

# Time Catalysts: Research by Design in the Loose Ends of Barcelona

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I, Pau Bajet, hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources I confirm this is clearly stated.

## Abstract

The passage of time, understood as the duration of becoming in space, offers playful yet serious liberating potentials concerning individual and collective, human and nonhuman rights of appropriation and transformation. This research enquires about the use of time as a design tool in pursuit of such potentials. Drawing upon theoretical frameworks and architectural precedents, it establishes a critical understanding of the capacity of a deep, cross-scalar territory of ever-changing spatial configurations, with openly interpretable supports gathered from specific physical and cultural pre-existence, loosely suggesting delightful habitation over

time. The 'time catalysts' at the heart of this thesis seek to embody these promises. They set out to deal with urban fringes damaged by the rise and fall of industrialisation, locating the investigation in the southern 'loose ends' of Barcelona. In opposition to the widespread tendency towards tabula rasa urbanism, time catalysts are assembled as situated alterations to found contexts. Their slow-changing rhythms are rooted in a fractal field, amidst consecutive infrastructural space (resistance) and its capacity to stimulate successive appropriation (change). They strive for a multiplicity of spatial, political and ecological purposes.

In its approach to architectural and urban investigation, this doctorate mobilises its core argument 'by design'. This methodological pathway bridges practice and theory by using design speculation as a medium of critical and prospective qualitative enquiry. Transdisciplinary relevance is prioritised in this outlook above scientific verification; instead, the uncertain interrelations of explicit and tacit awareness are of primary interest. The design outputs of this investigation distinguish between 'artefacts' (situated spatial prototypes) and 'artifices' (ambiguous design strategies)—the former containing irreducible yet ineffable knowledge embeddedness, the latter attempting to communicate designerly ways of knowing that demand, for their meaningful mobilisation, practical wisdom and intention.

Behind the hill of Montjuïc, in a former agricultural terrain of decayed industrial developments near the sea, specific places are approached at different scales—city edge, urban fabric, and room ensemble—providing a context for design speculation in a two-step research process. Firstly, design appears as an interpretive method for defining subjective contexts, identified as found-time catalysts, by means of unveiling fragmentary situations with the potential of stimulating upcoming change. In a second step, design provides a vehicle for speculation. The design research process launches and tests the potential of time in a constellation of projects that both enhance previously found situations and creatively release new-time catalysts in fresh forms. From furniture to landscape, these projects provide gradients of infrastructural support in-between typical categories, scales and disciplinary convention. Their purported insight is made evident in their capacity for overcoming simplistic dichotomies through manifold tectonic, social, climatic, metabolic and temporally nuanced interrelations. These interrelations engage with a deep awareness of the past (pre-existence), as well as producing new spatial resistance to catalyse futurity (in open-ended, slow durations of becoming), awakening a profound civic and ecological sense of coexistence in solidarity, that curates their aesthetics and meaning. Finally, a loose cohort of interconnected visual-written design strategies—the artifices—intends to articulate situated typicality, rather than objectified type, in the search for deeper structures that may trigger ambiguous, perhaps unexpected forms of liberating spatial praxis.

## Acknowledgements

Developing and finishing a thesis is a tremendous endeavour; writing it in a non-native language (for me, English) is especially challenging. But it is with this tiny portion that I feel speechless: I simply cannot find the words to express my gratitude for those who have had the patience and care to walk with me along this slow, tortuous journey—so, I will speak from the gut. In truth, I can only begin by thanking Maria. It is strange referring to her as a sort of distant third-person—Maria Giramé—because she is always part of our shared undertaking: together we have built a diffuse territory of kinship, home, profession, struggle, love, fun and discovery.

