Encompassing La Sagrada:
An Indivisible Approach to Spaces of Sentiments

I sat on a bench at Parc Güell, scrapping my nail over the mortar snaking between thousands of ceramic shards. I moved my fingers like little legs walking across white cement tightropes—on one side a solid green tile broken into a triangle of sorts, on the other a wedge of patterned yellow and blue. Neither seemed particularly connected to one another except that they were both on the same section of bench, cemented together, neither extractable from the next (fig. 1). It was my last afternoon in Barcelona after a six-week ethnographic stay. My notebook balanced on my lap and the entries seemed as distinct as the tiles. One page spoke of dream inducing city sights and another of how the park by my apartment always smelled like piss. But the words were all there together, bound by the same binding and by an arrival and departure date. When I stood up to leave I turned and stared at the long bench. Its back wrapped around Parc Güell’s patio in a continuous stretch. It rises and dips and the mosaic follow a similarly shifting motif, encircling the area in an array of transitioning colors and
designs. It is a panoramic concretized kaleidoscope. I look out at Barcelona spread beneath the park. I see the tops of modern skyscrapers and the peaks of nineteenth century churches comprising the city I will fly away from in the morning. I walked to exit the park thinking of how all those tiny tiles, so fragmented, formed a single, lovely, feature.

Atomism is founded on the conception of a world broken into a profusion of independent entities, each relative and distinct from the other. The bench, in one way, resonates with this philosophical school of thought. The mosaic shards are in one sense singular and contrasted to one another. But then again, the bench also appears as a greater whole. This interpretation flips Atomism on its head and instead resonates with an entirely different metaphysical perspective. Twentieth century philosopher Henri Bergson proposes thoughts diametrically opposed to segmentation:

The point of departure for ontology is not a series of discrete units of experience, temporally spread out and threaded together in the chain of consciousness. The starting point is, rather, a fundamental continuity, the experience of a temporal flow.¹

Coined “durée”, this Bergsonian concept understands the world as “a heterogeneous multiplicity” which is constantly changing but nonetheless continuous. Like Parc Güell’s benches, the transitioning schemes of shards which formulate existence are stuck together in a rising and dipping flow.

Parc Güell is the work of canonized Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí. Born outside of Barcelona on June 25, 1852, Gaudí gravitated to design at an early age. He quickly began to develop his own unique approach to architecture, animating materials such as brick, ceramic, and

stone and drawing upon natural geometries and biological muses. Gaudí engaged with and contributed greatly to the Art Nouveau and Modernist movements but was never overshadowed by them. Instead, he solidified himself as a singular force who’s works can be recognized throughout Barcelona. While his architecture is visually psychedelic, its structural underpinnings are equally whimsical. Gaudí crafted new interpretations on nearly every architectural element, from arches and vaults, to roofs and columns. He constructed several famous works within Barcelona’s city limits including Casa Vicens, La Pedrera, and Casa Batlló. Gaudí’s magnum opus, however, is undoubtedly the La Sagrada Familia Cathedral.

Construction on La Sagrada began in 1882 and has continued continuously since, with a scheduled completion date a decade away. Consecrated in 2010, the basilica is a testament to Gaudí’s religious fervor and his hope of creating a lasting monument to the glory of God. This ambitious project has been entirely funded by donations and ticket sales. The structure’s extraordinarily long progress has garnered international interest and has helped make it the number one visited tourist attraction in Spain. La Sagrada’s conglomeration of sculptural styles and decorative techniques is dizzying. Mosaic pediments depicting fruit top several spires and ceramic tiles cover a prominently featured Cyprus tree. Stretching stained-glass windows are installed in an ombré spanning the color spectrum. One façade drips with densely packed traditional sculptures while another is sparsely ornamented with angular ensembles. The eye must navigate a jungle gym of architectural features, clinging and swinging from one to the next.

The different spaces within the site also present a strange mixture of sentiments. On one hand the religious aspects of experience are conjured through vast vaults and organ music which give a sense of wonder and introspection. The crypt beneath the cathedral holds services and perpetuates a traditional and distinctly Catholic and reverent mood. Elsewhere there are
jubilant tourists snapping pictures and reading maps. While some visitors rest in alcoves others climb the twisting towers for a better view of the city. Gaudí’s feat hosts an abundance of functions; it is religious, artistic, museological, touristic, and monumental. A bright gift shop is wedged next to the chilling Passion Façade and a replica of a schoolhouse sits next to ongoing and new construction. These variations, like mosaic, are strange at a micro level. As I move from staring at statues depicting the crucifixion to a line where I can buy a souvenir I feel as if I myself am now walking a tightrope which has cemented together two distinct things.

But like the benches at Parc Güell, La Sagrada’s many spaces of experience are indeed inextricably linked to one another. Casting Bergson’s philosophy onto the site’s dissimilarities provides a way in which to reconcile but not extract them from one another. Bergson was not far removed from Gaudí and indeed existed within coinciding intellectual spheres of Naturalism and Modernism. Bergson’s first scholarly article was published in 1886, two years after ground was broken on the La Sagrada project. But beyond being a contemporary cultural figure to Gaudí, Bergson has often been understood in the context of artists and artistic movements. Manfred Milz’s “Bergsonian Vitalism and the Landscape Paintings of Monet and Cézanne: Indivisible Consciousness and Endlessly Divisible Matter” draws parallels between Monet’s and Cézanne’s representations of nature and Bergson’s understandings of perception. The philosopher has also been linked to Picasso. Twentieth century French film critic André Bazin wrote a review of Henri-Georges Clouzot’s “The Picasso Mystery” calling it a “Bergsonian Film”. An introduction by Bert Cardullo to Bazin’s review notes that, “Each of Picasso’s strokes is a creation that leads

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to further creation, not as a cause leads to an effect, but as one living things engenders another”. This progression, the critic argues, mirrors Bergson’s concepts of durée.⁴

But this move toward an indivisible vantage does not need to rely solely on Bergsonian theories. Instead, La Sagrada itself hints to its visitors that perhaps it’s essence is more uniform than meets the eye. Display techniques suggest that La Sagrada is a case in which indivisibility should be favored even in the absence of cohesion. This potential suggestion will be elucidated by exploring the ways in which the cathedral’s organic origins are presented as residing within the structural product—superimposed and fused together. The folding of inspiration and result reimagines the contradictions between biology and buildings. La Sagrada also evokes a sense of indivisibility through the presentation of its construction as a fluid, singular, and potentially animated movement. Instead of being comprised of various, segmented, building phases, La Sagrada is depicted as a flowing and transforming entity.

Depiction, however, proves an unavoidable obstacle in presenting an indivisible cathedral. How does one convey the true constitution of a complete, yet fractured, site? Bergson asserts that there are two ways of knowing something: relatively and absolutely.⁵ To know something relatively is to rely on symbols and translations. This reliance means that there are many different viewpoints from which one may come to understand a thing. Knowing a thing absolutely, on the other hand, is to enter into the thing itself. Absolute understanding is not found through viewpoints or elucidated via symbols, “but the absolute is perfect in that it is perfectly what it is.”⁶ Bergson argues that one experiences the absolute through “intuition” or “sympathy”,

⁶ Ibid., 189.
“by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it.”\textsuperscript{7} The relative, on the contrary, depends on the reduction of a thing into known elements that can then be analyzed. Analysis, the philosopher concludes, “consists in expressing a thing in terms of what it is not.”\textsuperscript{8}

Bergson provides an example to crisply define these two schools of understanding from one another. In a novel, an author may give a protagonist as many characteristics as she wishes. She may place her character in an inexhaustible array of situations. Readers can see how a protagonist reacts to a death, and a missing sock, and a divorce, and an empty tube of toothpaste. However:

The novelist may multiply traits of the character, make his hero speak and act as much as he likes: all this has not the same value as the simple and indivisible feeling I should experience if I were to coincide for a single moment with the personage himself.\textsuperscript{9}

To know something outside of one’s self is to know a thing relatively. This type of knowledge, Bergson maintains, is inherently incapable of unpacking a thing’s true essence. And so while this thesis sets out to describe and convey La Sagrada’s indivisible nature, the objective is hindered from the very start.

Writing is a decidedly relative device. This sentence is constructed using symbols and translations. A word is not what it depicts, but rather a series of lines and curves which nod to some object or feeling out there in the world. Writing, I believe, is immensely powerful—it can make a reader reach out into his imagination and build whole universes. But engaging in the

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 189.
\textsuperscript{8} Henry Bergson, \textit{The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics} (New York: 1\textsuperscript{st} Carol Publishing Group, 1992) 189.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 190.
metaphysical implications of a cathedral with varied spaces of sentiments necessitates a concession to the limitations of what a paper can do.

To concede to the absolute being unattainable is not to concede that writing cannot endeavor to push beyond the success offered by traditional ethnographic writing. Instead, many anthropologists have been attempting to match writing styles with subject matter in order to most accurately and effectively convey lived experiences. Ethnographers have begun blurring the boundaries of academia with the unbounded curiosity of elementary science fair participants—unafraid to reach for, and play with, something beyond their full comprehension. But rather than result in failed papier-mâché volcanos, these experiments have yielded beautifully rendered realities that challenge the future of Anthropological discourse. If words inherently fall short of reaching absolutes, perhaps it is imperative that those faults be mitigated—even if that means delving into poetry, or pictures, or fiction.

*Paper Tangos*, written by Julie Taylor, an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Rice University, reads as an extended metaphor between the tango and Argentine identity. She writes:

> When violence explodes in an interaction with those we think we ‘know’, or within our perceptions of beauty, it appears to be a contradiction. The experience of this contradiction escapes efforts to explain or analyze.¹⁰

But rather than ignore the contradictions inherent in Argentine identity, Taylor employs dance as a means of bringing readers closer to understanding how violence can exist in the exquisite. Yet dance, like identity, can run from word’s capture. Once again Taylor scans the methodological shelves for a solution, resulting in a flipbook rendered through a single image on

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each page. With the pull of a thumb still photographs animate into tango’s passionate twists and dips.

A flip book is made of a profusion of small images—their combination resulting in something much grander than its individual parts. Kathleen Stewart, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Américo Paredes Center for Cultural Studies at the University of Texas, Austin, uses a conglomeration of small scenes to also realize a larger whole. *Ordinary Affects* begins with a concise declaration: “*Ordinary Affects* is an experiment, not a judgment.” Rather than explore themes of capitalism, neoliberalism, and globalization through academic jargon, Stewart offers concrete and closed vignettes of, “things that happen.” The vagueness of this endeavor is realized in anything but vague terms. Instead, titled, tangled, and shockingly vivid scenes are pressed next to one another in quick succession. Self-aware of the peculiarity of her writing style, Stewart reflects:

> The writing here has been a continuous, often maddening, effort to approach the intensities of the ordinary through a close ethnographic attention to pressure points and forms of attention and attachment.\(^\text{12}\)

Rather than rely on traditional anthropological methods of presentation, Stewart offers readers an experimental experience that may not feel like academia, but certainly feels like life.

