it is also articulated and acted upon by government and engaged by media representation. It is a concept then, that traverses and is constituted by different kinds of agency. Because convivència encompasses a dialogic relationship between aesthetic experience and government policy, it constitutes an explicit exemplar of sensory politics. As I will demonstrate, the sensory public is entwined with media and government in the project of creating and evaluating 21st century convivència in Catalonia.

Paul Gilroy believes it necessary to ask “what critical perspectives might nurture the ability and desire to live with difference on an increasingly divided but also convergent planet” (2005: 3). We may broadly understand ‘perspectives’ to imply not only opinions or analyses but also the aesthetic orientations of embodied practices such as those
conjoined to neighborliness or festa found in Vilanova i la Geltrú. Gilroy elaborates the challenge of identifying “resources for the peaceful accommodation of otherness” against the fashion of appeals to absolute racial, ethnic or national differences (6) in which context “the desire to dwell convivially with difference can appear naïve, trifling, or misplaced” (5). I do not propose to offer anything resembling irrefutable proof that Vilanovin sensory-ethical practices of convivència are the answer to Europe’s many entrenched patterns of discrimination and xenophobia. Instead I want to offer my account of these practices as a installment of an unfinished narrative of emergent solidarities that have the potential for paradigmatic change. In this concluding chapter I will trace correspondences between Vilanovin vernacular convivència, institutions of incorporation, and pan-Catalan discourses about the politics of community and difference.

I will begin with another ritual transaction of Vilanovin sensory politics. In this case, carnivalesque idioms are deployed to articulate a local model of sociability that confronts what are here constructed as models imposed from above. This will lead to a discussion of how local government policies approximate or depart from the aesthetic-ethical orientations embodied in ritual practices. From there I will move to the register of texts circulating at a regional level—including television programming, news items, and public scholarship—to demonstrate how the Catalan paradigm of convivència constitutes an intervention into the politics of multiculturalism and other identity-based models of pluralism.
Satiric verses

The parliament of devils, falling into the local ritual category of a ‘talking dance’ (*ball parlat*) consists of the crew of devils (diables) described in chapter four, augmented by a boy or girl representing the Archangel Michael, dressed in white, and bearing wings, crown, sword and shield. The devils confront St Michael, delivering infernal speeches called *versots* that are much appreciated for their ribaldry and satiric bite of current social issues.

The parliament for the Festa Major in early August of 2006 took place in the central Plaça de la Vila. Arrayed in the formation of a three sided box, Llucifer, the Diableresa and the crew chief who serves as encenedor (igniter) faced the onlookers with two drummers extending the line on either end. Two flanking columns of devils extended from the end of the line towards the assembled crowd. The encenedor ignited the tall ceptrot of Llucifer while the drummers beat a tattoo. When the pyrotechnic carretilles completed their cycle of sparks and explosions, Llucifer addressed seven stanzas of introduction to the crowd, the sixth of which explicitly framed the utterances to follow:

*Ara és l’hora de la veritat*  
*De que surtin els draps bruts*  
*De dir les coses ben dites*  
*Sense toms i sense embuts*  

Now is the hour of truth  
When the dirty laundry is aired  
For telling things like they are  
Without beating around the bush

At the end of Llucifer’s address, all of the devils marched in a pattern recalling a changing of the guard and then the first of the devils approached the center to have his
pyrotechnic equipped maça lit. This devil then recited a stanza to which Llucifer replied with two, followed by the marching pattern and the repetition of the pattern until all twelve devils and the Diablessa had recited their versots, some of which I present below.

Second devil:

- *L'envelat que fa soroll*  
  The canopy that makes a racket
- *El far ens voleu apagar*  
  The lighthouse they want us to snuff
- *Amb aquesta colla de venuts*  
  With this bunch of sell-outs
- *El més fàcil és demanar*  
  All they do is complain

Llucifer:

- *Iniciem una revolució!*  
  Let’s start a revolution!
- *N’estem farts de pixapins*  
  We’re fed up with gentrifiers
- *Vilanova té una història*  
  Vilanova has a history
- *Que la portem tots ben endins*  
  We all carry deep inside us

- *I si no us agrada com és*  
  And if you don’t like how things are
- *Aquí no us hi hem pas cridat*  
  No one forced you to come here
- *Us en podeu anar a la merda*  
  You’re welcome to bugger off
- *Pel mateix lloc per on heu arribat*  
  To the place where you came from

Many Vilanovans originally came from Barcelona or elsewhere, including members of ritual crews such as the devils. As seen in chapter three, the term *pixapins* (those who
piss on pine trees) in this instance refers to those who move to Vilanova from Barcelona, treat locals with disrespect, and try to impose their preferences without making an effort to integrate into town life. These Catalans from the great metropolis are also said to romanticize provincial towns as tranquil escapes and to experience with vexation the riotous festes that townspeople consider essential. The old lighthouse that shines into the windows of newly built luxury apartments by the beach was a recent flashpoint of this tension. As Ignasio told me, “if you want tranquility, go to the mountains, not the towns. We’re noisy and we like it.”

One of the devils, Ximena, told me of the pixapins, “They look down on us, like we’re nothing.” She continued, “They think they control the proper mix of common sense (seny) and recklessness (rauxa) and that we’re out of control, that we don’t know how to manage it.” Ximena exhibited a state of agitation, exclaiming with vehemence: “They complain about the light from the lighthouse, that it keeps them up at night. We’ve lived with it our whole lives!” The versots and the comments from both Ignasio and Ximena make clear that the sensory qualities of life in Vilanova—from the plurisensual festes reduced to “noise” to the nocturnal blaze from the lighthouse—help define the local sense of community. Moreover, they explicitly establish that local integration requires an adjustment to local aesthetic evaluations.

Fourth devil:

_M’ho van dir i no m’ho vaig creure_  I didn’t believe what they told me
_Sembla metida que hagi passat_  It can’t be true what has happened
_Per una sola veïna_  Because of just one neighbor
El Racó, ens han tancat  They’ve closed The Corner (bar) on us.

Llucifer:

L’Ajuntament que està cagat  City Hall which is scared shitless
Amb els veïns, no vol merder  Doesn’t want to deal with the locals’ crap
És més fàcil tancar un bar  It’s easier for them to close a bar
I que sopem tots al carrer!  So now we have to eat in the street!

I no és l’últim de la llista  And that’s not the last on the list
Estem tots amenaçats  We’re all threatened
Per quatre merda de veïns  By four shitty neighbors
Que són tots uns desgraciats!  What a bunch of losers!

Eleventh devil:

Complim la meva il·lusió,  Let’s fulfill my fondest hope
Ara que ningú ens vigila  Now while no one is watching us
Comencem un botellon  Let’s have a drunken blowout
Enmig de la Plaça de la Vila  In the middle of the main square

The eleventh devil then passed out cans of beer to the others.