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Fig. 35  
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# CROQUIS B

Reseña gráfica del Puerto de Barcelona desde su origen hasta la actualidad

Escala de 1:5000



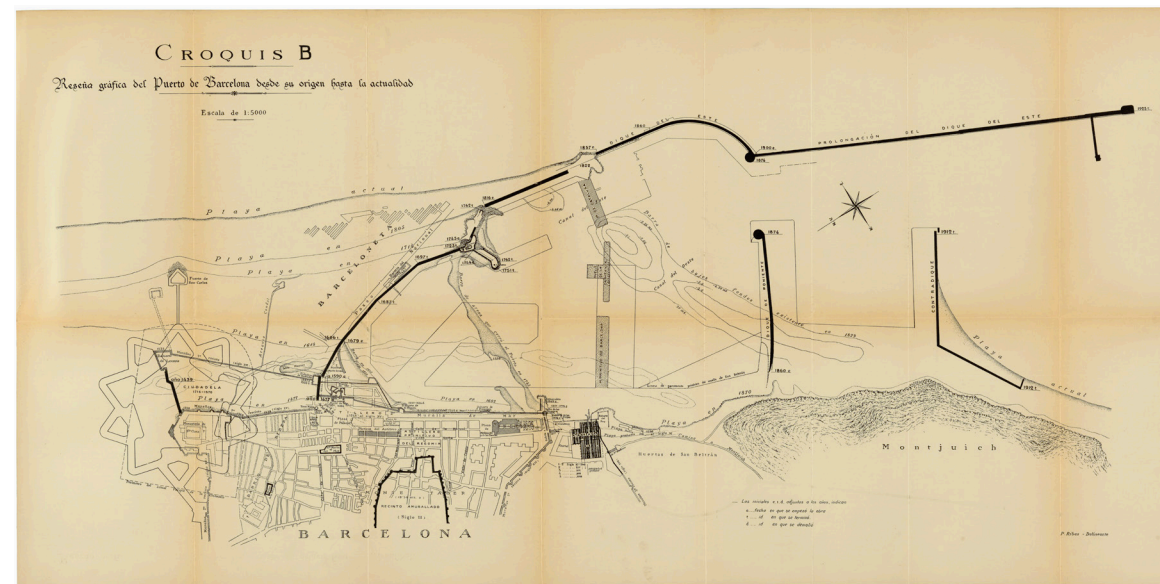
1	Siglo XI-1394	antigüedad probable
2	XIV	
3	XVI	
4	XVII	
5	XVIII	

Las iniciales e.t.d. adjuntas a los c...  
 e... fecha en que se empezó la ob...  
 t... id. en que se terminó.  
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BARCELONA



Fig. 1  
P. Ribas, 'Croquis B: Reseña histórica del Puerto de Barcelona desde su origen hasta la actualidad' (1935).



## Introduction

### A Road Map through the Promise of Time

Published in a 1935 report of the Port of Barcelona building committee, this 'sketch' plan (*croquis*) depicts a chronology of the port's developments over centuries.<sup>1</sup> On the left (north) side, overlaid dotted lines describe a kilometre of progressive shoreline reclamation between the 15th and 18th centuries where the popular quarter of Barceloneta would later be built. This immense land extension appeared accidentally as a consequence of the arduous task of constructing a dike that would preserve a navigable body of sea water—the city's new port—safeguarding it from sand barriers persistently formed and reformed by the prevailing north to south sea current. This was a slow endeavour, gradually advancing and failing over more than two hundred years. Unwittingly or not, the artifice of the dike in its design to conceal the port combined with meteorological dynamics and patterns of sedimentation, including increased alluvial deposits from the Besòs river—both naturally and anthropically produced—to support the formation of a new plateau onto which the city would later expand. In other words, the dike functioned as a catalyst in the slow generation of a new human and nonhuman landscape. It may be seen, retrospectively, as an instrument that made use of a long passage of time to stimulate urban transformation. This thesis sets out to ask: might such instigatory, catalytic, evolutionary triggers for manifold civic development be deliberately designed?

My decision to start the thesis with this drawing is apposite for several reasons: because the sketch plan illustrates the potential of progressively urban transformation over time; because as a representation, the drawing succeeds in depicting an accumulation of

<sup>1</sup> Junta de Obras del Puerto de Barcelona, *Memoria* (Barcelona: Industrias C. Cornet, 1935), p.50. Drawing by P. Ribas.



26 intervals and changing situations; because I enjoy its combination  
27 of sharp precision and loose ambiguity; because the drawing is not  
oriented according to a universal rule or grid (cardinal directions)  
but organised from the inside-out, facing the sea from the city—as  
we inhabitants do—while coinciding with the Roman geometrical  
layout of the *urbs* traced more than two thousand years ago; and, per-  
haps most importantly, because by introducing the promise of time  
through this drawing, I reveal a key factor in the attitude or stance  
adopted in my thesis: a form of knowing through phenomena that I  
can directly experience in my everyday life—a life lived as an archi-  
tect in Barcelona, near Montjuïc, culturally and physically embedded  
in the site of this research project.