Professor of World Religions at Harvard Divinity School and author of over thirty books, Michael Jackson also shows a fierce commitment to rendering the realities of experience. The first sentence of “Show and Tell,” the first chapter of Jackson’s *Harmattan: A Philosophical Fiction*, reads:


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 3.
For many years I was convinced that a clear line should be drawn between documentation and invention, particularly in ethnographic writing, where one’s first obligation is to do justice to the experience of those who welcome or tolerate one’s presence in their communities.\(^\text{13}\)

He goes on to attend to ethnography’s traditional and continuous reliance on figurative language and poetic description. This reliance, though, conventionally stops short of complete creative immersion for fear of its blatant disregard for fact. However, facts, Jackson muses, do not always form the truest depiction of life. As in other philosophical fictions such as Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse Five* and Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, Jackson writes with the knowledge that sometimes reality is best relayed through fiction.\(^\text{14}{15}\) And so, along with flipbooks and vignettes, fiction is another methodological approach to attempting the absolute.

Adrie Kusserow, Professor of Cultural Anthropology at St. Michael’s College, ventures even further from ethnographic norms in *Refuge*.\(^\text{16}\) Her work focuses on themes of globalization with a focus on Sudanese refugees in Sudan, Uganda, and the United States. She unpacks the stories of “The Lost Boys of Sudan” and addresses the sentiments of many seeking refugee, through poetry. This brand of ethnographic poetry brings readers from kitchens and gardens in Vermont to the mud beneath a leafless tree in South Sudan. Once again methodology seems to be creeping away from convention in hopes of realizing feelings rather than merely recounting facts.

These examples of radical Anthropology were first brought to my attention by my Ethnographic Writing professor, who later became my thesis and fellowship mentor, Anand Pandian. Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies of Anthropology at The Johns Hopkins University, Pandian’s ethnography, *Reel World: An Anthropology of Creation*, strives to show the cinematic in the ordinary and the ordinary in the cinematic. The resulting nineteen chapters with titles such as, “Dreams”, “Love”, and “Hope”, draw upon the powers of scene and creative writing to ground abstractions in their real life manifestations. Rather than merely write about desire in Tamil cinema, Pandian launches into a single, eight-page long sentence. The form of the chapter begins to parallel its subject matter. The consuming craving of desire is replicated through the craving for punctuation.

Over the course of my research I too have attempted unconventional writing styles in hopes of best conveying the lived experience of walking through La Sagrada. Pandian’s chapter on “Sound” challenges the sonic shortcomings of a page by printing verses in waving lines. The reader’s eyes are forced to follow the lyric’s rises and dips just as vocal chords are tasked to produce music. When trying to express the whirlwind of sounds within La Sagrada, I was left with a catalogue of mediocre methodologies. The following effort was my reach toward capturing the overlapping sounds within the site:

> Each day, as I wind through La Sagrada, different sounds pass me by. Some graze my ears like lips while some persist like a tooth ache; others startle and others sooth. As a singular receptor I ascend from the metro, rest in the park, stand in line, and tour the cathedral, museum,

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and gift shop. As I progress I pick up different noises. My trajectory gives sounds a sense of sequence and I segment one from the next. Sometimes I strain to hear and sometimes I strain not to. I move away from a man chewing gum with gnashing molars and slide toward a thoughtful conversation. My ears are recorders of the ephemeral sounds that fill and shape the site. But these fixed biological technologies, all tubes, drums, and canals, are deceptive devices. If I were to surpass my bodily limitations, I could encompass the total sound of La Sagrada, a continuous song with instruments as varied as an organ and a shuffling shoe. Instead of separate each thud, ha-ha, and a-ha, I would be able to listen to an indivisible song much closer to the cathedral’s actual and complete transmission.

The subway: “La Sagrada Familia,” the bodiless metro announces to a hoard of bodies as the escalator belt screeches and a guitarist busks. Heels clack up steps before they are swallowed by a sharp honk. When the light is green the cars steadily hum by, as it turns yellow they hurdle and pedestrians jump one, two, feet back onto the curb.


A bench: French, Japanese, Spanish, English, Catalan. Words I don’t know are swept away in the chattering crowds. My sandals scrape against the park’s granular sand. Suitcase wheels jump up and down over the uneven ground, rolling, crunching until they rest against a railing. “Huff” a woman sighs. “Come on,” a child pulls at his mother’s hand. Adolescents sing a song I don’t know in a language I can’t place, interrupted by laughter as abrupt as a shriek. A
flash pops up from the top of a camera and is clicked back down. A suntan canister goes chh-chh.

The line: “Over there,” a worker waves a couple to a different cue. He leans into a microphone on the collar of his shirt, “vale, vale, vale”. Paper ruffles as tickets unfurl. A fingernail taps against a glass cellphone screen. The scanner beeps a red line. Purses unlatch and backpacks unzip, their contents shuffled around by a security guard’s stick. “haahh,” an angry exhale.

The Nativity Facade entrance: A hush sweeps through the space as people look up, “Ooo,” “ahh,” “Oh”. Hands tap phones and they click, click, click. The audioguide pumps rising orchestra music into people’s ears, it crescendos and falls into moaning violins that gently fade. Sunglasses fall from the top of a tipped head and clatter onto the floor. “Would you please remove your hat sir?” “Would you mind taking a picture?”

The Nave: Metal circular saws scream from the choir vaults. The audioguide switches from a feminine voice, clear and gentle to a male voice, deep and slow. Silence falls in between commands, “Go to stop seven located in the ambulatory”, pause, “Now look up”. Ave Maria fills the room like a faucet into a bathtub. Metallic saw scream. “Aaaaaveeeee,” saw scream, “Mariaaa,” saw scream. A video sounds from an alcove, “Construction on La Sagrada began in 1882...” in the next alcove Spanish, in ten minutes it will be Catalan. A water bottle crinkles. The audioguide clicks on and off.

I put in my headphones and play songs to summon sentimentality. But the saws still seep through, like a child crying two apartments away. It makes me aware of the coexistence of La Sagrada’s noises, of how they resist exclusion. I take out my earbuds but can hardly interpret the cacophony. Outside there are hundreds of voices looping around the building, overlapping and interjecting one another. Somewhere above me a crane groans and steel whines as it’s cut. Each noise dovetails into the next, stacking on top of one another until the soundscape is too thick to depict or dissect.

I contemplated how to best splice sound in order to tighten the gap between my symbols of words and the lived experience of La Sagrada. I grappled with how to depict the flowing movements of the tourists outside the cathedral. I could fictionalize a single character leaping and ducking in a dance of crouching to snap a photograph, and fanning a hot brow, and tracing streets on a map. I could venture to form a poem packed with assonance, consonance, alliteration. For while writing will always fail to convey the absolute as defined by Bergson, it can still commit itself to offering readers the truest representation of the world. And so while I cannot give an absolute understanding of La Sagrada’s constitution, this paper will work to draw attention to its exceptionality and its implications through both traditional and speculative ethnography. Unlike the aforementioned Anthropologists, I am but an elementary ethnographer playing an elementary science fair student. My papier-mâché volcano may blow up, but even in failure I hope to show a commitment to conveying La Sagrada’s essence.

This endeavor began four years ago with my acceptance to The Johns Hopkins’ Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. With the aid of a generous grant I was able to conduct a six-week ethnography of Barcelona’s museums, monuments, and cathedrals. Research into the writings of anthropologists, architects, philosophers, and historians have helped shape my following
arguments. I am indebted to the creativity and hard work of other academics including my Johns Hopkins’ professors and most importantly my advisor Dr. Anand Pandian.

This thesis strives to highlight La Sagrada’s indivisibility so that the ethnography of the site’s vastly different spaces may exist within an overarching awareness of what may be described as the cathedral’s heterogeneous continuity. In unpacking the existence of unified contradiction it may serve to visit the myth of Daphne. Present in both Greek mythology and in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Daphne is a beautiful nymph who is desperately trying to escape the lustful Apollo. In her desperation, Daphne pleads with her father, a river God, for help. He obliges and Daphne is transformed into a laurel tree. The nymph therefore becomes half-woman, half-tree, half-living, and half-petrified. These existing incongruities do not call for a dismantling of Daphne but rather a renewed understanding of how one thing can also be two things at once.

Nature, Gaudi’s greatest influence, also reconciles the existence of multiplicities within a singularity. A butterfly begins as a caterpillar and then a cocoon and while the latter are two drastically different states, they nonetheless belong to one whole, and beautiful, creature. No one can offer an absolute knowledge of what it means to emerge from a chrysalis and no one can offer an absolute knowledge of what it means to be an indivisible cathedral. However, in noting the phenomenon of unified variety we can strive to become aware of the peculiar nature of an exceptional site.

If the spaces within La Sagrada are each a shard of ceramic, I hope that in studying them we may also step away from them to see the larger picture. For while each space is interesting in its own manner and in its relation to other spaces, the grander conglomeration of all the sites is what comes nearest to evoking the true nature of La Sagrada. The aim of this paper is to challenge the tendency to dissect spaces while neglecting to recognize that certain, extraordinary,
locations resist such division. I will note that contradiction, while fascinating, can be encompassed within a singular indivisible entity—the traits of which should tinge exactly how it is we digest its variety—to do otherwise would belie La Sagrada’s indivisible essence.

**Part I: The Constitution of an Indivisible Cathedral**

**Vivifying Architecture:**

Henri Bergson notes that the need to conceive is born from the many limitations of natural perception. When one cannot discern the whole of something, he or she may turn to reasoning in order to push the bounds of perceivable reality, proving it elastic. Bergson quickly predicts his critics’ retort, “How can one ask the eyes of the body, or those of the mind, to see more than they see?”

For while increased attention can surely elucidate, it cannot conjure what was not initially there. But as swiftly as the objection is raised it is refuted. Artists, Bergson affirms, have always been tasked with making people see what they would not otherwise have seen.

As they [artists] speak, shades of emotion and thought appear to us which might long since have been brought out in us but which remained invisible; just like the photographic image which has not yet been plunged into the bath where it will be revealed. The poet is this revealing agent.

According to the philosopher, our visual horizons are too often defined by life’s demands. “Distinct perception,” he asserts, “is merely cut, for the purposes of practical existence,

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19 Ibid., 251.
out of a wider canvas.”

If we are to seriously consider the scope of perception as flexible, as Bergson suggests, we must attend to the latent potential of the artistic creations that surround us. Architecture, rather than merely sheltering us, has the power to stretch our gazes beyond the peripheries of our current reality.

Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí began designing his magnum opus, The Basílica i Temple Expiatori de La Sagrada, in 1883. The iconic structure combines Gothicism, Modernism, and Art Nouveau into a style which transcends categorization. Densely ornate, structurally innovative, and immense in scale, La Sagrada boldly challenges architectural convention. Less tangibly however, La Sagrada also extends a perceptual challenge to its visitors: to see an inorganic structure as something imbued with life. “A process of questioning of what constitutes human… can be found in Gaudí’s interpretation of the organic in architecture: this is one striking result of looking at his buildings through the Bergsonian lens.”