Llucifer: [holding a can of beer aloft]

Brindem per tots aquests politics  A toast for all these politicians
Per tots aquells que estan allà  
For all those over there (gesturing)

Per ells que fan botellón  
For those who drink in public

Al celler de Can Solà  
[outside of] Solà’s Wine Shop

Us penseu que sou uns déus  
Do you all think that you’re gods

O alguna altra divinitat,  
Or some other divinity

Per aplicar lleis repressores  
To apply repressive laws

En contra de la nostra llibertat?  
In violation of our liberty?

These versots highlight the disjuncture between two related complexes in current Catalan social discourse: civisme (civility) and convivència (active relations between neighbors). While there is some overlap between these terms, a number of local respondents agreed with the following characterization. Civisme is a code of conduct determined and enforced by government authority. Convivència is the mutually negotiated shared occupation of public space as arranged by the residents themselves. Convivència proceeds from aesthetic and ethical orientations based on a common commitment to a consensus model of sociability.

The botellón (Castilian, big bottle) referenced in the versots is a street party, usually among teenagers and young adults, who for reasons of economy, imbibe low-cost alcohol in a plaça rather than in a bar. This relatively new custom had been a particularly charged phenomenon in a number of Barcelona neighborhoods where the noise of these parties kept neighbors awake all night. The neighbors invoked their right to sleep and the young people invoked their right to public space, the high expense of drinking in bars, the lack
of recreation facilities and prohibitive housing costs (many young adults live with their parents).

On the basis of neighbors’ complaints about the *botellón* and other practices codified as *incivilities*, such as littering, public urination, vandalism, prostitution, unlicensed street vending, improper parking, etc., in January, 2006, the city of Barcelona put a new civility ordinance into vigor and began issuing citations, breaking up *botellones*, and confiscating the goods of street vendors (Suñe 2006a, 2006b). Municipal governments throughout the Catalan lands followed suit with measures and practices based on the Barcelona model.

In Vilanova, the young sub-Saharan African men who sold such goods as sunglasses and pirate DVDs from sheets laid out on the Rambla Principal near the central market began the practice of grabbing the four corners of their sheets, transforming their displays into makeshift bags, and dashing down side streets whenever they saw or thought they saw an approaching *mosso* (lit. ‘stable boy,’ the official term for Catalan urban patrol officer).

The young revelers took a more defiant approach. Led by university activists, Catalan and newcomer youth organized the *Macrobotellón*, a series of giant public parties in Barcelona and other cities. These were far more disruptive than any of the impromptu *botellones*, leaving public squares mired in trash and local businesses and residents in distress (Oller and Ricou 2006). In Vilanova, such problems had rarely exceeded that of bar patrons being noisy after leaving a bar. Complaints resulted in bar keepers trying to regulate their own patrons and taking such measure as installing signage reminding patrons to “respect the sleep of the neighbors.” Forcing a bar to close down due to complaints represented a breakdown in negotiation between neighbors, a usurpation of convivência through imposed standards of civility.
Local citizens: infrastructures of incorporation

Vilanova's sensory public has articulated a model of local citizenship in which neighborliness and participation are demonstrated and explicitly valued. The larger claim that the sensorium is a political space requires evidence that there is a correlation between ritual practices and practices outside the ceremonial sphere. Are the pluralistic tendencies of Vilanovin festa present into other social institutions? Catalans say of themselves that Catalonia is a “land of welcome” (Generalitat de Catalunya 2006a: 7) but to what extent does Catalan society organize itself to incorporate newcomers into its civic and economic life as well as the sensory public produced through practices of convivència? A second question regards pluralism. To what degree does local incorporation compel newcomers to adjust their practices to dominant native norms or enable them to maintain practices rooted in their own sensibilities? Finally, as Patchen Markell points out, the respectful incorporation of difference is not the only form of social arrangement through which to make create conditions for equality (Markell 2003: 24). Thus I will try to identify other indicators of social justice that can be linked to the aesthetic-ethical orientations of a sensory public.

At the national level, Spain, a key entry point for many immigrants to the European Union, has one of the lowest rates of reported xenophobic expression in Europe (EUMC 2001, 2003, 2004). One of the first acts of the Zapatero government, elected days after the Madrid bombings of 2004, was to grant amnesty to the country’s undocumented immigrants. Some EU members and Spain’s conservative Partido Popular protested that this move makes the country a gateway for illegal immigrants. The Zapatero government
countered that providing legal status to immigrants would draw them out of the informal economy where they do not contribute tax revenues and are vulnerable to being victimized (BBC News 2005).

The Spanish case, however, does not bear easy comparison to other European countries. Firstly, widespread immigration to Spain is a much more recent phenomenon than that to France, Germany or Britain where interethnic conflicts have had generations to become polarized and where nativists have had much longer to organize themselves (see Gilroy 2005: 121-151). Secondly, the backlash against fascism—associated with racism, xenophobia, and cultural genocide by the Catalan left—is far more salient in Spain than in Germany or Italy where, as of this writing, only the elderly actually lived under fascist rule.

I have doubts about the utility of any generalization about a national stance towards immigrants. As I showed in chapter two, Catalonia draws upon distinct historical, linguistic, political, ritual, and sensory reservoirs to make sense of itself and there is plenty of variation even within Catalonia itself. In 2004, a group of neighbors in the Catalan town of Santa Coloma de Gramenet near Barcelona began noisy protests against a mosque in the ground floor of a residential building, claiming among other things, that the mosque would decrease the value of their properties (Aranda and Cruz 2005). This and other incidents indicate what none of my informants deny: that xenophobia does exist in Catalonia to some degree. But as I argued in chapter three, identifying injurious acts should not exhaust one’s analysis. In this case, activists organized counter protests in solidarity with the Muslim community (Barcelona Independent Media Center 2004). In addition, the local government intervened to facilitate dialog between the parties and a
A group of film makers produced a documentary about the conflict, which was used to stimulate reflexive discussion about freedom of religion and the rights of neighbors (Aranda and Cruz 2005).

Social justice is not the absence of conflict nor a utopian situation in which no person or social collectivity is ever treated with disrespect or otherwise wronged by others. The statistical incidence of expressions of xenophobia compiled by the EU cited above is of limited diagnostic value unless we know about the response to such expressions. I would suggest that there is a world of difference between injurious acts met with tacit approval or indifference and those that elicit enabling responses of solidarity, intervention and dialog. The conceptual space of convivencia facilitates a more nuanced analysis of conflict. In reference to another Iberian context, Liliana Suárez-Navaz, describes convivencia as the “dominant construction of difference” that has a “transformative effect on the way people behave and identify themselves, and it shapes the sociopolitical struggles of enfranchisement of immigrants in particular countries and locales.” Suárez-Navaz uses the concept to explore “processes of claiming space, rights, and cultural practices that go beyond the intentions of the state.” Rather than spaces of “pure” resistance, she conceptualizes convivencia as a complex approach to power and resistance that transcends the temptation to portray social structure as polarized between dominators and dominated (2004: 194).