The thesis introduction is organized in order to address a threefold  
purpose: thematically it aims to formulate a deeper understanding  
about treating time as a design tool in spatial practice; methodo-  
logically it investigates an approach to architectural research that  
deploys design speculation as a vehicle of enquiry; and in ethical and  
practical terms, it cares for the elaboration of specific outputs—in  
the form of situated urban prototypes and design strategies—that  
serve to explore the thesis topic and procedures, while at the same  
time emerging as outcomes on their own terms. That is to say, they  
come into being as distinctive civic artefacts, embodying and yet  
transcending the origin of their monographic investigation. Finally,  
the introduction concludes with an explanatory note that explains  
the layout of the thesis and guidance regarding its navigation by the  
reader.

#### Time as a Design Tool

How may we understand and appropriately exploit the poten-  
tial of time in spatial practice? This study investigates the use of  
time as a design tool through a cohort of interwoven projects that  
explore a threshold in scale and in practice between architecture  
and urbanism, aiming to carefully transform pre-existing, fragile  
urban environments. Building upon an awareness of the immense  
tradition of the study of time in the humanities, this topic will later  
be approached through specific philosophical frameworks. From  
that angle, the passage of time will perform liberating and affective  
potentials of individual and collective rights of appropriation and  
transformation.<sup>2</sup> Particular ecological and political awareness will

2 Henri Lefebvre, 'Perspective or Prospective' in *Writings on Cities*, trans. and ed.  
by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 171-174.

trigger playful yet serious practices of change, caring for manifold  
human and nonhuman contexts.<sup>3</sup> This approach to change will be  
phenomenologically situated, therefore reclaiming the resistance of  
mundane rhythms rooted in ordinary places and, in this way, taking  
delight in slow durations of progressive transformation.<sup>4</sup> Besides  
philosophical context, an array of selected architectural precedents  
and critique will establish the grounds for discussion in the lead-in  
chapters of the thesis. This literature review will start by portraying  
the freedom of spatial appropriation on an everyday basis, not being  
enhanced by harmless neutrality, but by physical and cultural speci-  
ficity, yet remaining indeterminate and openly interpretable.<sup>5</sup> Then,  
amid post-war paradigms of the open form and participation, a wide  
reading of Habraken's approaches will unfold—beyond objectual  
buildings—a deep territory of live configurations, with generative  
supports and interpersonal capacity for habitation and transfor-  
mation over time.<sup>6</sup> Following the design concept of 'landscape  
infrastructure' developed by Florian Beigel and Philip Christou since  
the 1990s, these live configurations (or infrastructural levels) will be  
gathered from situated traces of specific material and cultural con-  
texts, engaging with found pre-existence, to loosely suggest future  
habitational delight, at any scale from landscape to furniture.<sup>7</sup> In  
dialogue with all this literature, the thesis identifies gaps for research  
speculation in-between scales and typical situations, concerned with  
a wide notion of habitation beyond programmatic and typological  
reductions, while bringing current poetic, tectonic, political and eco-  
logical concerns.

Thematically, the thesis posits the following research question: what  
sort of architectural procedures may foster the design of cross-sca-  
lar spatial catalysts for delightful appropriation and transformation  
over time? In line with a sensibility expressed above, the thesis is  
concerned with—and intends to enjoy—mundane situations and  
wicked problems of our ordinary civic environments. In particular,  
it cares for damaged urban fringes that have suffered the rise and

Originally published in 1968 under the French title 'Perspective ou Prospective?'  
in Lefebvre's book, *Le droit à la ville*.

3 Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological*, (London: Pelican Books, 2018), p. 186.

4 Matthew Barac, 'Place Resists: Grounding African Urban Order in an Age of  
Global Change', *Social Dynamics*, 37: 1 (2011), 24-42.

5 Florian Beigel and Philip Christou, 'Brikettfabrik Witznitz: specific indeterminacy  
– designing for uncertainty', *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 2 (1996), 18-38.