Gaudí’s work defies the assumption that structures, while conceptually derived from nature, are ultimately separated from it.

Finding design inspiration in the organic is hardly novel. In fact, art historian George Hersey argues that all structures, cathedral or bike shed alike, have their provenance in nature. This descent is evidenced by the biological origins of the geometries that characterizes our manmade artifacts. The first hexagons appeared in honeycombs, the first domes in eggs, and the first suspension bridges in spider webs. Traces of this architectural ancestry remain in the language used to describe the spaces we inhabit. In construction terminology a “valve” is the

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20 Ibid., 252.
23 Ibid., xvii.
“leaf of a double door”. Thus the opening into a cathedral can be understood in both the aquatic terms of a mollusk and the terrestrial terms of a leaf.\textsuperscript{24} For an aerial association one simply needs to think of a building’s many “wings”.\textsuperscript{25} By working backward, link by link, along the chain of association between result and origin, we can see the prevalence of biological inspiration behind manufactured products. “An African termitary might remind us of Wright, or of a Gaudí spire, or of a skyscraper by Herman Obrist”.\textsuperscript{26} This connection, though common, is exceptionally emphasized in the presentation of Gaudí’s works where museological techniques animate architecture with its natural conception.

In 1910, Gaudí completed Casa Milà, a modernist apartment building along the avenue Passeig de Gràcia in Barcelona. Tour guides refer to the site as, “a monument to his [Gaudi’s] main source of inspiration: nature”. And indeed the structure is cohesively discussed in organic terms. Audioguides invite visitors to imagine the curvilinear exterior as a “stone wave…flowing like the ocean”. This call to action carries throughout Casa Milà’s presentation as tourists are told to see wrought iron railings as “seaweed” and a courtyard as a “forest clearing”. An exhibition space located in the building’s attic pulls biological materials into conversation with the structure. Supported by over 250 parabolic vaults, the space’s roof rises and dips at varying heights, as if it were a spine slithering across uneven terrain. This serpentine analogy is not lost on those who curated the experience. Visitor’s wind past glass boxes housing organic artifacts ranging from pinecones to pelvic bones. A snake’s skeleton is stretched across the length of a display case. Tourists look from the arching ribs to the ceiling, seeing each within the other.

\textsuperscript{24} L. George Hersey, \textit{The Monumental Impulse: Architecture’s Biological Roots} (Cambridge MA: MIT, 1999) xii.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., xix.
Casa Mila’s museological techniques all work to animate the structure with the life of its organic inspiration. To dive further into this uncanny mode of perception, visitors may purchase a ticket for Gaudí’s Pedrera: The Origins. This nighttime tour features a show on Casa Milà’s rooftop where images are projected onto the building’s iconic and swirling “badalots” (stairwells). Visitors exit onto the terrace, a jungle gym of uneven steps, mosaic vaults, and fantastical chimneys. The lights dim and a cinematic melody bellows. Through a technology known as “videomapping”, scenes cover the badalots, forming to them as if they were flat surfaces. The stone structures become the cosmos as stars shoot from one column to the next, nebulas coming into view and then receding. Flowers blossom in magenta and green, unfurling against the sky (fig. 2). Images of the ocean are cast onto the stairwells as evenly as if each were itself an aquarium; fish swim from badalot to badalot, disappearing in the night and then reappearing again. All the while music gurgles from every direction. Images switch from one natural subject to the next. Fire crackles and lava spills. Reptilian eyes blink and forests grow. Casa Milà’s organic inspiration is literally superimposed onto itself. The Origins ultimately works to fuse the building with its biological conception.

The Montserrat cloister of La Sagrada houses a permanent exhibition which, like that of Casa Milà, places Gaudí’s work in a wild context. Simply titled “Gaudí and Nature” the curated space compares the geometry prevalent in Gaudí’s structures with those found in biology. As argued by Hersey’s research, this connection is prevalent. However, what distinguishes Gaudí’s work is the way in which its presentation consistently aims to strengthen this bond between the
biological and the architectural. The exhibition highlights that rather than use buttresses, Gaudí turned toward nature for a structural solution. The resulting thirty-six columns which support La Sagrada’s interior are decidedly tree-like in design, “…the shafts imitate trunks, the capitals are knots, the upper columns branches, and the vaults foliage”. This apparent inspiration is reinvigorated by instructions for visitors to try and see the nave as if it were a forest.

The scripts of La Sagrada’s tour guides and audioguides further stress the conflation of the natural and the inorganic. “La luz es el agua”; “Las columnas son los arboles”. The light is water; the columns are trees. These descriptions once again ask visitors to surpass natural perception and vivify La Sagrada. As an ethnographer I cannot help but slip into a similar mode of observation. Dust particles float like algae in the sunlight. A beam passes through a pane and hovers amongst the columns before casting itself across the calf of an elderly man. The floor is covered in an array of watercolor shapes. A window, the hue of a deep gorge, turns the man’s white sock momentarily blue as if he were ankle-deep in a stream. As he continues, the ribbed tube turns orange and then red and then yellow. A discarded water bottle rests against the leg of a chair. The light washes through it, refracting through its crinkled plastic.

A unique kind of imaginative effort is asked of those who view Gaudí’s architecture. Visitors are urged to suspend normal perception and instead conceive the vivification of inanimate architecture. Rather than merely follow Heresy’s chain of biological legacy, they are implored to fold Gaudí’s inspiration into his product. Spyros Papapetros’ On the Animation of the Inorganic explores the existence of this apparent contradiction. The author utilizes perceptual psychologist Rudolf Arnheim’s ideas to set the foundation of his argument:

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I would like to maintain Arnheim’s basic distinction between the two concepts [empathy and animation]. That is while empathy pertains to subjects doing things to inanimate objects, animation is about objects doing things to human subjects. *Things doing things:* causes and effects are homogenized on a level of blunt linguistic generality.\(^{28}\)

Thus when visitors imagine La Sagrada’s architecture as somehow being alive, they are empathizing with it. Reciprocally, this now imbued structure can act upon the visitor, eliciting deeper emotions and prompting expanded perceptions. It is two bodies acting upon one another. I return again to Bergson who championed this effect, saying, “Art would suffice then to show us that an extension of faculties of perceiving is possible”.\(^{29}\) Instead of seeing architecture as being derived from nature, it is seen as being natural itself. Historically, Anthropology has negatively associated such animist mentalities with “the ‘spiritualist’ believer, the female hysteric, and the ‘savage’”.\(^{30}\) However, while purposefully presenting the animate as indivisible from the inanimate, La Sagrada not only evokes but also celebrates the inherent contradiction of living architecture as does emerging schools of animist anthropology.

Placing contradicting artifacts in dialogue is not a unique museological technique. The Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya (MNAC) boasts an expansive wing of Medieval Romanesque Art. Interestingly, one of the galleries displays an Antoni Tàpies painting next to a replicated Roman asp. The work of Tàpies, a modern avant-gardist, is a visual anomaly in the space. The incoherence of the placement elicits a conversation across two disparate artistic


styles. The presentation of Gaudí’s architecture also strives to enliven a conversation on contradiction. However, this conversation works to overcome contrast and instead suggest conflation by proposing that architecture can in fact be animate. Display practices underscore the existence of Gaudí’s organic source within his structural product. Rather than being an argument isolated to a single gallery, this vivifying stance is extensive across the presentation of Gaudí’s architecture. Even the space of MNAC which exhibits Gaudí’s furniture is painted a vibrant green, evoking nature.

La Sagrada shows a commitment to the conception of realities in which contradictions are resolved, realities in which the inspiration for a structure can reside within the structure itself. Rather than segment organic conception from inanimate result, Gaudí’s cathedral is presented as being, in and of itself, a natural animated artifact. A visitor should not see Casa Milà’s badalots as being derived from the ocean, but see each as itself being a moving wave. This collapsing of incongruous attributes highlights the elements that make La Sagrada a unique and powerful architectural feat which suggests indivisibility. But this suggestion is not limited to the design process but also to the building process. La Sagrada’s extraordinarily long construction also shies from a mentality of segmentation.

**Flowing Architecture:**

George Hersey encompasses all buildings, monumental and mundane alike, by claiming that each work of architecture has its provenance in nature. Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva make a similarly inclusive argument. They assert that architecture is consistently and

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problematically viewed as static. In an ever increasingly fast paced society, buildings can appear to materialize at a near lethargic pace. While people are well-aware that structures are constructed and not merely conjured into existence, perceiving them as dynamic entities takes a certain kind of mental effort.

Everybody knows—and especially architects, of course—that a building is not a static object but a moving project, and that even once it is has been built, it ages, it is transformed by its users, modified by all of what happens inside and outside, and that it will pass or be renovated, adulterated and transformed beyond recognition.32

This structural movement, however, remains elusive, and capturing it calls on one to challenge how they perceive the deceptively static artifacts that populate their daily landscapes. La Sagrada stands as an exceptional example of architecture in flux.33 Begun over a century ago, the cathedral’s lengthy construction offers a unique opportunity to see a structure as flowing rather than stolid.

Since 1882, La Sagrada’s building process has proceeded at various rhythms and speeds. At its onset, the project was overseen by the architect Francisco de Paula del Villar y Lozano. However, due to disagreements, Gaudí took over the commission just a year into the construction. The new head architect dramatically overhauled the initial design, giving the Gothic cathedral a distinctly whimsical and singular style. Gaudí saw the completion of the cathedral’s crypt, Nativity façade, provisional school building, and first bell tower. At the time of his death in 1926, only a quarter of the project had been finished.34

33 Giovanna Borradori, “Cities in Flux: Bergson, Gaudí, Loos” (European Legacy, 2011).
reconciled with this pace of construction, famously saying, “Don’t worry, my client is not in a hurry.” With God as his overseer, the architect was peacefully resigned to never seeing the final iteration of his magnum opus.

Fifteenth century Architect Filarete discussed an architect’s role in maternal terms. A designer is the “mother” of a site in that before he may “give birth” to a building, “he must dream of it, mentally examining it from all angles, exactly like a woman carries a child in her body.” But just as a mother may pass away before she sees her child reach ‘completion’ or rather become a fully-fledged adult, so too may an architect died before his design is completed. “The act of building is none other than a voluptuous pleasure comparable to that of a man in love.” When understood in corporal terms, it is easier to reconcile Gaudi’s contentment with La Sagrada’s slow growth or gestation.