Returning to Vilanova i la Geltrú, I will describe some aspects of the institutional infrastructure that newcomers to the town encounter. Before one can open a bank account, enroll one’s child in school, or conduct many other types of transactions, the

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71 The Castilian form of the word referenced by Suárez-Navaz contain a different accent mark.
newcomer to Vilanova must seek the sponsorship (empadronament) of the municipal
government. The streamlined process consists of completing a one-page form and
returning later to pick up a letter of sponsorship. There is no fee. It is immaterial whether
one’s status is documented or undocumented with respect to the European Union or the
nation of Spain. The newcomer’s data is entered into the town’s demographic database
while she is handed a booklet and told “welcome to Vilanova.”

The booklet is titled *Useful Guide for Newcomers to Vilanova i la Geltrú* published
by Vilanova’s Office of Civil Rights. The 2005 edition contained identical information in
several languages including Catalan, Castilian, Arabic, Russian, French, and English. The
booklet contained information about the city and the rights and duties of its citizens, the
country of Catalonia, and social services provided. The rights held by each person
according to their legal immigration status are listed. Significantly, the town guarantees
all the rights of citizens to non-citizens, such as health services and education, with the
exception of rights located in the national sphere, such as voting for president. All
sponsored persons do, however, have voting rights in municipal elections, thus the
municipal government has attempted to minimize the structural inequalities between
natives and newcomers.

It is also notable that in this government document, the town’s festes are described
and newcomers are explicitly invited to participate. The religious origins of the festes are
acknowledged with the caveat that many townspeople participate in festa as a cultural
rather than religious practice, therefore making space for a pluralistic orientation to the
town’s ritual life (l’Oficina de Drets Civils 2004).

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72 There is also a campaign to extend voting rights to nationally undocumented immigrants for Catalan
region-wide elections (SOS Racisme-Catalunya 2007).
Following from the right to speak Catalan and Castilian, the government of Catalonia considers itself to have an obligation to provide free language training (Generalitat de Catalunya 2006a: 13). To this end, the Language and Social Cohesion subdivision of the Department of Education coordinates educational services throughout the region. These include the Centers for Language Normalization, described in chapter two, that primarily serve immigrant adults with free beginning and intermediate classes and low cost advanced courses for professional level Catalan. Children are served by a network of ‘classrooms of welcome’ (Aules d'acollida) for the acquisition of levels of comprehension and acclimatization for both Catalan and Castilian adequate for the student to enter a conventional classroom. The stated objectives of the classrooms of welcome are to contribute to “the construction of a cohesive, welcoming and open Catalonia.” The idealized classroom of welcome is posited as a place where “we know and rediscover one another, learn from one another, and have the opportunity to live and exchange diverse experiences” (Grup d’aules d’acollida). Regardless of the success or failure of the classrooms of welcome to implement their mission, the values they articulate strike several consonances with the orientations of Vilanova’s sensory public.

Like the crew of castellers, the classroom of welcome is a space in which people gather for common objectives: the acquisition of technical competencies and the construction of social solidarities. In both cases, difference is construed as not merely enriching or tolerable but essential to the success of the enterprise. The objective of social cohesion is attached to that of welcome and openness, instructing the reader not to confuse cohesion with a homogeneity antithetical to the Catalanist aversion to imposed cultural and linguistic norms. In Catalonia, the word ‘unity’ would never be substituted
for ‘cohesion’ without signaling a tremendous paradigmatic shift evoking the clarion cry of the dictatorship: “Spain: One, Great, and Free” by which dissent and difference were ruthlessly extirpated. Aligning cohesion to openness implies a negotiated model of communal belonging, in short, convivència. The word ‘welcoming’ adds an affective element consonant with other aesthetic-ethical sensibilities of the sensory public such as hospitality and neighborliness. Again, I am not assessing the success of the classrooms of welcome to implement its ideals only to suggest that those ideals articulate an exchange of values between the spheres of ritual techniques and practices of government.

**Vilanova’s plan for convivència**

In Vilanova, the most elaborated example of the exchanges between the sensory public and the body politic was the process of creating a town Plan for Convivència (Pla per a la convivència de Vilanova i la Geltrú). In March 2006, a full assembly of the municipal government unanimously agreed to vigorously pursue a town model based on “social cohesion, convivència, and equal opportunity” (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2007b: 3). In addition to articulating a set of social goals and strategies of implementation, the report locates Vilanova in a time of rapid change due to global inequalities and migration. The team that produced the report also makes an attempt to clarify the concept of convivència.

Acknowledging the shortcomings of dictionaries, the authors identify a series of associated words and phrases that help define convivència: “interactions between persons, exchange, fear of the unknown, working together, to share, to know others, relations with the collective, prejudices, communication and dialogue, conflict,
participation, information, respect, cohesion…" (4), the concluding ellipsis suggesting further associations and ultimately, indeterminancy. This assemblage of social dynamics and affective states exists in a determinate urban space. “The city is the common space that enables the relations between the citizens of a territory” (La ciutat és l’espai comú i més proper de relació entre els ciutadans i les ciutadanes d’un territori) (ibid.). A section of the plan is dedicated to articulating the city as a space of convivència, claiming that the city is not merely the sum of its streets and squares but “an expression of the will of the persons who, by living there, form a community” (op. cit.: 23). In positing the city as inseparable from the ethical-aesthetic concepts of civility and convivència, the plan identifies the conjunction between municipal initiatives and the citizens who implement them as “axes of the education and sensibilization of these values” (ibid.). The authors go further to claim that “there is no possibility of a sustainable, convivencial city without shared spaces, comportments and values” (op. cit.: 25).

I have introduced the term sensory public, to draw attention to the ways embodied techniques and sensory exchanges in shared public space are constitutive of models of sociability and understandings of community belonging. The authors of the Plan for Convivència—the Vilanovins most engaged with immigration within the sphere of policies, texts and governance—have also posited shared space, embodied practices and ethical orientations as inalienable to their concept of the city, albeit with a vocabulary different from the one I employ.

The authors of the plan aver that the recent arrival of people from around the globe in large numbers has revealed the culture of political democracy as but feebly able facilitate engaged coexistence of significant differences. The right to difference, they claim, is
imperiled because difference continues to be seen as a problem rather than the *sine qua non* of all social life, and even as the best guarantee of social cohesion (op cit.: 24). In fact, many Vilanovins who were not professionally engaged with the theme of convivència also spoke of the presence of newcomers as ‘enrichment’ rather than in terms of problems. This tendency towards a positive disposition should not be taken as evidence that most native Vilanovins have proactively engaged with their newly arrived neighbors to achieve the ideals of convivència. It is a rhetorical ethical stance distinct from xenophobic language that characterizes immigrants as impurities (cf. Gilroy 2005), but this could be what both Anglophones and Catalan speakers sometimes refer to as mere ‘political correctness.’ Although I witnessed acts of neighborliness initiated between natives and newcomers, and have testified to nascent infrastructures of incorporation, I agree with the authors of the report—and a number of my informants—that Vilanovins need to more systematically and vigorously coordinate the reception of newcomers; guarantee their rights, opportunities and dignity; and adapt public services to their needs (Ajuntament de Vilanova, op. cit.: 35).