6 See both: N. John Habraken, *Supports: an Alternative to Mass Housing*, ed. by  
Jonathan Teicher (UK: Urban International Press, 1972; repr. 2011). Originally  
published in 1961 under the Dutch title, *Dragers en de Mensen, het einde van de  
massawoningbouw*; and N. John Habraken, *The Structure of the Ordinary. Form  
and Control in the Built Environment* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998).

7 Florian Beigel and Philip Christou, 'Time architecture: Stadtlandschaft  
Lichterfelde Slid, Berlin', *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, 3 (1999), p. 204.

28 fall of urbanisation and industrialisation in the borderlands of civic  
29 cores, the often unravelling or neglected ‘loose ends’ of the city. In  
this regard, an initial working hypothesis suggested that the notion  
of ‘time catalysts’ may embody the potential of spatial stimulants of  
joyful change. But these time catalysts could not depart from decon-  
textualized *tabula rasa* or isolated laboratory experiments. Instead,  
they should only be gathered as architectural or urban enhancements  
and additions to a found topography, already rich in physical and  
cultural terms, taking advantage of their unique situated contexts.  
Moreover, according to this hypothesis, the architectural configu-  
ration of time catalysts departs from an understanding of a fractal  
field of ambivalences between permanence and change—amidst  
consecutive infrastructural spaces and their capacity to stimulate  
successive appropriation at multiple scales—incorporating not only  
spatial qualities from autonomous architectural parameters (even  
if these too), but embracing diverging purposes and meaning from  
transdisciplinary concerns. While learning from literature and pre-  
cedents, as well as by delving into the investigation of specific designs  
in the ‘loose ends’ of Barcelona, I was surprised to realise how  
naturally these localised concerns easily expand into multifaceted  
matters, thus enriching their architectural ground and stimulating  
unexpected tectonic turns at multiple scales. Before introducing the  
design products of this investigation, outlining their purposes, scope  
and character, the next section aims to address ‘how’ this research is  
undertaken.

#### Design as a Research Vehicle

This thesis navigates the methodological terrain of architectural  
research which, one might argue, is at times swampy or at least  
murky, freighted in some quarters by controversy and sometimes  
by dispute. The design-led approach adopted is relatively familiar  
in Anglo-Saxon and Northern European universities—even if still a  
young and comparatively uncertain method at a doctorate level, as I  
will later discuss—and yet a methodological pathway to architectural  
research that remains largely unseen in institutions with a deep tra-  
dition of doctoral study (including the Polytechnic Universities of  
my homeland). This approach to architectural investigation asks: why  
shouldn’t architects rely on their own praxis as a core instrument  
of doctoral investigation? Why can’t the process of design specula-  
tion be embedded as pivotal to critical and prospective qualitative  
enquiry? These questions point to the potential of a speculative  
area of architectural research, an angle concerned with insecure,

or better said ‘designerly’ ways of knowing.<sup>8</sup> This angle prioritises  
relevance above verification, enquiring uncertain interrelations of  
explicit and tacit, even ineffable, forms of connoisseurship.<sup>9</sup> This  
methodological journey attempts to bridge architectural practice and  
theory, bringing together ‘the intuition of making’ with the critical  
distance of ‘proper thinking’—a traumatic disjunction related to the  
split between artistic and scientific spheres in the 18th century.<sup>10</sup>  
For a long time, architectural research has departed from analysis,  
interpretation and theorisation of physical or cultural phenomena  
fixated in the past, establishing a safe critical distance with its objects  
of study. Undoubtedly, this remains a sound and fruitful pathway  
to architectural knowledge that I do not intend to undermine.  
Nonetheless, my suggestion is that a procedure that uses design spec-  
ulation as a research vehicle, may offer an additional stratum, further  
enriching and expanding a wider field of architectural research.