The movement of La Sagrada was not unvaried, and under Gaudi’s successor Domènec Sugrañes, the construction process saw a major interruption. In July 1936, revolutionaries of the Spanish Civil War sacked Gaudi’s workshop, set fire to the crypt, and destroyed the provisional school. Filarete continued his bodily analogy to comprehend such set backs, saying a building may, “become sick and die; sometimes it is cured from its illness by a good physician… others are killed by men for some reason or another.” However, La Sagrada was not killed. The cathedral’s official website strives to contextualize these murderous attempts, noting, “It should be pointed out that, from when Gaudi took the helm in 1883 and despite these acts of vandalism,

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37 Ibid., 3.
38 Ibid., 3.
work on the Sagrada Familia, although disrupted, never came to a complete stop, and has always
gone ahead according to the architect’s original concept.” Despite the La Sagrada’s
inconsistent rates of progress, its movement has always trudged ahead. In 1940, Francesc de
Paula Quintana i Vidal repaired the fire-damaged crypt and worked to restore Gaudi’s models. In
the proceeding decades La Sagrada has had several different directors. Sequentially, the process
has been lead by Isidre Puig-Boada and Lluís Bonet I Garí, Francesc de Paula Cardoner i Blanch,
Jordi Bonet I Armengol, and since 2012 the current architect, Jordi Faulí i Oller.40

Over the decades, La Sagrada has slowly transformed before the eyes of architects,
Barcelona citizens, and the international community. The cathedral has grown taller and more
intricate, facades have been erected and stained glass inserted. In 1961, a museum was designed
in La Sagrada’s crypt to elucidate the project’s rich history and symbolism. In 1976, four of the
Pasion Façade’s bell towers were built, and in 2000, the foundation was laid for the Glory
Façade.41 These achievements are only a few of the numerous steps taken toward structural
completion in the last century and each has seen the inclusion of new sculptors and architectural
staff. The site’s slow yet dramatic development challenges the perception of buildings as static
artifacts. La Sagrada’s gestation, gradual and far from uniform, has been visually dynamic.

I was seventeen when I first saw La Sagrada, on a high school Spanish trip with a group
of kids I didn’t exactly like with a tour guide I couldn’t exactly understand. Standing in a park
adjacent to the cathedral, the guide pointed out La Sagrada’s features. We followed her index
finger with our eyes as it circled symbols on façades and outlined towers. We didn’t go inside.
Instead we walked around the cathedral in a slow Spanish sort of way, necks cranking upward to

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
look at lurching cranes. There wasn’t much to see inside, the guide explained, the outside would suffice. At nineteen I was on a plane, lost in anxious sleep, flying back to Barcelona for a semester abroad. I have a video of the first time I went inside the cathedral. It is mostly of my face, still tanned from summer, spinning in a giddy circle with the nave blurring behind me. I wave to my family, to show them that I am doing alright. The interior’s intricacy sent me back to my first visit. I replayed the memory through the skeptical lens of a critic. It was difficult to believe that enough had changed in the intermediate years to have ever deemed the nave unworthy of visiting. The building was moving quickly now, it seemed. During my research, eight months after my return from study abroad, my visits were separated by days rather than years. And while I couldn’t as clearly note large scale structural changes, the reoccurring metallic whine of a saw in the choir vault always served as a reminder that the space was indeed physically transforming on a daily basis.

As architecture changes it participates in a peculiar kind of movement, a trait which Latour and Yaneva argue is often forgotten. The idea that structures are transformative rather than static resonates with Henri Bergson’s concept of durée, defined as, “a heterogeneous multiplicity, encompassing various dimensions of change that include qualitative sensations pertaining to color, sound, and organic aging”. This philosophy is diametrically opposed to that of Atomism, which understands the world as comprised of singular entities which can be comprehended as relative to one another.

Bergson calls on the vibrant analogy of a vast spectrum of colors to depict his philosophy of durée:

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42 Giovanna Borradori, “Cities in Flux: Bergson, Gaudi, Loos” (European Legacy, 2011) 924.
43 Ibid., 922.
A current of feeling running through the spectrum, becoming tinted with each of these shades in turn, would suffer gradual changes, each of which would announce the following and sum up within itself the preceding ones.\(^{44}\)

The experience of the spectrum is defiant to divisibility and instead evokes a transforming but continuous flow. It would follow that a Bergsonian view of dynamic architecture would aim to understand a building as an indivisible movement. Anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that movement can also be used as a way to understand the inanimate as animated. “Wherever there is life there is movement,” he writes, “Not all movement, however, betokens life”.\(^{45}\) While Western scientists define life by cellular configurations and reactions, “the primacy of movement in the animic cosmos,” can help reimagine the definition of life:

We are not required to believe that the wind is a being that blows, or that thunder is a being that claps. Rather the wind is blowing, and the thunder is clapping, just as organisms and persons are living in the ways peculiar to each.\(^{46}\)

If we take this animist sentiment seriously, a building moving in a Bergsonian flow may extend Filarete’s bodily metaphor even further. While organic inspiration may animate La Sagrada, so too may its flow.

Comprehending a moving, living building, however, proves difficult. One could take every possible picture of a city, Bergson argues, and though the total of all the images would show the city, they would never convey the lived experience of walking through its streets.\(^{47}\)

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 9.
number of images could represent the ever evolving state of a metropolis. Latour and Yaneva conclude that buildings are often misconstrued as static artifacts due to the inadequacies of structural representation. This fundamental problem is the opposite of Etienne Jules Marey’s, who wished to capture each frame of a seagull’s flight to best comprehend the physiology of its movement. While Marey developed the device needed to take a series of successive freeze-frames, there is not yet a perfected way to fully depict the complex flow of a building, “It seems almost impossible to grasp them [buildings] as movement, as flight, as a series of transformations”. Architecture is generally represented in the Euclidian space of a perspective drawing. However, the essence of a building is inherently adulterated when it is flattened onto a page.

La Sagrada employs a plethora of representational techniques that move beyond two-dimensional replication. Models of the cathedral are scattered throughout the site, each depicting various stages of completion. A bronze sculpture of a fully constructed La Sagrada sits outside the Nativity Façade and marks the first stop on a visitor’s audioguide tour. Here, tourists may see the project’s eventual structural destination. Beneath the nave in the cathedral’s museum, a large number of displays show the construction process at various times and scales. Visitors can even look into a contemporary workshop as designers carve and create models. It has also been crucial to effectively represent La Sagrada offsite. Funded entirely by ticket sales and donations, the cathedral has had to appeal to contributors throughout its construction. In 2004, the institution presented an exhibition, Sagràfica, which displayed donation posters from each year since 1955.

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49 Ibid. 2
These graphic representations often attempt to capture the spirit of architectural progress. One artist rendered the cathedral as if it were made of clouds, a dreamy nod to what could be. Another shows figures pouring water on the cathedral as it grows like a flower.\(^{50}\)

One may suggest that while models and posters fail to capture a building’s movement, modern computer technology can. However, 3D-CAD renderings still fall short of capturing a building’s evolving flow, and not simply because they cannot access absolute knowledge:

Where do you place the angry clients and their sometimes conflicting demands? Where do you insert the legal and city planning constraints? Where do you locate the budgeting and the different budget options? …Where do you archive the many successive models that you had to modify so as to absorb the continuous demands of so many conflicting stakeholders—users, communities of neighbors, preservationists, clients, representatives of government and city authorities?\(^{51}\)

A space’s transformation is not only affected by structural additions but also by who uses the space and how it is that they use it.\(^{52}\) In this sense, even when a structure is physically completed it is still apart of a dynamic Bergsonian flow.

A space’s changes are not always visually apparent. On November 7\(^{th}\), 2010 Pope Benedict XVI consecrated La Sagrada as a basilica. This act marked the Catholic Churches’ distinction of La Sagrada is as an exceptionally sacred and important religious site.\(^{53}\) Through ceremony, the cathedral’s name and categorization changed. “Only by enlisting the movements

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\(^{50}\) Sagràfica del 1955 al 2004: Un recorregut gràfic per 50 anys d’història del Temple de La Sagrada Família.


\(^{52}\) Ibid. 2

of a building and accounting carefully for its ‘tribulations’ would one be able to state its existence’. These tribulations are not necessarily large. The ways in which a space, “resists attempts at transformation, allows certain visitors’ actions and impedes others, bugs observers, challenges city authorities, and mobilizes different communities of actors,” contribute to a building’s movement. Each day that I interacted with La Sagrada I affected the site in a new way. Some visits I crossed the nave in lazy diagonals, others I rushed from model to model in the cathedral’s museum. I spent some evenings in La Sagrada’s parks, other mornings I went to mass. My moods always tinted my experience and, like Bergson’s spectrum, tinged La Sagrada’s continuous flow. While it is tempting to segmented these differences, the sites’ gradient transformations exist as an indivisible series of successive changes rather than a number of singular stages.

The lived essence of a building is distinctly opposed to the misperception that architecture is stolid. “To consider a building only as a static object would be like gazing at a gull, high in the sky, without being able to ever capture how it moves”. This uncanny movement consists of both physical and experiential changes. La Sagrada has been quantitatively impacted by the various interpretations of Gaudi’s designs by multiple head architects. The pace of construction and structural challenges have effected the rate of the building’s transformation. Qualitatively, ceremonies and visitors have informed the nature of La Sagrada. “Indeed,”

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55 Ibid. 7
Bergson writes, “time and space, or better temporality and spatiality, form the intricate and inseparable mixture of concrete experience”. 58 The true essence of La Sagrada lies in its indivisible and infinite flow which eludes effective capture. While perhaps no methodology can validly represent a buildings’ movement, it serves to attend to this limitation and to recognize the vivifying power of motion. There is a temptation to dissect La Sagrada’s seemingly disparate spaces of sentiments, to place the silent prayer space in contrast to the touristic gift shop, or the museum in contrast to the crypt. But although these spaces vary in meaningful and drastic ways, they are nonetheless encompassed by the same singular, and potentially animate, body of architecture. La Sagrada’s variations do not necessitate segmentation, but rather an attention to the immense complexity of uniform wholes.

**Part II: Spaces of Sentiments**

When La Sagrada is vivified by its inspiration and when it is viewed in animated movement, it is done within an indivisible context. Bergson provides several ways of understanding how a building may defy segmentation. But while the cathedral itself may be seen as a singular and whole entity, one with the attributes of a body, how is it that the actual bodies visiting and traversing La Sagrada experience the site? On the ground tourists stare at façades which have opposing aesthetics and elicit vastly different moods. Visitors can climb towers and also rest on benches. Like a mosaic, the spaces within La Sagrada cause a sense of surprised wonder at how so many contrasts can be concretized next to one another.

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58 Giovanna Borradori, “Cities in Flux: Bergson, Gaudi, Loos” (European Legacy, 2011) 924.
And each body within the larger body of La Sagrada engages with these contrasting sites in various ways. For an hour I sat in one of the approximately 280 plastic chairs set in the middle of the nave. I watched the masses ebb and flow into the seats around me. A young woman took out a brush and began to untangle her blonde hair. She checked her face in a compact mirror. Another pair of women sat down near me, the older female removed her shoes and flattened her soles onto the floor. A husband and wife occupied the chairs directly to my left, making a lovely pair of contemplative statues—unmoving, unspeaking. They wore simple and small smiles and listened to their audioguides as their stares scanned the ceiling. A more vocal pair excitedly discussed the architecture. Each embellished their phrases with hand gestures. On woman’s hands fell into an elegant pile in her lap as she said, “When I see stuff this beautiful it makes me really sad that my mum’ can’t travel to do stuff like this.” A pause hung between them until the woman’s companion picked the conversation up again, “You see that light? They really thought about that—about the sort of imposing impact, you know?” Next to them an adolescent boy speaks a few words of Russian to his friend before resting his forehead on the backpack cradled in his lap. He falls asleep for ten minutes.