The last strategic initiative proposed in the Plan for Convivència is titled ‘public space and social cohesion,’ which concerns the participation and implication of newcomers in the social and cultural spaces of the city. This initiative calls for mechanisms of political participation, of dialogue, of the stimulation of civility, and of the generation of a sentiment of belonging to the city: in fact, a new concept, that of “local citizenship” (op. cit.: 35-6). Local citizenship is distinct from but related to the sensory public in that by insistently invoking the affective and ethical qualities of convivència, the authors of the plan appear to break from the paradigms in which ethics
and aesthetics were seen as epiphenomenal to the ‘real’ spheres of economic and governmental structures. In contrast, of Britain Paul Gilroy writes: “There is no governmental interest in the forms of conviviality and intermixture that appear to have evolved spontaneously and organically from the interventions of anti-racists and the ordinary multiculture of the postcolonial metropolis” (2005: 124). But to what extent do Vilanova’s would-be architects of planned convivència draw on the knowledges and practices of its sensory public?

While making reference to the social fabric provided by Vilanova’s large number of voluntary associations as inherent to the space in which a sense of public space and social cohesion are engendered, the plan is silent regarding the techniques by which the aesthetics and ethics of belonging are fostered. The majority of these associations—108 of them—are ritual crews like the castellers, devils, and others I have described. I have demonstrated throughout these pages that Vilanovin fests constitute the public space par excellence that enables a wide array of sensory and affective techniques to process many dimensions of convivència, and not exclusively or necessarily a sense of social cohesion. Given the intense enthusiasm Vilanovins, including many newcomers, dedicate to the social space of festa—far in excess of any other—it strikes me as baffling that the authors of the plan at no time mention festa. I suggest that despite their acknowledgement of aesthetics and ethics as pertaining to the sphere of the political, they have retained the prejudice against play as secondary to economics and power politics. In this the authors are oddly disconnected from many of the local citizens who, as a sensory public,

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73 An appendix to the Plan lists 22 local entitats de cooperació or solidarity organizations including chapters of Oxfam, SOS Racisme, Friends of the Palestinian People, Guatemala Friendship Association, Catalan Engineers without Borders, etc (Ajuntament de Vilanova i la Geltrú 2007b).
consistently articulate political and ethical sensibilities and affirm the centrality of festa to their model of convivència.

I met with Francesc, the leader of the technical team that produced Vilanova’s Plan for Convivència, some months prior to the public release of the Plan. I asked him about festa as a space of convivència but first I asked for clarification about convivència vis-à-vis other social paradigms. “The municipal government speaks of convivència rather than integration because it understands this as a bi-directional relation between the people who arrive and the people who are here” he explained. “Our work as a municipality is to receive (acollir) the people who arrive.” The verb used, acollir, has two senses, the first, a neutral term for admitting someone to one’s company or house. The second is affectively invested with the sense of good will. This choice of the verb, acollir, common to Catalan discourse about immigration, places migration within the paradigmatic sensibilities of hospitality and neighborliness. Francesc continued, “this is an issue of cohesion, the word ‘integration’ implies more distance, less proximity” and he spoke about the rambles and public squares as important spaces of convivència.

I have argued throughout this dissertation that the techniques of Vilanova’s sensory public tend to de-reify identity. Francesc provided some corroboration for this claim in stating, “We have to end the discussion of [distinguishing] who are immigrants and who are not.” He invoked the history of Catalans as migrants to other lands, the nature of Catalonia as a land of immigrants, and the conditions of globalization that accelerate mobility to demonstrate the essential arbitrariness of the category of the immigrant and the shortcomings of rigid models of social relations.

74 Gran Diccionari de la llengua catalana, s.v. “acollir.”
When asked, Francesc downplayed the salience of festa to the project, but articulated a range of apertures to community belonging:

I don’t see festes as more of a gateway of entry than any other. I think that the first gateway of entry for the newcomer is their own collectivity. Very rarely does a person arrive all by themselves but usually they come to meet someone related or known to them. The educational community —teachers, other mothers and fathers—is another gateway of entry. I don’t see festa as a first step but a later step. For Festa Major, the newcomer first experiences it as an observer. To integrate is complicated. Another [point of entry] is the language. A way that a person who might be Romanian or Arab or South American or from here—a way to cohere everyone together—is to know the language of the territory. The language carries a sentiment very intimate and deep for Catalans. The language serves as a way to facilitate communication between everyone.

Francesc thought that there were very few opportunities for newcomers or Catalans to participate in the cultural activities of the other. “There are very few diversity fairs, for example, in which people can learn about each other.” He said that what is missing is quotidian spaces of relation, remarking that festes are only once a year. “When Carnival is here, we’re all in solidarity, when it’s Christmas were all gathered together. How do we create everyday spaces of interchange and encounter?”

I do not wish to downplay the central importance of immigrants’ collectivities,
language acquisition, the educational community, or the need to increase everyday spaces of encounter. I am positing that festa is neither peripheral nor exceptional but the paradigmatic space of convivência, a ritual crucible of intensive sensory-affective orientation in which a sense of local belonging is forged. The suggestion that a diversity fair is the only festive space in which Vilanovins learn about each other rests on two assumptions I have challenged throughout this dissertation. The first is the multiculturalist paradigm that calcifies difference into a ‘mosaic of cultures,’ impoverishing commonality while reifying identity. The second is the rationalist assumption that accurate knowledge of the other will extinguish prejudice. The claim of sensory politics is that the kind of knowledge that can be communicated through texts provides, at best, a partial account of human interrelationship. When we speak of persons known to us, that knowing encompasses affective encounters and aesthetic recognition, knowledge that might matter more to us than the information about them conveyed by language. Moreover, in the sphere of language, the knowing that comes from dialogic engagement carries a different affective charge than that of being educated about what one ought to know.

A Strange Place: Immigrants as anthropologists

I asserted in chapter two that creating conditions for social justice and equity—such that no one group holds a monopolistic share of power, privilege, capital and knowledge—requires the decentering of the dominant group. As a stateless nation, Catalonia is already decentered in the context of the Spanish state and its citizens experience many of their practices and aspirations as oppositional rather than taken for granted. But to newcomers,
Catalan society, however complex its relationship to Spain, constitutes a set of social norms to be negotiated from a position of relative vulnerability. To foster a convivencia that enables the full participation of newcomers, that is, to achieve deep pluralism between multiple minorities (Connolly 2005: 59-67), Catalans must also be decentered in relation to their new neighbors from Africa, Latin America and beyond. One technique of decentering is self-examination, to observe one’s collective self as sensed by its others in ways that place normative assumptions under scrutiny. I have shown how carnivalesque performances in ritual space embody this kind of decontextualization as a decentering technique of the sensory public. Catalans were also engaging in this process at the level of the Warnerian public through a popular television series that aired during my stay in Vilanova.