Later in the thesis we will outline a philosophical and scholarly con-  
text for this epistemological pathway, establishing conditions and  
purposes for the role of design in the context of doctoral investiga-  
tion. In addition, given my initial unacquaintance with this type of  
research—and looking for methodological stability—over the course  
of the thesis, I have mapped out an array of PhD programmes around  
the globe that have forged the first steps of this approach in the past  
30 years. This contextualisation has been published elsewhere in a  
condensed format, yet not included in this thesis to avoid an excess  
of methodological materials.<sup>11</sup> Within this research territory, the  
thesis follows a phenomenological sensibility, one that embraces the  
act of designing as a medium for research, enjoying its depth, uncer-  
tainty and ambiguities. The hermeneutical principle of knowledge  
production and reflection from within the context of experience  
and creativity is here brought into being in an architectural premise.  
This sensitivity is deeply influenced by ARU (Architectural Research  
Unit) at London Metropolitan University, a design laboratory that  
for decades has used ‘design as research’ as a method of enquiry.<sup>12</sup>  
Their investigations—even if rarely at a doctoral level—have focused  
on spatial and design concepts, explored as monographic enquiries,  
tested and unfolded through live projects at varying scales, enjoying

8 Nigel Cross, ‘Designerly ways of knowing’, *Design Studies*, 3.4 (1982), pp. 221–227.

9 Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 92.

10 Alberto Perez-Gomez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983), p. 324.

11 Pau Bajet, ‘PhD: Grasping Knowledge Through Design Speculation’ in *IX Workshop on educational innovation in architecture: JIDA’21*, ed. by Daniel García-Escudero and Berta Bardí Milà (Barcelona: GILDA, 2021), pp. 424–437.

12 Florian Beigel and Philip Christou, *Translations* (Basel: Christoph Merian Verlag and Swiss Architecture Museum, 2014), p.7.

30 vivid situations, while sustaining a deep dialogue with literature,  
31 architectural precedents and everyday observation. Doctoral study  
in the context of ARU has produced one graduate to date who devel-  
oped her research 'by design' in an expansion of the spatial concept  
of 'landscape infrastructure' through a project in the *bastide* village  
of Monpazier, France.<sup>13</sup> In terms of methodology, my contribution  
intends to articulate this sensibility in a more urban setting, in  
dialogue with a scholarly context of research through design, by pro-  
posing a particular methodological structure and output.

Methodologically, this PhD asks: what is the role of designing and its  
production—projects or artefacts—as a pivotal vehicle of a doctoral  
investigation in architecture? What is the interaction between design  
speculation and standard academic procedures? What should be the  
structure of this kind of doctorate and its balance between literature,  
background material, and core 'by design' content: between words  
and drawings? What sort of forms may embody the apprehensions  
gathered from the process of designing, in order to make them com-  
municable for others? This research journey has not been easy. From  
the beginning it has encountered a thorny contradiction between the  
necessity to formulate monographic enquiries—as in any doctoral  
research—and the expansive, manifold and transdisciplinary nature  
of designing specific, situated architectural and urban projects. Later,  
I will argue that from this inherent difficulty and contradiction,  
distinct (perhaps rather relevant than verifiable) and unexpected  
findings have arisen. During the early steps of the doctorate, in a  
conversation sustained with Florian Beigel, Philip Christou and Peter  
Carl, a methodological hypothesis took form: it departed from a dif-  
ferentiation between 'artefact' and 'artifice', the former understood  
as the output of personal design speculations (carrying ineffable  
knowledge in itself) and the latter as a necessary subsequent intent  
to propose explicit and communicable—even if ambiguous—formu-  
lations that could embody design strategies or concepts learned from  
the projects. These artifices should not be confused with abstract  
principles unrooted from the material world to be automatically  
generalised elsewhere. On the contrary, approached by means of  
designerly ways of knowing, the artifices implied the necessity of  
practical skill and intention from designers to be subjectively inter-  
preted in anticipation of the future.<sup>14</sup> Artifices cannot be read by  
themselves, but only interpreted by designers in relation to their per-  
sonal dexterity and experiences, as well as in relation to the specific

13 Lucy Pritchard, 'Bastide City Territory: Landscape Infrastructure Design, Monpazier, France' (unpublished doctoral thesis, London Metropolitan University, 2019).

14 Joseph Rykwert, *The Necessity of Artifice* (London: Academy Editions, 1982), p.59.

projects that suggested them in the first place. My hypothesis was  
that these artifices would result in a family of nuanced visual-written  
design strategies embodying insights compiled during the design  
journey.