The ground of the nave is a bustling mixture of bodies engaging in various ways with La Sagrada. The nave itself evokes a persistent sentiment of wonder. The interior of La Sagrada opened to me each day like the beginning of a reoccurring dream. The details are immense and startling. The ceiling looks like a butterfly’s wing seen through the lens of a kaleidoscope; its symmetry becomes complex and dizzying—circles ring circles and crosses are dotted with rotundas. The patterns are colored with jewel tone glass and gold leafing. The vault is supported by columns like the trunks of massive trees. They stretch upward, supporting a canopy of stone. The amount of space above visitors is astonishing and chins tilt upward in attempts to absorb the
extraordinary grandeur of the nave. On a Saturday afternoon, I read a quote from Gaston Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space* transcribed in the margin of my notebook:

> Slowly, immensity becomes a primal value, a primal, intimate value. When the dreamer really experiences the world immense, he sees himself liberated from his cares and thoughts, even from his dreams. He is no longer shut up in his weight, the prisoner of his own being.⁵⁹

I imagined myself being freed by the vastness of the nave. I allowed my gaze to take agency over my body—leaving it behind as it floated upward toward the intricately constructed foliage of concrete and light. My audioguide played soft and rising music, as if it too were being pulled upward. The recording gently prompted me:

> *Whatever your beliefs, we invite you to join in the mood of meditation prevailing here.*
> *Remove your earphones, sit down, and leave your daily hustle and bustle behind. Grant yourself a few moments of introspection. And if you are a believer remember that the purpose of this space is to encourage prayer.*

The invitation mimics Bachelard’s exaltation of the power of vast spaces. It asks that worries be forgotten and wonder be embraced. The magical material combinations conjure amazement.

> *Breath pushes against the breastplate like air against a balloon—filling one with wonder that lifts, surprises, astonishes.*

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Walking around the exterior of La Sagrada it is difficult to look up, there are people moving in every direction. Some mosey, others stride, leaving packs of pedestrians awkwardly navigating the crowds—fast then slow like rapids. Scaffolding stretches over a portion of the sidewalk outside the Glory Façade. The extra poles dividing the pavement cause extra obstacles. The façade lures curiosity and attention—it is concealed by a tall fence and from street level it is all tarp and metal lattice. One day, this façade will be La Sagrada’s main entrance. It will detail Jesus’ resurrection and ascension and boast fifteen columns, sixteen lanterns of hyperboloid layout, and large illuminated clouds displaying scripture. It will stand as a testament to hope—to the promise of the might be.

Inside La Sagrada the Glory Façade remains a largely unseen and mysterious component. One day it will be there, but for now there are only signs and audioguides to elucidate the feature. The Eucharist door, erected in 2012, is symbol for the eventual grandeur of the main portal. Visitors huddle around the massive 2,000 kilo doors. Blue-green bronze is patterned with reliefs of fifty translations of the Lord’s Prayer. A plaque details each language and its location on the doors. There are small exclamations of curiosity at the less-common languages: Wolof, Coptic, Berber, Aranese, Tagalog. An adolescent girl repeats, “Quechua, Quechua, Quechua,” rolling each syllable on her tongue as if it were an exotic food found in an open air market.

The promise of a façade entangled with the promise of salvation tilts heads in curiosity and excites hope.

The Nativity Façade is the cathedral’s current main entrance. The meeting place for guided tours is tucked to the side and throughout the day clusters of people form and dissolve,
form and dissolve. A large rectangular booth stands to the right of the façade, where a line of visitors snakes to receive audioguides. People swarm in excited chaos. First, the audioguide directs tourists to a bronze model of a completed La Sagrada. Eyes scan the model and flick up toward the Nativity Façade, able to see the current state of the cathedral and its eventual iteration. Headphone clad tourists clad in smiles fill the large patio surrounding the façade.

So many heads look up at the cathedral’s overwhelmingly crowded face, leaving others to bump and push past them as they navigate the patio. A large viewing area stretches back and tour guides usher large groups into the space, leading the way with signs held above their heads. People perch on the benches rimming the patio. At peak hours, the scene transforms into a tangle of feet. Visitors vie for shade and scrunch into alcoves against the façade filled with holy images, and allegorical animals, and ornate vegetation. A woman scans the details; her thin lips are parted in a small gaping smile.

To the left is the Hope Portico which represents Saint Joseph. The tympanum shows the gentle scene of Jesus cradling a wounded dove to show his father while his grandparents, Saint Joachim and Saint Anne, stand in the background. Another ensemble depicts The Flight to Egypt in which an angel helps the Holy Family flee Egypt. Mary, her face smooth, rounded, and draped by a cloak, looks down at an infant in the crook of her arm. Her face is sculpted with a gentle grin; she is surrounded by flora and fauna indigenous to the regions surrounding the Nile river.

The Faith Portico, is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The Visitation is symbolized by Mary, pregnant with Jesus, and her cousin Elizabeth who is pregnant with Saint John the Baptist. Mary stares upward, her hands gently pressed together in prayer. Shadows catch in the many folds of the women’s robes. The right of the section features an adolescent Jesus working with his father
as a carpenter. His face is young and cam, his eyes cast downward as his hand lifts a mallet.
There are farm animals, and bees, and doves.

The Charity Portico, the central and largest portico, is dedicated to Jesus. The ornamentation on this portion of the façade is so elaborate that sculptures seem to blend into one another, wildlife, anagrams, and zodiacs bunching together in an expression of festive opulence. Tucked into the dizzyingly packed façade are squirrels, and lambs, and a dog. There are eighteen species of flora and thirty-three religious figures nestled amongst the natural elements. Shepherds and the three Wise Men stare up in astonished joy at the star of Bethlehem hanging above the main entrance. Angels herald trumpets and six musicians play instruments, conveying an encompassing sentiment of elation. Guidebooks and audioguides direct visitors to particular arrangements, but it is still difficult to hone in on any one feature so buried amongst the gleeful decoration.

Eventually the masses flow through the façade’s bronze gates and more visitors fill in behind them. Designed by Japanese sculptor Etsuro Sotoo, the doors are covered in green and red leaves, as if it weren’t solid metal but instead a section of forest which could be brushed aside with a hand. Insects are sporadically tucked amongst the leaves—a ladybug here and there. People pause for photographs with the hidden specimens. They point toward the bugs and wear big open mouth grins. Tourists squeeze past the photographers, leaving behind the chaos of the entrance, and the cornucopia of natural carvings, and the happy days of Jesus’ youth.

*Jubilance radiates from the dense façade—lifting lip’s corners, warming some spot deep in the gut.*
The Passion Façade, a somber, stark meditation on Jesus’ final days, faces the setting sun. The cathedral’s face is sleek and barren. Its geometries are angular and anguished. The audioguide details designer Josep Maria Subirachs’ twelve sculptural groupings. The Last Supper is nestled into a nook. But rather than sitting at the table with his apostles, Jesus stands with his back facing the multitudes of tourists. A notched spine shows beneath his cloak and his head is bowed. It is capturing the moment during the meal that the Messiah had said to Judas, “What you must do, do it quickly.” Turned away from the crowds, Jesus is frozen in a moment of ominous resignment. His face is hidden, denying the chance of a comforting countenance.

In 1911, Gaudí became gravely ill with Maltese fever. In an effort to preserve his life, the architect left the city to escape to Puigcerdà, a small Pyrenean town with cleaner air. It was there, bedridden and drawing up his will, that Gaudí found the inspiration to depict Jesus’ last days, “He did it immersed in the spirit of anguish and fear and later acknowledged that he wanted the façade to scare viewers.” There are no rounded faces or cradling arms, but instead jutting cheekbones and slumped shoulders. The architect was well aware of the project’s severe solemnity. From La Sagrada’s initial conception, “Gaudi was already planning to provide the Passion Façade with a rather sinister air.” He consciously began construction on the Nativity Façade first, worried that donors and Barcelona citizens would be unwilling to support an iconography defined by grief.

The audioguide instructs tourists to follow the “S” formation of chronological sculptural ensembles to The Kiss of Judas where statues stare down from the Passion Façade. Shadows lodge in their hollowed cheeks and under their furrowed brows. Their eyes have no pupils and

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61 Ibid.
they slant downward, like perhaps if they weren’t stone they would slide right off and land in front of a tourists’ toes. Next is The Flagellation where Jesus is bound to the façade’s central column (Fig. 3). Opposite the main doors’ mullion, Jesus is carved at the same height as those who are exiting the nave. Visitors can closely see Christ’s closed eyes, his nose pressed against the column as if he were hugging someone he loved for the very last time. The doors behind him are bronze turned to mauve teal. Their surfaces are covered in scripture explaining Jesus’ final days. Morbid and melancholy symbols are wedged between words—a skull, a man with his face buried in his arms.

Visitors stream past the Jesus whose back is ready for a whip.

A young girl speaks to her mother with her thumb hooked in her pocket, “I don’t know, I don’t really like it.” I collect similar sentiments over the weeks: too sad, I like the other one, it’s creepy. The area around the porticos are less densely packed and one day it is so quiet I can hardly believe it is an August afternoon. A bench is tucked away beneath The Last Super and people rush for seats in the shade. Out of sight lurches the Passion Façade’s austere figures frozen in pain, and sorrow, and regret. There are twenty-five soldiers depicted, each one made faceless by a helmet. A crucifix presides over the façade. Jesus hangs from two nailed wrists, all ribs and strained muscles. The pediment is composed of eighteen purposefully bone-like pillars. They are smooth, as if the flesh and muscle had been flayed away and nothing else was added.
Terror shrinks the body, pulling shoulders closer together—a shiver without cold—under the gaze of the solemn sculptures.

A sign announcing “The Sagrada Familia Temporary Schools” sits at the base of the Passion Façade. In 1909, at the suggestion of Father Gil Parés i Vilasuau, the first Chaplin to custodian the crypt, Gaudí built provisional school buildings for construction workers and their children. Deceptively humble, the building is twenty-four meters long and twelve meters wide with just two partitions delineating three classrooms able to accommodate 150 pupils. Destroyed during The Spanish Civil War, the schoolhouse was reconstructed and relocated to outside the Passion Façade in 2002.

The architecturally significant nature of the schoolhouse is rooted in its functional and innovative use of brick. The curving exterior was created by laying bricks on their larger sides and arranging them vertically, giving the structure a whimsical shape. The roof is warped as if it were a wave. Three iron pillars and smaller wooden beams support the surprisingly light roof which was designed to best channel rainwater. Despite the simple materials and modest purpose, the schoolhouse retains Gaudí’s signature style and commitment to organic lines.