*Un Lloc Estrany* is a documentary series produced by the main Catalan language television station, TV3, presenting sections of interviews with 60 immigrants, in a light, often humorous style. The show explicitly identified its immigrant interlocutors as “anthropologists” who would relate their impressions of the “strange place” that is Catalonia and its “indigenes,” the Catalan people. Each episode focused on a theme such as the appearance and character of the Catalan people, practices relating to work, money, personal grooming, dress, interpersonal and sexual relations, religion, food and family. A number of my Catalan informants expressed delight in the program, enjoying the opportunity to laugh at themselves via the newcomers’ astonishment or disgust expressed in remarks such as “Catalans eat anything that wags a tail,” or “all they talk about is sex and shit” (Nicolas 2006).

As I related in chapter three, during Vilanova’s Carnival, I did not witness any joking
between natives and newcomers. I suggested such humorous content was absent because it required the development of a joking idiom based on shared experiences that had yet to emerge. By providing a forum for immigrants to laugh at the positionally less vulnerable Catalans, *A Strange Place* may have served as an aperture of such emergence. Although the newcomers did appear to generate a series of stereotypic characterizations of Catalans, these bore little in common with the long-standing Castilian stereotypes of Catalans as stingy and unfriendly, characteristics emphatically denied by the interviewees. By intervening in the denigration of Catalans by the positionally superior Castilians, the newcomers performed an act of solidarity, albeit an uncalculated one.

The theme of nationalism, featured on the May 22, 2006 broadcast, brought the heterogeneity of the political experience of Catalonia’s newcomers into focus. A German woman and a Serbian man each evinced discomfort with Catalan nationalism, saying they experienced nationalism as something very negative which they associated with the extreme right. In contrast, a Tibetan woman drew comparisons between Catalonia and Tibet, noting that Tibet also had a population of 6 million people, was semiautonomous and oppressed by a stronger nation. A number of Moroccan respondents related their situation to that of the Catalans, explaining that in Morocco, the Berbers or *Imazighen* also speak a different language and want to be recognized as distinct but are told, “Oh no, we’re all Moroccan.” Warming to the theme of solidarity, a Sub-Saharan African man said that “the first [humanitarian aid] caravan to help people in the first Gulf War came from here and the same for the war in Bosnia. These actions speak for themselves.”

The articulations of solidarities seemed to strike a deep chord with the Catalan audience for whom the discourses of autonomy, language rights and social justice are
frequently present. *A Strange Place* turns the tables on native commentators about the immigrant other and places the host community under scrutiny. This move gives newcomers a seat at the table with a kind of agency unusual in the depiction of immigrants elsewhere. The jocular interventions of the newcomers towards their hosts resembled the good-natured ribbing characteristic of Carnival. In these ways, *A Strange Place* could be seen as contributing to the formation of new patterns of social interrelation.

In contrast, US-made documentaries about immigrants cleave to the multiculturalist paradigm in which each immigrant group is portrayed as bounded within its cultural norms and defined as other. While *A Strange Place* was airing in Catalonia, in Northern California—another site of social transformation through rapid immigration—the public television channel KQED presented *Immigrant Voices—American Stories* (Fromer and Sadiq 2006). In its single episode, the program presented interviews with eight immigrants living in the San Francisco Bay Area. The opening credits depicted dark-complexioned people in bright clothing, dancing to folk music from their homelands, establishing the otherness and boundedness of immigrant cultural milieus. The interviews portrayed immigrants as hard workers, people who love their families, victims of exploitation or restrictive laws, and people determined to become civically active to overcome the obstacles in their path. The immigrant voices are allowed to serve as authorities on their own cultural practices and experiences but not as experts summoned to comment on native behavior. The distanced, non-immigrant viewer is invited to feel sympathy and admiration for the noble sentiments expressed by the interviewees, and perhaps share in a critique of the host society in the most abstract form. The people of the
host society play no part: they are never invited to self-reflection or dialogue, never reached out to with a playful jibe, sympathetic complement, or a acknowledgement of mutualities on which solidarities might be founded. The narrator even described immigrant communities as a "mosaic." Indeed the multiculturalist paradigm facilitates the imagination of immigrant communities as distinctly pigmented, glued-in-place, and separated from each other by white, rock-hard borders.\(^75\)

*Strange Place*, in contrast, wields a Brechtian hammer upon this masonry. The natives are implicated and directly addressed, decentering them from assumptions about their own positionality. This is completely different from what Gilroy calls the “positive-image school of cultural critique” (2005: 133), the strategy by which negative stereotypes of subaltern groups are replaced by idealistic positive images, a strategy shown to be largely ineffective by studies by social psychologists (Galinsky and Moskowitz 2000; Garcia-Marques and Mackie 1999).

By directly addressing the host community as their object, the commentators of *Strange Place* incite Catalan self-reflection. Their problem space is not a sidelined immigrant experience to be regarded by detached voyeurs of cultural alterity but the broader society in which all inhabitants are implicated. The structural obstacles faced by newcomers to Catalonia—language, work, school, etc—are frequently described but they are placed in the context of the adjustments immigrants must make in the sphere of sensibilities, in the context of the daily life of the sensory public.

\(^75\) At another extreme, the 2006 film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, made by British comic Sacha Baron Cohen, features Cohen impersonating a Kazakh journalist visiting the US. While the Kazakhs are depicted as over-the-top anti-Semites and sexual predators, *Borat* manipulates Americans into gross displays of intolerance. *Borat* makes fun of the host community but unlike *Strange Place*, *Borat* delivers brutal satire rather than an invitation to dialogue.
Still, one can not claim too much from a single television series, however popular and innovative. As an experimental intervention into identity and positionality, *A Strange Place* serves as one among many kinds of encounter in the emergence of Catalonia’s 21st century convivència.

**Unfinished narratives**

I have related the encounter between Vilanova’s native born and newly arrived inhabitants through a series of acts in different spheres. The embodied practices of the sensory public, both during the affectively charged ritual space of festa and quotidian town life, is one such context of encounter and commentary. Another register is made up of representational interventions that address the encounter. Vilanova’s Plan for Convivència and Barcelona’s civility codes acted upon regulatory processes while *A Strange Place* used mass media to incite reflexivity about Catalan social positioning. In sometimes consonant, sometimes dissonant ways, these constitute threads of a discernible project of 21st century convivència. While these threads cohere to the degree that they appear distinct from native-immigrant paradigms dominant in the US, France or Britain, the project is not characterized by unanimity, and its outcome, like all outcomes, is yet to be known.