#### Situated Urban Prototypes and Strategies

The core and final chapters of the thesis are devoted to situated  
design speculations developed on my own as the core vehicle for this  
study. The site for the research project is in the Barcelona southern  
loose ends, behind the hill of Montjuïc near the sea, in a former  
agricultural terrain now absorbed by decayed early industrial devel-  
opments and wasteland, all seemingly besieged by vast metropolitan  
infrastructures including the main port of the city. This place is  
approached at different scales, starting with a city edge landscape  
project, continuing with an urban grain transformation, and con-  
cluding with smaller-scale city interior proposals, always with the  
intention of gathering cross-scalar design strategies. It is important  
to make clear that both my subjective recollection of contextual data  
(containing biological, geological, climatic, historical and economic,  
among many other concerns), as well as the urban and architectural  
proposals (entailing environmental, thermodynamic, sociological,  
services and structural specialities) have been approached at an indi-  
vidual scale, based on information obtained between 2015 and 2020  
from public sources, with the purpose of establishing a vivid context  
for a modest yet meaningful doctoral investigation. Therefore, its  
specific urban analyses and proposals cannot be taken as comprehen-  
sive developments, that in professional practice would have required  
broader interdisciplinary team efforts. By exploring the concept of  
time catalysts through design speculation and, therefore, enjoying  
vivid situations anchored to this specific place, the thesis produces  
a cohort of projects that carry on their monographic investigation—  
maintaining a dialogue with historical and modernist precedents as  
captured in the literature cited—and, still, they go beyond in offering  
fresh urban and architectural propositions, with singular qualities  
of their own, responding to grounded social, ecologic and poetic  
matters.

This situated exploration addresses design-speculative research in a  
two-step process. Firstly, design appears as a method of interpreta-  
tion for seeing and constructing subjective places, through selecting  
and sketching fragmentary situations of potential. Investigated at  
different and sometimes overlapping scales, this operation unveils  
unexpected qualities from marine and agricultural memories,

32 industrialist infrastructures, accidental streetscapes and yards, a hap-  
33 hazard plot division, and a prosaic city grain of sheds and rowhouses. These interpretations make apparent fragile physical and cultural topographies that already suggest directions of future change. Appearing as instigators of upcoming appropriation and transformation, these spatial situations are identified as 'found-time catalysts.' In a second step, design appears as a vehicle for wider speculation, launching and testing the potential of time into novel spatial form. In the research, this process takes place through a constellation of projects at varying spatial, social and temporal scales, by enhancing the previously found situations and, at the same time, by creatively releasing 'new-time catalysts' in distinct, fresh forms.

- At a larger scale, a human-made geological shoreline is proposed as a socio-ecological threshold that connects Montjuïc and the delta, while catalysing horticulture, leisure, workspace, living and collective memory, as well as improving the water cycle, biodiversity and microclimatology.
- At an intermediate scale, an accidental street structure is proposed, by gradually altering ordinary found urban situations. This proposal radically opposes a *tabula rasa* approach, in this way enjoying and carefully distorting historical differences, while avoiding local displacement.
- At a smaller scale, a cohort of projects explores the potential of shared urban supports to house a changing, non-programmed diversity of belongings and biographies, including: a city base for row habitation, a plug-in three-dimensional framework and active and passive habitational thicknesses.

These projects have been explored as live configurations in-between typical built categories, seeking at varying relationships between permanence and performance, with the aim of transcending simplified support and infill dichotomies; hence opening up ambiguous infrastructural gradients that follow temporal, cultural and spatial scalar relativity.

Clearly, this study is concerned with a two-fold output that emerges from the process of design speculation: on the one hand the projects or urban artefacts in themselves and, on the other, a series of design strategies apprehended from the design work and articulated as a family of artifices. From territorial proposals to interior explorations, each project has served to both test previously formulated conjectures, as well as launch unexpected hypotheses, always enquiring the aforementioned thematic and methodological research purposes.

Conceived with the purpose of further investigation and the proliferation of future designs, the projects are here referred to generically as 'prototypes.' By qualifying the urban artefacts as prototypical, the thesis recognises their role and contribution in knowledge embodiment, in accordance with widely endorsed research standards.<sup>15</sup> Towards the end of the thesis, a critical exegesis of the design chapters is followed by a proposition of an open-ended family of artifices. This family is formed of around twenty composed categories, that formulate nuanced design strategies, as an attempt to contribute to a rather explicit knowledge production. This group of strategies are expressed through the combined format of a speculative written language, together with small drawings that intend to express their purposes, all related to the will of finding, enhancing and making time catalyst designs.