Entering the building, visitors surround a small recreation of Gaudí’s work table. There is a simple desk surrounded by a mess of paper scrolls and books. The plaque directs viewer’s toward some of the small details meant to illuminate the architect’s distinctly humble disposition, “At the back [of the display], hanging from the oil lamp, is a bag with his supper, consisting of two small slices of bread with honey and a handful of raisins. Gaudi worked on designs in his studio-workroom. In the last few moths he also slept there [in his workshop].” The recreation is
surrounded by a glass partition, though none of the materials are originals. Historic black and white pictures dot the walls of the building, offering a dose of authenticity.

The far left classroom is recreated and tourist can walk through it, like a penetrable or interactive diorama. The desks are utilitarian and made of knotted wood with accompanying backless benches. A tour group enters the space and quickly fills the seats while their guide explains the space’s significance. A coat rack and clock are nailed to the wall, inviting people to imagine children hanging up their jackets or perhaps eagerly watching the time. The chalkboard is covered in simple arithmetic problems and geometric shapes. On the far side of the board white cursive translates one of Gaudi’s quote from Catalan to Spanish and then English. The meticulous script, as if written by a thoughtful teacher, reads, “When the building simply has what it needs with the resources available it has character, or dignity, which are the same thing.”

But the chalk isn’t really chalk; it won’t rub off. And the charcoal sketches posted above the board are not authentic. And the simple lamps lighting the space and contemporary. The space reminds me of Disney World, it is thoughtfully crafted and engaging, but nonetheless artificial. Visitors snap photos behind the teacher’s desk at the head of the classroom. A man waves people past as he waits to capture the best image of a woman who is sitting with her hands folded in an authoritarian pose. It is an appropriate place to play pretend.

*Imagination causes postures to change and eyes to see differently, it lets one slip out of adulthood, disrobing to reveal the childhood mind.*

A small permeant exhibition sits just off the Nativity Façade. Half-hidden, the space is only noticed by a few visitors who duck into the narrow side-room. Leaving the chaos of
sculptures, and lines, and crowds, tourists enter a bright room full of white light, poster-pops of color, and wire and metal models. There is no audioguide script associated this portion of the La Sagrada experience. Instead a large wall text at the entrance introduces the exhibition’s aim. A tiny and decidedly modern exhibition, “Gaudí and Nature” works to pull Gaudí’s overarching architectural strategies into a discussion with the biological world. Curated by La Sagrada’s former head of modeling, Jordi Cussó i Anglès, the exhibition compares architectural forms and naturally occurring geometries in order to explain their provenance and purpose. The elongated room’s ceiling peaks in a series of vaults and circular panes comprise triangular sections of windows. Stone curves like valances above the larger and lower windows. The walls are a pale grey, at places smooth and at others porous. Three contemporary mobiles that hang from the ceiling. Each is made of twisted black wire, one looks like a wilted leaf, another a cinched column, and the last a three-times wound spiral.

The small number of visitors who enter the space move in a circle around the room, lingering at some texts and passing others. On the furthest wall a series of images, cut into hexagons, are hung next to one another: the top a spire, a close up of a berry-like detail, a shot down a spiral staircase. Along the room’s sides brightly colored squares mark alcoves with different numbers, beneath each a display is arranged on a wooden table, simple and sturdy like a work bench. Signs in orange, blue, green, teal, and red describe different architectural forms that appear across Gaudí’s many works. Each text is presented in Catalan, Spanish, and English sequentially.

One portion discusses “Spirals” by placing an image of a seashell next to an image of La Pedrera’s badalots. Models are set in front of text to visually explain the often intricate architectural processes at play. A metal spiral, like an expanded slinky, is dotted at intervals with
brown leaves to demonstrate how it is they move when they fall from trees. Another text discusses Gaudi’s use of honeycomb-like grills. Visitors look from the spirals and honeycombs to photographs and labels—the combination explaining La Sagrada’s complexities.

The display discussing “One-Leaf Hyperboloids” is paired with a table-top contraption of red flexible cords and metal. Two flat silver disks are connected by a pole, the red cords connect from one disk to the other and visitors can turn the two so that the cords twist together tightly at the center and extend outward at each end. I watch as a pre-pubescent boy turns the disks, pulling the strings and then letting them snap back into place. I can tell he is interested in the way the cords jump when he removes his hand. I watch him watch the way they fight to keep their shape. His guardian wanders a few displays ahead, leaning close to texts so that as his nose juts forward his toe extends for balance. The boy stays at the station, staring at, and learning from, the contraption.

A larger, more comprehensive, museum is situated beneath the nave. The audioguide prompts, *Before entering the museum take a close look at this panel, they [the names escribed] ensure that each day we are closer to Gaudi’s dream coming true.* The panel lists the names of crucial designers who have aided in the completion of La Sagrada. This introduction is all the explication offered by visitors’ audioguides on the museum. Guides also end their tours at the museum’s entrance—leaving visitors to wander through the space alone. They descend by a ramp into the windowless and sleek exhibition space through one of two entrances.

When I worked in the La Sagrada archives, located a few streets from the cathedral, I had asked about the museum. In a Spanish still creaking from disuse, I requested any documents regarding its construction and utilization. The woman seemed puzzled by my request. She was adamant that there were no such documents saved and stored by the archives and though I was
initially adamant that I had surely mistranslated the inquiry, slowly I accepted the absence of all documentation. Like the audioguide, the archives seemed to stop just short of fully noting the museum’s role. But while the museum as a structural addition is not elucidated by the audioguide or by archives, the museum itself works to fully elucidate the history and architecture of La Sagrada for its visitors.

Tourists shuffle through the space. Independent guides wave for groups to follow them as they stop at a large timeline of the construction process, or a model of a portion of the church, or a piece of altar furniture. There are nooks with glass displays full of bits of stone. Pictures depicting the building’s progress are hung throughout the space. There are two dark rooms—one which screens a short movie on La Sagrada and another which houses rare prints which need to be stored in an environment with strictly controlled light. Plaques describe complex architectural forms and structural innovations.

A contemporary workshop is situated behind large glass walls and a young man watches as an artist refines a model. He is wearing a black and neon green flat brim hat. A security guard moves assuredly toward him and motions politely that he needs to remove his hat. A woman joins the man and they ask defiantly, “why?” The guard points to the ceiling, gesturing toward the consecrated basilica above all of our heads were Ave Maria plays and a crucified Jesus hangs above the altar. The man motions back by sweeping his hand like a game show host displaying a prize, as if to say, *this is not a cathedral, this is a museum*. After a repeated request the man obliges and spins the hat in his hand as he continues watching the workshop and I continue watching as the guard intercepts guests and asks them to remove their baseball caps, and fedoras, and visors. The exhibitions bring awareness to the cathedral’s construction and history, and security reinforces an awareness of the cathedral’s proximity and sanctity.
Awareness is something that washes over the body, stripping away questions, revealing the what, why, and how.

Windows make little portals between the nave and the crypt beneath the cathedral. Hands cup faces as they peer down into the comparatively traditional space with its Romanesque vaults and pillars, glowing red votives, and wrought iron candelabras. From below their faces look like children’s pressed against an aquarium. Their features are far and distorted but I can make out their casual clothing and backpacks. It is early morning and I cannot hear the chatter above but I know that as the day goes on the masses will become denser and more and more faces will cycle past the crypt’s windows. I am reminded of the chorus of snapping cameras and small talk. But if I look forward, away from the portals, I am transported to the dim and cool seriousness of a Spanish mass.

Weeks into my research and it was my first time attending a service in the La Sagrada crypt. Every few days I had gathered the resolve to go to mass only to find it disintegrate the next morning. I knew from midafternoon visits to the crypt that the space was imbued with religious gravity. Gaudí’s grave is nestled in a corner next to the alter, always surrounded by flickering candles and flowers. Seven apsidal chapels encircle a central nave lined with traditional wooden pews. Symbols I had long learned to identify as staple figures of Catalan Catholicism looked down at me from the chapels: The Virgin Mary, The Virgin of Monserrat, the Virgin of El Carmen. Even in the afternoon hours I had felt the spaces’ religious pulse. I had felt the heaviness of the crypt’s relative silence. There are no audioguides and few visitors. It can only be
entered from the outside of the cathedral. Mysterious and austere, alluring and menacing, the crypt made me nervous.

As I walked into my first mass at La Sagrada I worried that my Presbyterian upbringing would be somehow apparent, that it would alarm the congregation. I had dressed especially for the occasion and as I waited for the sermon to begin I pulled my shawl tighter over my shoulders and smoothed my skirt so that it fell neatly around my ankles. Only sixteen other people dotted the wooden pews, most all of them over the age of sixty. They all wore modest and conservative clothing and together we all kneeled and stood in unison. The sermon strained my Spanish capacity. Soon I decided it was best to focus on meditation rather than vocabulary. I may have even prayed, a little. The visitors around me were no distraction. Their movements were calm and slow. They were reverent.

By the time the Priest indicated that the congregation offer the Sign of Peace, I had settled into a warm and quiet mood. The five visitors closet to me turned toward one another, and toward me, to say, “Peace be with you” or to give a kind nod. Each held my hand and I looked each in their eyes. One at a time I clasped their hands, one was plump and one was large. One person’s skin was cool and calloused and another’s felt like loosely fastened wrapping paper. With each well wish I focused on each individual. After the last handshakes the mass continued but I felt as if something had changed, like our physical contact had created a sense of unity. At the end of the service I strolled past the chapels and pulled my fingers across the cold dark stone. The traditional sentiments had changed the pace of my steps, making me move more slowly with more attention to life, and death, and belief.

*Reverence settles across the torso like a heavy blanket, passed down through the generations.*
There is a pair of glass doors which open to a gift shop. The translucent material looks strange set into the cathedral’s weathering stone. The interior of the shop is brighter, its stone hidden from the elements and whiter because of it. Four square display cases float in the middle of the room. Each is three shelves tall and made of pale beige wood which blends into the pale beige wood floor. They are strategically lit from underneath so that the items on each level are illuminated for clear viewing. Book covers shine in neat stacks and picture frames sit empty, waiting to hold any visitor’s La Sagrada memory. Glass containers are full of bouncy balls and several types of pencils—some are rubber and bend like stems while others tuck neatly into graphite squares. The shop’s exterior wall is lined in large clear windows. Religious symbols and century old designs rise just behind them. Metal track lighting hangs from the ceiling.

Stacks of wooden display boxes line each side of the rectangular room. They look like dorm room storage solutions, except made of nicer material and lit carefully so that they glow like concave televisions. They hold more expensive souvenirs: mosaic patterned glassware and metal models crafted to scale. Saturated jewel tones pop against the room’s light backgrounds. There are coloring books and rows of postcards. Each item has a price tag. Two cashiers scan and bag items and most days there are lines of people waiting to check out. A woman and her husband cradle two large glass bowls, one blue and green and the other red and orange. They look like the stained glass windows encircling the cathedral’s nave—only these could hold fake fruit or stacks of mail. “Which one do you think Beth would like?” The woman stares from one souvenir to the next, until the man says, “red”. They watch as the cashier covers each bowl in bubble wrap. After he tapes the loose ends the woman interrupts his attempt to slide it into a
shopping bag, “Can you wrap it one more time please?” The cashier obliges and wraps the bowl until only peaks of blue and green show through the plastic.