I presented many examples in which the sensory public critiqued the sphere of power politics through festa techniques, particularly during Carnival and explicitly through the use of satiric verses. For example, Spain’s Civil War and the Franco dictatorship continue to be re-narratized through the idioms of Carnival in ways that connect Catalan historic resistance to current politics such as that of the 2006 Statute of Autonomy. In another
example, the plurisensual practices of festa give form to a version of convivência patterned through affective and ethical sensibilities distinct from state defined regimes of civility. While local government provided money and services to enable festa, I learned of few acts generated from the sphere of officialdom, broadly conceived, to intervene in the ritual practices of festa. As my interview with Francesc suggests, the realm of festa appears peripheral to the governmental project of managing difference.

I learned of an exception to this tendency that I briefly referenced in chapter three. On Christmas day I took my daughter to a puppet show in the courtyard of Vilanova’s city hall. Three windows overlooking the courtyard had been transformed into puppet theaters: the center panel consisting of a large, sleepy-eyed Catalan peasant wearing an emblematic red wool hat or barretina while the flanking panels portrayed scenes from the annunciation to the shepherds. I encountered Maçana, who had accompanied her young niece. Maçana told me that until about seven years previous, the center panel had displayed a grotesque face of a legendary Moorish pirate called Moro Manani (The Moor Manani). At the conclusion of the puppet show, this figure would vomit candy from its mouth, which the children would scramble to collect. Maçana recounted the legend, that the pirate had stormed into Vilanova, terrorizing the populace, eating and drinking everything he could lay hands on until finally he vomited and expired. 76

As Maçana explained, group of teachers from Vilanova’s schools suggested to the authorities that this negative, stereotypic image of an Arab character could be viewed as

76 The action of vomiting candy by the grotesque head of a Moorish pirate on Christmas and other holidays, and variants of this legend were common within the province of Barcelona at least since the early twentieth century. In an early version from Vilanova, the Arab pirate tires of his way of life settles on the beach of Vilanova as a penitent (Ferrer i Martí 2005).

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offensive to the town’s Muslim population. In response, the organizers of the Christmas
day puppet show developed an alternative. The first year, the figure was renamed the
Pirate Manani, dropping the linguistic marker of ethnicity, Moro, that had moreover
become a politically incorrect term when applied to contemporary Muslims. The
following year, the defecating peasant typical to Catalan nativity scenes, the caganer
(defecator), took the place of the pirate, and, substituting one carnivalesque act for
another, launches a flood of candy from its buttocks.

The disciplining of Moro Manani is typical of “managing diversity” in which
immigrants are not spoken to but their needs are assumed, thus they remain objects for
intervention and management. A number of my informants expressed distaste for the
process, indicating a breach of sensibilities about convivencia.

This act of de-racializing the grotesque did not end the narrative life of Moro Manani.
Six months later, as Festa Major approached, I learned of an outdoor concert organized
by the Bordegassos to take place during the week of Festa Major titled Manani Rock. I
asked Romà, one of the young members of the technical team involved in the concert
about the name. Romà recounted a story similar to Maçana’s and explained that the
concert, Manani Rock, was then in its fourth year. He then told me: “Taking the name
Manani was a way to pay homage to a personage of our childhood and hold it up against
the dictatorship of the politically correct. (Agafar el nom de Manani era una manera
d’homenatjar un personatge de la infantesa i revelar-se contra la dictadura del
politicament correcte).”

I had been an active member of the Bordegassos since the Spring and had to evaluate
Romà’s statement within the context of my experience in Vilanova. In the US, I have
observed that opposition to political correctness takes two primary forms. The first is that people who inhabit hegemonic normative categories resist examining their privileged position or altering their representational practices: thereby reasserting their superiority over those to whom they refuse to extend the respect they themselves take for granted. The second form of opposition is a critique of political correctness as a veneer that hides structural inequalities and facilitates a deniability of privilege, in that saying the right thing can become a substitute for doing the right thing. The Bordegassos weren’t articulating either of these positions.

I had seen the Bordegassos consistently embrace—literally and figuratively—newcomers from several continents, and act in solidarity with those disadvantaged by structural inequalities, on and off the plaça. I also witnessed them demonstrate resistance to top down authority, to hierarchy, and assert the primacy of the people gathered physically together—the sensory public—over experts, officials and those who stand apart. As to language practice, the only time I heard any member of the crew use the term *moro* instead of the now preferred *musulmà* or *magrebi*, it was a white-haired grandfather who was immediately chastised by a younger member of the crew. Thus, I could not find evidence that opposition to political correctness was associated with an acceptance of injurious utterance.

While anti-racist groups such as *SOS-Racisme* were visibly active in Vilanova and other Catalan towns, the Bordegassos are clearly not organized by a rationalized ideology of anti-racism or human rights. I observed an active stance of solidarity among the Bordegassos that was often extended in practical ways in support of social justice. The stance against an imposed political correctness is consistent with the Bordegassos’
opposition to ranking by judges in professionalized competitions. There is no implied racial animus in this stance but rather an articulation of practices of autonomy and democracy. Because these ethical orientations are routed through embodied practices of ritual and sociability they appear peripheral to conventional political analysis—but they are central to sensory politics.

Francesc, the technical team leader of the Plan for Convivència, had minimized festa as an aperture for newcomers to Vilanovin society and I think it is prudent not to ascribe too much importance to festa in relation to the institutions that structure everyday survival. However, in speaking to newcomers, I came to appreciate the ways in which the affective qualities of ritual life could matter more than the best political platform. In speaking (in Castilian) with three South American laborers who had arrived in Europe more recently than myself and had also become members of the Bordegassos, I asked the same question I had addressed to Francesc: “Is festival a gateway of entrance to Catalan society for immigrants?” “It can be” answered Pedro, “for us, definitely.” “Being a member of the Bordegassos and coming out to the festivals makes me feel like a member of the community,” he continued, “We don’t have [immigration] papers, so it’s complicated, but the festivals are something positive.” Their undocumented status was a source of vulnerability and a measure of the way that governmental structures had failed to include them. The sensory public however, enabled a sense of belonging. Paolo echoed Pedro’s sentiments and recounted with enthusiasm all of the ritual events they had attended during the preceding five months.

I asked them specifically about participating as castellers and Pedro answered: “I like the companionship a lot. And it’s a way to incorporate into the community.”
many outsiders tended to categorize castells according to familiar models of athleticism I asked out of curiosity, “Do you think of it as a sport?” “No,” replied Pedro, “It’s not a sport because there’s no competition. It’s a form to... to live together (convivir).” I noted that after pausing to search for the word he wanted, Pedro settled on the Castilian form of the dominant Catalan concept of engaged social interrelation. Even though these newcomers understood very little Catalan, they were already beginning to orient themselves to the aesthetic-ethical sensibilities of Vilanova’s sensory public in explicit ways.