#### Navigating through this Thesis

This dissertation is structured in six chapters of approximately 8,000 words each, intending to balance and articulate lead-in and core materials, including a comprehensive portfolio of design work of equivalent pre-eminence to the text, while building upon a research argument that aims to gently guide its reading. Each chapter is usually split in three sections, sometimes two, organising the narrative according to key thematic territories. Similarly, the sections are generally split in three headings, each of which contains a reduced number of paragraphs to tackle specific sub-topics. The introductory and conclusive paragraphs of each chapter provide a brief synthesis of their contents, arising key research questions, problems, hypotheses and findings, in relation to the overall thesis discussion; in this way allowing to quickly skim through the entire book. The order of the thesis, however, does not reflect a true chronological account of the research journey, which has indeed followed non-linear, usually erratic, intervals of design speculation in the midst of literature and background studying and refinement. As an attempt to reflect this serendipitous course of events, each chapter has been given the format of a modest booklet—within a collection box—allowing for individual readings and the potential of diverging narratives.

The initial three chapters of the thesis—mainly textual—are largely devoted to literature, background and contextual revision. Chapter

<sup>15</sup> OECD, *Frascati Manual 2015: Guidelines for Collecting and Reporting Data on Research and Experimental Development, The Measurement of Scientific, Technological and Innovation Activities* (OECD Publishing: Paris, 2015), p. 60-61.



1 starts by critically addressing philosophical frameworks embed-  
ded in the realisation of time within the practice of making spatial  
propositions. Emerging from such notions, the chapter continues  
by rendering an ethical discussion, involving aesthetic, political and  
ecological shades. It concludes with a theoretical revision of specific  
material and immaterial conditions that mediate the experience of  
spatial practice. Chapter 2 provides a cross-scalar revision of archi-  
tectural precedents and literature, mainly focusing on a debate  
initiated in the 1950s Western countries. This debate begins with an  
examination of interior spatial arrangements that stimulate everyday  
alterations, followed by a discussion of greater urban supports that  
trigger expansive building transformation. It concludes by reviewing  
the role of landscape urbanization in the production of our changing  
urbanities. Chapter 3 is introduced as a break that provides methodo-  
logical and setting materials. In one section it examines the scholarly  
context for the epistemological pathway of research through design  
and, in the other, it subjectively provides historical and geological  
site information to characterise the southern fringes of Barcelona as  
a design setting.

The later three chapters of the thesis contain the bulk of core and  
interpretative materials, with equivalent written portions to the  
former ones, but including the totality of creative work—mainly  
drawn—and, therefore, in sum implying at least a doubled weight to  
the overall discussion. Chapter 4, devoted to interpreting pre-exist-  
ing urban situations, which are characterised as found-time catalysts,  
establishes a triad scalar research approach: city edge, urban fabric  
and room ensemble. Each of these categories is explored in a dif-  
ferent section with a variety of interrelated design exercises. By  
answering to the same threefold scalar structure, Chapter 5 aims to  
unfold the creative task of enhancing and producing a constellation  
of prototypes, investigating landscape, urban and architectural cata-  
lysts of change. Chapter 6 contains two sections: the first, provides a  
self-critical, theoretical interpretation of pivotal aspects of the design  
chapters, in dialogue with literature and precedents. Finally, the last  
section takes again a rather speculative mode, to propose an extended  
family of design strategies, each formulated as a complex, ambiguous  
artifice, to be openly interpreted in the future.

This introduction may be seen as a compass to provide orientation  
in navigating the different chapters, and a view of the doctorate as  
an entirety. I have aimed to situate the territory for investigation  
within a wider research context and to carve out niches for new areas  
of enquiry within my research, explaining its specific aims and con-  
tribution to knowledge, its methods of investigation and limitations.  
Research questions and problems, including central and secondary

hypotheses, have been illustrated for both thematic and methodolog-  
ical enquiries. Findings from the interpretation to be carried out in  
the later part for dissertation have been briefly introduced, as well as  
the main outputs arising from the investigation, in the form of civic  
prototypes as well as design artifices. As a summary, the introduction  
naturally cannot reduce every substance researched and discov-  
ered along the journey. From this point forward, each chapter, each  
detailed discussion, each stroke on paper will demand its own voice.



Introductory Materials