Most of the Gaudí sites, La Pedrera, Parque Güell, Casa Batlló, have similar knick knacks and memorabilia. There is a set of salt and pepper shakers in the La Pedrera gift shop shaped like Gaudí’s iconic faceless soldiers. One is white and one is black; one has two holes in its helmet and the other three. The pair cost thirty-two euros. I had purchased a kaleidoscope from La Sagrada. Like museum gift shops, the items being sold by the Gaudí locations were expensive, and somehow more dignified because of it. The kaleidoscope was expensive, but heavy. The tube was clad in dark and light blue paper and topped with a thick clear lens. I had chosen it from a bright display case and stood in line to buy it. I would bring it to the cathedral and museums, rolling it between my palms so that the world refracted into repetitive geometries. It was a new way to see Gaudí’s art, a psychedelic take on his natural forms. I would sit with it on my terrace and use it as an artificial artist’s eye. It turned the world beautiful and strange.

There is a second gift shop, on the Nativity Façade. This location is open to the exterior and tourists who don’t venture inside the cathedral can still amble beneath track lighting and explore full display counters. A row of headless, legless mannequins model t-shirts with a variety of images of La Sagrada—black and white spires stretching from hem to breast against pink cotton. Whoever buys it will be able to wear it in some far away place—a materialized memory. Souvenirs will be erected on desktops and beneath Christmas trees as reminders of La Sagrada.

*The body falls into remembrance—nostalgia may have a price tag; it is a vagrant that needs no permanent home.*
Benches flank the transepts and line the nave, recessed into the walls like elongated open-faced caves. Along the aisles, the choir vaults hang above the stretches of seats like a smooth stone ceiling. The lip of the vault is curved so that edge of the overhang looks like a wave. Twisting iron railings rise up from the lip like seaweed that has washed up on the beach and hardened to black in the sun. But the seats are tucked away from the light, watercolor patches pattern the nave’s floor just beyond resting feet. The material of the benches is cool to the touch, refreshing to the backs of thighs and the smalls of backs during a Barcelona summer. The stone on the lower portions of the bench is slightly granular while the higher stone lightens to large flat bricks seamlessly stacked together. Each block is a slightly different blend of grey and beige. The effect is a design of subtlety transitioning shades with no reoccurring pattern.

At peak hours, the benches are almost always full. People stare while cradling audioguides hanging from lanyards, black and grey foam headphones over their ears. Others talk to one another in small groups, large groups, quiet groups, boisterous groups. Throughout the afternoon the seats collect lost items: a baseball cap, a half-full water bottle, a pair of sunglasses. From the benches visitors can still see most of the nave, if they lean forward the altar and ceiling come into view. On days when the heat had made me particularly tired, I would sit in the cool concave and click through the audioguide without moving where it told me—I would simply stretch my neck while I listened. I often watched people next to me likewise clicking from segment to segment without standing up.

One afternoon I watched as a woman strode up to two workers. She scrunched her neck in a shrug and turned her hands up in an impatient question, “Is this all we get for twenty dollars?” I widened my focus to the soaring columns, the glittering ceiling, the streaming light. I looked back to the woman, her hands still hanging in the air. Her dress blue cotton, short for her
age and wrinkled around the hips as if she had been sitting. A tall male guard faced her with his hands tucked behind his back.

“Yes,” he responded, “all of this”. His hand swung above the woman’s head in a sweeping gesture. Her shoulders slumped and her hands fell.

“So just this, nothing else?”

The second worker ran her fingers through her ponytail, her lips a polite pink line. Her English sounded deep and rolling under a Spanish accent as she explained that the ticket included access to both the Nativity and Passion facades as well as the inner cathedral. There is a building of classrooms that Gaudí built for the worker’s children; this site is outside the Passion Façade. She can visit this too. She then pointed toward the floor, “you can visit the museum as well.” The woman retorted a short “OK” before turning on her heels and walking away in loud clacks. The workers say nothing to one another and drift apart to their different posts.

A bald man sat next to me, happily patting his palms against khaki shorts. Two children flanked him and I shifted over on the bench to make room. His head swiveled from child to child. He patted each of their legs. “You know guys, I enjoyed this, I really, really did. What a special place—and the family all together.” The children didn’t reply but the man kept on grinning and fidgeting. A middle-aged man and woman approached the trio and stood in front of the alcove, forming a huddle. The woman sighed in a tired but happy sort of way. “Should we get lunch?”

“You know what?” the bald man paused but no one responded. “I still can’t get over how it is called a tapas bar.” His companions giggle and began discussing options of where to eat while the woman unfolded a pamphlet. The man went on smiling, his chin tilting up as he
scanned the ceiling. He seemed to be reflecting on his afternoon silently now, allowing his mind to wander peacefully from impression to impression.

On my last day in La Sagrada I too had sat on the benches lining the nave, my eyes dancing from one feature to the next in amused contemplation. It was all so beautiful, and I was to leave it so soon. I reflected on when I would be back and what I had done while there. I wanted to find the perfect song to listen to during my last minutes inside the cathedral. I scrolled through slow sentimental songs, deciding on *These Days* by Nico:

I've been out walking
I don't do too much talking
These days, these days
These days I seem to think a lot
About the things that I forgot to do
And all the times I had the chance to.

I wasn’t sad, only contemplative. I settled into the cool stone and let go of my thoughts like a child releasing a toy boat to drift down stream.

*Reflective sentiment slips away from bodily mooring, legs and feet relax.*

If La Sagrada’s design and its construction process indicate an indivisible essence, how can so many contradictions within the site itself be reconciled? One face of the cathedral wears a countenance of anguish and elicits fear while another is a jubilant cornucopia of fauna and flora. One space seems dedicated to pure wonder while another dedicated to didacticism. And while a gift shop cultivates transportable sentimentality, a crypt offers grounded reverence. But these
variations in sites within La Sagrada can still be understood as impervious to segmentation. To reach the conclusion of a heterogeneous homogeneity, it serves to return to La Sagrada’s, and indeed many building’s, bodily attributes.

There is a long and cross-cultural history of anthropomorphic architecture first appearing in Western society, most markedly, in Renaissance theory. Vitruvian, fifteenth-century architect and sculpture, returned to Greek mathematics to incorporate ideal proportions within his designs. “The building derives its authority, proportional and compositional, from the body; in a complementary way, the building acts to confirm and establish the body—individual and social—in the world.”62 This Renaissance corporeal projection is most clearly illustrated in Francesco di Giorgio’s drawings which show a body superimposed over a cathedral (Fig. 4). The Italian painter wrote, “basilicas have the shape and dimension of the human body”63 And surely, this correlation is demonstrated in the derivation of “nave” from “naval”. This fixing of body to building is also shown in an illustration from a manual on Hindu temple construction, in which Purusha, “the cosmic man” is laid over a design grid (Fig. 5).64

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63 Ibid., 3.
64 Inga Bryden, “‘There is no outer without inner space’: constructing the haveli as home”, *Cultural Geographies* (2004). 31.
Post-modernism offers a different, though nonetheless corporeal, understanding of architecture. A renewed interest in anthropomorphic analogy ventures from humanist tradition to include, “a body which seems to be fragmented, if not contorted, deliberately torn apart and mutilated almost beyond recognition.” Rather than trace a perfectly proportioned man onto a space, this reinscription of the bodily is less literal:

Its limits, interior and exterior, seem infinitely ambiguous and extensive; its forms, literal or metaphorical, are no longer confined to the recognizably human, but embrace all of human existence, from the embryonic to the monstrous; its power lies no longer in the model of unity, but in the intimation of the fragmentary, the morsellated, the broken.

But if post-modernism seems to favor anthropomorphic architecture that is prone to segmentation, a challenge is once again raised to La Sagrada’s contrasting spaces of sentiment. Perhaps, however, the modern period offers a body which is at once varied but nonetheless whole.

Kant, Edmund Burke, and fellow romantics, “described buildings not so much in terms of their fixed beauty, but rather in terms of their capacity to evoke emotions of terror and fear.” Rather than have a nave which is only identified with a specific body part, such as a “womb”, the architectural feature is also understood to evoke the emotion of love, or care, or protection. Twentieth century architectural historian Geoffrey Scott specifically wrote on human sentiments within design. “The centre of that architecture was the human body… to transcribe in stone the body’s favourable states; and the moods of the spirit took visible shape along its borders, power

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66 Ibid., 2.
67 Ibid., 4.
68 Ibid., 5.
and laughter, strength and terror and calm.” Instead of seeing these fluctuating states as making a monstrous, fractured entity, Geoffrey’s corporeal site is a singular body of many moods.

Fifteenth century humanist, architect, and philosopher Leon Battista Alberti understood that a building as a body is necessarily comprised of parts. The entirety is beautiful, he argued, in that no components can be removed or added without harming the whole. And so if La Sagrada consists of a nave, three façades, an exhibition, a museum, a school house, gift shops, crypt, and bench areas, perhaps they all act as different emotional states, or parts, of one indivisible body. Each site within the site offers visitors a different, but vital, portion of the La Sagrada experience. The little bodies on the ground experience wonder, hope, jubilance, terror, comprehension, imagination, sentimentality, reverence, and reflection. These various states, though disparate at times, do not necessitate leaving behind the indivisible Bergsonian essence otherwise suggested by La Sagrada.

The Bergsonian declaration of writing as an inherently flawed tool, however, maintains. But as seen by Taylor, Stewart, Jackson, Kusserow, and Pandian, just because writing cannot transcend the relative that does not mean that anthropologists have to cease striving for accurate representation. As the above exploration of La Sagrada’s spaces stands, it appears like one of Gaudi’s mosaics. Sentiments are separated by white space on the page, like mortar. The observations are taken from my own bodily perspective rather than from the wider perspective of La Sagrada as a body itself. Arjun Appadurai notes that this difficulty is exactly the challenge that Anthropology tasks itself to grapple with:

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70 Ibid., 1.
The problem of voice (‘speaking for’ and ‘speaking to’) intersects with the problem of place (speaking ‘from’ and speaking ‘of’). Anthropology survives by its claim to capture other places (and other voices) through its special brand of ventriloquism.71

What if I were to fold these claims and problems in on one another? Rather than ‘speak for’ or ‘speak from’ I would speak for something by speaking from it. This speculative form of ethnography would demand a special brand of ventriloquism. If La Sagrada is to be understood in bodily terms, I, as the ethnographer, could operate its mouthpiece in order to capture both an architectural ‘voice’ and ‘place’.

Imbuing a building with the power to speak for itself, however, is perhaps not as strange a notion as it may initially appear. Anthropologist Tim Ingold notes that the definitions of the animate and the living are more troubled than traditional Western scientific discourse may suggest:

What I am sure about, because we know it from ethnography, is that people do not always agree about what is alive and what is not, and that even when they do agree it might be for entirely different reasons. I am also sure, once again because we know it from ethnography, that people do not universally discriminate between the categories of living and non-living things.72

This school of thought helps elucidate the intellectual claims made by “New Animists”.73 Rather than infuse spirit into the inert, Ingold’s animism calls for a return to the very ontological

differentiation between the animate and the inanimate. Brazilian Anthropologist Eduardo Viverios de Castro argues that animism needs to be taken seriously because, “Anthropology is alterity”. The otherworldliness of animism, “is a thought-provoking, creative venture, which may potentially open new insights into the very issue of what constitutes life.” This opening has indeed been undertaken by ethnographers who are keen to dive into this creatively taxing overhaul of assumptions on personhood.