Bell towers and minarets

In spite of the seemingly endless new construction in the region, church bell towers are still among the most conspicuous visual features of Catalan urban space. Even for the religiously non-observant, these towers serve as landmarks of orientation and familiarity. The sound of their bells serves to regulate the soundscape by audibly marking distance, wind, and temporal divisions. Vilanova’s central bell tower at the church of Sant Antoni has come to symbolize a local point of view, both through a panoramic photographic image of the town taken from that magisterial vantage point and as a journalist metaphor. The opinion page of Vilanova’s newspaper is titled: From the Bell Tower.

On March 16, 2007, Conrad Rovira Pascual, a regular contributor to the opinion page decentered this characteristic gaze by titling his contribution, “From the Minaret.” Rovira Pascual drew attention to the process of rapid change due to immigration and the uncertain future it portends, announcing: “We’re on the way to a new Vilanova (Vilanova-nova).” Arguing that, while the current practices of convivència had served
well up to now, that this future calls for greater proactivity. He identified a “frontline” in Vilanova’s reception of immigrants, people working on their own without support, such as the small business owners who provide food and services. He exhorted the “rearguard” to applaud the good efforts of these individuals while sharing responsibility for their mistakes “as if they were our own” (2007: 15).

Arguing that the “long process of the convivència of cultures” requires vision, Rovira Pascual proposed that Vilanova needs to build a mosque in the near future. The mosque should not be hidden away in an industrial park, he urged, but in the city center where it will be dignified by its situation. “I imagine the minaret of the mosque perfectly complementing the skyline formed by the bell towers of la Geltrú and Sant Antoni and the towers of the medieval quarter.” This pluralized re-imagining of the architectural elements of the cityscape flowed into imagery of pluralized festa practices: of Muslims, feeling secure in their position, introducing new banners to the Comparses, of Chinese bringing their dragons and firecrackers to join the local dragons and pyrotechnics, of Sub Saharan introducing new steps to a Catalan dance, etc. In closing Rovira Pascual suggested that with the help of immigration, the Comparses (the dance/candy war described in chapter four) would be declared Patrimony of Humanity by UNESCO (Ibid.).

Employing the medium of text addressed to readers, Rovira Pascual engaged the idiom of the sensory public as an activist intervention into the local stance towards newcomers. Convivència, in his paradigm, focuses on the face-to-face encounters of daily business and on participation in the colors, sounds, movements and images of festa. The physical profile of the heart of the city is also at stake and, for Rovira Pascual, this must
be opened to the town’s Muslim community in a grand, visible gesture that redefines emblematic local space as plural. Like the members of the technical team of the Plan for Convivència I spoke to, the lack of major conflict to date does not justify complacency for Rovira Pascual, who urged his fellow native Vilanovins to initiate bold acts of solidarity with newcomers. The festive convivència Rovira Pascual imagines as the future product of such proactivity is sold as a new and valuable cultural asset worthy of international recognition.

In fact, the issue of mosques has been central to Catalonia’s Muslim community. Almost half of all mosques in Spain are in Catalonia where 170 mosques or oratories serve the region’s 300,000 Muslims (Playà Maset 2006). Most of these are small facilities often located in garages or basements. These sites were deemed inadequate in a public statement by the Islamic Cultural Council of Catalonia, which has proposed building a large, “dignified” mosque in Barcelona to “serve as an Islamic point of reference in this country” (ibid.). Catalonia’s first Muslim member of Parliament, Mohamed Chaib, a delegate of the socialist party, echoed this call in the 2006 inaugural session of Congress. He urged the construction of a large dignified mosque and added that mosques have to be the patrimony of everyone in their neighborhood, open to neighbors and students, in equal conditions to those of other faith communities (Ibid.). Chaib used the language of normalization in his address, thereby establishing a parallel between Catalan language rights and Muslim rights to religious practice. In another parallel, Chaib made a call to Muslims to “facilitate the good convivència” and “to be tolerant, as much towards Islam’s critics as towards those who sympathize with Islam” (Ibid.). Linking convivència to Islamic values, Chaib reminded his Muslim audience that the Prophet said “I was sent
to avow pure tolerance” (He sido enviado para hacer valer la pura tolerancia) and urged Muslims to “participate in the culture of the country that receives us” by learning its language, history, culture and civilization (Ibid.).

Both Rovira Pascual and Chaib invoked reciprocal gestures, utilizing tropes familiar to the Catalan public, particularly the sensory public; and in Chaib’s case, designed to resonate with Islamic values. One government official’s position, while not oppositional and sharing some of these tropes, asserted evaluative notions that departed from the dialogic, pluralist sensibilities articulated by Chaim and Rovira Pascual. Montserrat Coll, the Catalan government’s director of Religious Affairs, said that “the Government wants an educated (culto) and modern Islam and that the mosques contribute their values to Catalan society: peace, love, cordiality, hospitality, and the sense of the festa” (Ibid.). Rather than the open-ended reciprocity advocated by Chaib and Rovira Pascual, Coll communicated conditional support for Muslim aspirations. There is a proposal for exchange but it is mapped onto assumptions that Europe is already “educated and modern” in a way that Islam is not. The stated desire that the mosques share their values with Catalan society is also formulated in a distinct way. Chaim and Rovira Pascual evoked shared values and envisioned pluralist practices, the latter employing the carnivalesque idiom of abundance. Coll’s statement implied some kind of deficit, either that Muslims bear such values as peace and cordiality but haven’t extended them to those outside their faith community, or that Catalans need an ethical education to improve their hospitality and sense of festa.

I began chapter two with an account of Operation Jackal in which 22 presumed members of al Qaeda cells were arrested in various parts of Spain, 14 of them in
Vilanova i la Geltrú. Bringing that unfinished narrative up to date ties into the foregoing discourse on mosques and leads me towards my exit from this text.

The raid took place in January of 2006. Three of those Vilanovins retained were released without charges, and the remaining 11 were sent to prison where they were kept incommunicado under the provisions of a new anti-terrorism law. In October of 2007, Judge Baltasar Garzón of the Audiencia Nacional, or Spanish High Court, processed the 22 people arrested. Garzón has formally accused members of the group of recruiting and training individual jihadis and of financing terrorist attacks in Iraq and Europe. As of this writing they await trial on these charges. A support coalition for the detained formed of local solidarity groups is still active in Vilanova (Diari de Vilanova 2007a).

Two months after this announcement, Vilanova’s Director of Social Affairs, Health and Convivència, Encarna Grifell, approved moving the town’s mosque from the small apartment where it had been to a large building near the sporting complex. The move was made possible by an agreement between the city government, the neighbors, and the property owner. While this is not the grand building with a beautiful minaret in the town center envisaged by Rovira Pascual, the Muslim community was pleased by the improved conditions and accessible location, expressing the desire to purchase its own property within a few years. Vilanova’s municipal government also announced its intention to engage with other municipalities to survey their practices with respect to religious spaces. While communicating its satisfaction with the temporary solution, the municipality also

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77 Baltasar, known as the “Super Judge,” is famous for such acts as ordering an arrest warrant against former Chilean President Augusto Pinochet and for his fierce condemnations of the United States for practices relative to al-Qaeda suspects held in Guantanamo Bay (Sciolino 2006).
expressed its hope that the Catalan government will arrive at a region-wide framework for the equitable treatment of all religions in the future (Diari de Vilanova 2007b).

Here I want to make a series of points towards a conclusion. I have used the frame of sensory politics as a way to focus on the social processes that constitute the specificity of local places at the same time that they are also being constituted by globalizing processes. The orientations towards living with difference I have studied help differentiate Catalonia from other regions of Europe. The framework of universal human rights and principles of secularism that characterize European statecraft have not produced the same refusals to accommodate difference as found in Britain and France (Asad 2003, 2006) but are being adapted to accommodate the practices of social collectivities as well as the rights of individuals.

At this point I want to re-emphasize that the entirety of the data I have presented do not demonstrate that Vilanova has achieved an exemplary model of social interrelation. In the first place, I have described emergent relations and changing practices within a framework of tendencies following different threads that are not always congruent. In the second place, a model suggests a set of transportable practices. I have located Vilanova’s convivència partly in Catalonia’s distinct socio-linguistic and political history and in the lived experience of Vilanovins enabled by their urban spaces. Therefore it cannot be supposed that importing its festa rituals to any other place would serve to make the sense of belonging more permeable or to correspond to any of the ethical-aesthetic orientations produced in Vilanova.

That being said, by focusing on technique and demonstrating how practices change over time, I hope I have opened sensory politics as a broad space of social analysis. I did
not set out to challenge the long standing convention in anthropology that ritual primarily serves to circumscribe social interiors. However, by focusing on the sensory aspects of ritual techniques I demonstrated the open-endedness and permeability of ritual acts: showing that ritual can simultaneously secure and decenter a social body.

This intervention also challenges the received vocabulary of inclusion vs. exclusion and open vs. closed, which tends to essentialize the asymmetries of social relations as fixed and polar, instead of emergent and dialogic. I must emphatically state that I do not make this move with the intent to underplay the patterned bases of social inequality. On the contrary, my claim is that by being attentive to the nuances of asymmetrical social interaction—that is to say, all social interaction—we can identify transformative practices, apertures in the covert bunkers of privilege and dominance.

The transformative potential of the practices of convivència in Vilanova i la Geltrú and other Catalan towns with similar orientations will have to be evaluated over time. At this moment in its history, the region has a number of resources favoring its success, some dispositional, some structural. Structurally, Catalonia stands in a more or less oppositional relationship to the Spanish state. As I showed in chapter two, Catalanists tend to look at immigrants as potential allies in the cause for autonomy and minority rights. Politically, the region leans leftward, emphasizing government responsibility to provide services and opportunity, thus maintaining conditions that materially help immigrants and mitigate their economic vulnerability. Vilanova’s model of the ‘local citizen’ stands in stark contrast to the dehumanizing US construct of the ‘illegal alien.’

With respect to disposition, the sensory public’s aversion to social isolation on the part of any local inhabitant and its aesthetics of neighborliness also have potential for
extending community belonging to newcomers. However, linguistic barriers, distrust, or other biases cannot be discounted and may take a long time to overcome. A complementary disposition can be found in Vilanova’s largest newcomer collective, its Muslim community, whose leadership consistently links convivência to Islamic values, sometimes reminding their flock that ‘the Prophet enjoins us to greet our neighbors.’

Muslims and non-Muslim natives told me that they consider both communities to be Mediterranean, and thus to share much more in common than either do with Northern Europeans. Despite the complimentary nature of the sentiments expressed, social encounters between native and newcomers are ultimately a matter of practice, and in this regard they still have a distance ahead of them.

An additional resource that has the special capacity to collapse social distance is festa. By driving experience into the body, producing a sense of solidarity, and re-imagining the social world, the ritual practices that constitute festa are techniques of encounter and aesthetic-ethical orientation. Festa participation does not demand orthodoxy, in fact, individuals regulate their own degree of participation and assimilate the aspects that appeal to them in their own self-fashioning. The double gesture of ritual to both consolidate and decenter a local sense of belonging is produced through asymmetrical encounters—like that of the wasp and the orchid—that enable moments of individual and collective becoming.

Together, these dispositions, political structures and ritual techniques are, in Gilroy’s words, “resources for the peaceful accommodation of otherness” (2005: 6). These resources represent a capacity to live with difference convivially. Capacity does not imply success yet it is possible to imagine that such an assemblage of resources could
produce a plural society of multiple minorities. Lest this appear utopian, I also assert that social asymmetries, conflicts, and failures of recognition will necessarily arise as aspects of the condition of human social contact. However, these inevitabilities could become increasingly decoupled from invocations of racial, ethnic, national or religious difference.

This model is radically different from the position of colorblind liberalism or the academy’s postraciality, which, in different ways, assume that racial discrimination will fade away—or is already doing so—with the elimination of racial representations. The politics of difference are rooted, not only in rhetoric, but in the sensory and material aspects of social interaction. As John Jackson Jr. points out, “taking away race’s vocal chords, the acoustic concreteness of its explicit bark, does not mean that one has defused its bite” (2005: 394). This caveat about race extends to other essentialized identity categories. In contrast to the passive path of silence about difference, my Catalan interlocutors—including professional planners of convivència, Muslims and non-Muslim mass media voices, and the vox populi of the sensory public—privilege an active engagement with conflicts arising around difference. Although they deploy numerous rhetorical tropes, these constituents of Catalan convivència are concerned more with the public policy dimensions of social equality, than with rhetoric as an end in itself.

I have introduced sensory politics as a conceptual apparatus capable of tracing paths between the senses, affect, ritual, ethics, place, difference, migration, media, and governance. Articulating a patterned relationship between embodied practices, ethical orientations, and public policy, the Catalan notion of convivència itself concretizes sensory politics. My claim that the ritual sphere can be a locus of social transformation unsettles the work of many anthropologists who have depicted ritual as a reservoir of
conservative forms of social practice. I believe that increased attention to the sensory and affective aspects of ritual may transform the discipline’s assumptions about ritual practice and its relation to the politics of difference.

Social relations in 21st century Europe will continue to be forcefully impacted by the double gesture of globalization to extend forms of exploitation and to enable new social experiments. The fact of continuous migration means that living with difference will likely become more fraught with complicated challenges. One consequence of this will be to push paradigms for managing difference—assimilationist, multiculturalist, separatist, or interculturalist—to their practicable limits. Catalonia’s vernacular interculturalist model of convivencia will also be put to the test, and over time, can be compared to practices elsewhere. I have stated before that convivencia is not a transportable model, but that is not to say that its principles could not adapted to fit other polities and sensory publics. While I invite the reader to imagine the merengada and A Strange Place set loose in other topoi, my own speculative inquiry must, for now, remain another unfinished narrative.
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