A new genre of ethnographic writing has begun to emerge in recent years. Multispecies ethnography has taken marginalized actors in human-centric anthropologies—fungi, insects, livestock—and put them center stage. The standard divisions of Anthropology into cultural, linguistic, archeological, and biological schools are being troubled by additions such as “zoo ethnography” and “ethnobotony”. Hugh Raffles, for example, has written on subjects such as lice and crickets. Perspectives, however, have not only widened to include those deemed alive in a cellular sense. Raffles has also written extensively on stones. Rather than treat minerals as lifeless props in human’s backgrounds, Raffles notes that a stone can “do” many things. “It can carry your memories and your dreams. It can build empires and burn cities. It can reveal the history of the universe. It can open and close the gates of philosophy.” If an ethnography of stone can open academic conversations on writing and animism, then a speculative ethnography from the perspective of an animated, indivisible, cathedral may not be so unfounded.

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75 Ibid., 2.
Conclusion:

The orange street light lodged in the corners of the playground; it wrapped around the swing set’s poles and made shadows through the bench’s slats. It was eleven at night and the city was quiet expect for murmurs drifting from bars and restaurants across the road. All the sounds seemed removed from me, as if they were playing on an answering machine in some house far away. I sat on a swing, rocking back and forth. It was my second to last night in Barcelona, the end of my six weeks of research. It seemed fitting that I should spend what time I had left in a park next to La Sagrada when the day had given way to the calm contemplative hours of night. I pumped my legs and with each pump I remembered that childhood feeling of rising and falling and not being afraid.

I had just left Gaudi’s Pedrera: The Origins where I had watched natural images videomapped onto Casa Mila’s badalots. I had gone alone, which suited me just fine. I had spent most of my six weeks alone. The solitude made my thoughts louder, crisper more deserving of being written down and, I hope, of being written about. Everything about Casa Mila’s nighttime tour had lent itself to meditation. The exhibition spaces were lit with dimmer lighting and the group was smaller and the guide’s language more poetic than explanatory. He had said that the building was like a human being with a beating heart. He spoke as if his words would form epitaphs—each phrase had to mean something. And even when he was silent the space itself conveyed a seriousness. As the show played and oceans, nebulas, and forests formed against the badalots, I felt the type of gravity generally reserved for theaters, galleries, and churches.

After the show the group had returned to the building’s courtyard where there were glasses of Cava and sweets. It was odd, to me, that a tour should end in an abbreviated cocktail
party of sorts. But I didn’t mind. It was like a send off celebration marking my departure and so I sipped my Champaign and sunk into reflection. They said the courtyard was supposed to mimic a forest clearing, and it did. The woods, I have always felt, were meant for getting lost and getting found. And in that moment I felt like I was both of those things at once. It was a pleasant quiet feeling. I stared up through the clearing and the sky chewed the stars like sunflower seeds—spitting them out often, and unceremoniously. I had left Casa Mila unsure of where I would go but my mood pulled me toward La Sagrada and to the little playground across the street from its Nativity façade.

I didn’t notice at first that a homeless man was sleeping on one of the park’s benches. I didn’t mind him and he didn’t seem to be minding me or the soft creaking of the swing’s linked chain. I could see La Sagrada through a series of trees; its face was lit by bright white lights that illuminated the cranes and turned the spires a grey-blue. I thought of what a strange site the cathedral was, of how so many people seemed to take away such different things from their visits. I had seen hung-over teenagers, and praying women, and crawling babies. I had watched people turn over picture frames in the gift shop to look for price tags and people cross themselves. But I too had done these different things. So many different sentiments had saturated my various visits. The notebook on my lap was scrawled with sentences of shifting tones. Some afternoons the park and its bustling hoards had infuriated me. But then there I was, at almost midnight, treating the same park as if it were a confessional.

Variety is everywhere. The universe is full of contradictions. But this paper has set out to highlight that the La Sagrada Familia Cathedral is exceptionally diverse in how it is structured and how it is site’s convey sentiments. Most importantly, my research has aimed to conclude that no matter how incongruous the site’s spaces, or moods, it is still a unified invisible entity. While
writing cannot properly convey the absolute truth of La Sagrada’s multiplicities, it can argue their unique existence. Over the course of my ethnography I visited an abundance of artistic, touristic, museological, monumental, and religious Barcelona sites. I had frequented national and modern art museums. I had wound through roman ruins preserved beneath city streets and looked out over the city from the roof of the Joan Miró foundation. I had sat in busy squares and in quiet cathedral corners. All of the experiences offered by these many locations were also all, in some way, present in La Sagrada. Gaudí’s masterpiece was at once decidedly and boldly artistic, touristic, monumental, museological, and religious with wondrous, terrifying, and jubilant moods.

La Sagrada sat, just beyond the park, stretching into the pigeon dotted sky. I thought about how it held so many different things. Like the mosaic at Gaudí’s Parc Güell, La Sagrada had collected and unapologetically presented incongruous things next to one another. But at night it seemed easier to understand the cathedral as one whole entity. It was all quiet, the towers, and crypt, and nave all asleep and emptied. The more I researched after returning to the United States the more I came to understand La Sagrada as an indivisible location. The works of Bergson gave me the language and philosophy to comprehend how architecture can be continuous. Hersey’s The Monumental Impulse and Spyro’s On the Animation of the Inorganic helped me see that La Sagrada actively conflates its origins and its results. It biological legacy is folded into its structural reality, defying their separation from one another. Giovanna’s discussion of Gaudí seen through a Bergsonian lens and Latour’s and Yaneva’s assertion that architecture is wrongly classified as static allowed me to understand La Sagrada as an indivisible flow. But sitting on that swing, kicking myself toward the sky, I already knew that my project would be tinged by a distinctly personal interest in contradictions.
Seeing La Sagrada as not only indivisible, but as a building animated by movement and vivified by design, perhaps stemmed from a private struggle. Art Historian Heinrich Wölffin called architecture an, “art of corporeal masses”. He argued the human capacity and indeed inclination to attribute bodily qualities to the inert and lifeless:

We judge every object by analogy with our own bodies. The object—even if completely dissimilar to ourselves—will not only transform itself immediately into a creature, with head and foot, back and front; and not only are we convinced that this creature must feel ill at ease if it does not stand upright and seems about to fall over, but we go so far as to experience, to a highly sensitive degree, the spiritual condition and contentment or discontent expressed by any configuration, however different from ourselves. We can comprehend the dumb, imprisoned existence of a bulky, memberless, amorphous conglomerate, heavy and immovable, as easily as the fine and clear disposition of something delicate and lightly articulated.

And so just as it may not be so strange to represent La Sagrada, creatively, as a building with a mouthpiece, the initial desire to give architecture lips and a tongue may also be coherent. This relation between site and subject was complicated by La Sagrada’s many spaces of sentiments. The cathedral is joyous, and somber, wondrous, and didactic. But such a variety does not necessitate dissection. In fact, I too, in my one little body, have been as varied as La Sagrada.

They say it normally hits in your early twenties. They say it as if it were a tornado in the Midwest or Hurricane in the Gulf. It is the season of life when out of nowhere you can rattle like a wind-whipped house, lifting off your foundations. Sophomore year the counselors told me I

79 Ibid., 4.
was depressed. When people spoke their words seemed to dissolve before they reached my ears. Sleep was my substance of choice. But the way they described it then it seemed like a state I could pull out of and leave behind, and for a moment I did. And then the summer going into my Junior year, months before I would depart for a semester abroad in Barcelona, I sang to myself, sought mistakes, waved to strangers. My joy was like flowers—the artificial silk-leafed kind, too bright to be real. My friends stared at me strangely when I spoke, half-pulling away from the deluge of words I couldn’t help but spit out. My family’s concern made me feel cornered. And it didn’t matter, anyways, because I was fine. That’s the problem with mania, it all seems fine when you’re inside of it.

The following Fall my states switched so fast I felt my sense of self shaking apart. On a Wednesday I would answer every question in every class, send ream-length text messages, and deem myself near perfection. On a Friday I could hardly look in a mirror. On a Saturday I would stay in bed. One morning, I woke up and felt as if I should pull out my hair, and crack open my sternum, and dismantle my limbs from my torso because being in my body didn’t feel safe anymore. When the on call psychologist told me I was Bipolar I didn’t believe her, and when my weekly psychologist told me I was Bipolar I didn’t want to believe him either, and when the psychiatrist told me I was Bipolar I simply couldn’t go on not believing. When they explained that Rapid Cycling, the quick movement from one mental state to the next, was common in those with undiagnosed Bipolar, my days of the week began to make sense. The mosaic of my emotions, a spectrum of patterns and shapes, gained a logic. Over the course of the proceeding months, medication and honest discussions brought calm to my life.

A few teenagers milled into the park and nuzzled on a bench. The homeless man had stood up and was taking long stretching strides, his arms reaching up as he yawned. I felt as if I
were underwater, as if everything were quiet except for rising bubbles, suspended, my hair a halo waving in the current. It felt nothing like drowning; it felt like steadiness. I thought about all the differences I had experienced over the proceeding years. But all those experiences, their contradicting tones, had been comprised within myself and each had added up to the girl sitting on that swing. It is, of course, necessary to recognize when I edge toward tipping into an unhealthy state. But I refuse to dissect the parts that have made up my life as if they could never have existed within the same person. I have been fractured, but I have also always been whole.

La Sagrada exemplifies a diverse and dynamic site which presents its contradictions as being a part of a complete entity. The cathedral is still under construction, and its sentiments and spaces will continue to complicate. Perhaps the site will further diversify or perhaps it will gain a coherence in the upcoming years, decades. The cathedral’s audioguide tour concludes simply:

As you have seen for yourselves, the building changes everyday and will continue to change for at least another two decades, always with the aim to better welcome those who visit it, they come—like you—from around the world. Drawn by the beauty of the human work but also in many cases, in the search of something more.

La Sagrada takes on a different meaning for each of its visitors and each of its spaces conveys different sentiments. It is, in a sense, a mosaic site. But while a mosaic is varied it is also solidified, held together by grout and concretized. Just as a mosaic is singular and opposed to segmentation, so too are the bodies we inhabit which are full of fluctuating moods. To best understand La Sagrada’s indivisible essence, it serves to delve into creativity and understand that untraditional ethnography may be the methodology that brings La Sagrada most clearly into view. But a living, empathetic building is not unfounded and perhaps one day this thesis, like La
Sagrada and like myself, will continue to grow and take on new shapes. Perhaps La Sagrada will look in a mirror and tell you all about herself, about how she is whole and complex and beautiful.

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